

Discipleship as Process: The Manager's Role in Connecting People to Faith

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ABSTRACT: Are there elements of the management process that provide an opportunity for Christian business leaders to develop disciples, even within the context of a secular organization? In this article, the author argues that a proper understanding of the discipleship process opens the door for Christian leaders to develop disciples while doing good business work. He gives a picture of how business leaders can use their development opportunities to move people closer to the kingdom of God. It is argued that the biblical model of discipleship is a process that begins before conversion and carries forward past the conversion experience. Building on that foundation, the author then explains how a Christian leader can teach kingdom concepts in the context of employee development. This model offers significant advantages in an increasingly secular society.

KEYWORDS: disciple, discipleship, evangelism, management, employee development, virtue

INTRODUCTION

When does a person become a disciple of Jesus Christ? Church leaders often decry an emphasis on evangelism that does not lead to discipleship. Is discipleship something extra that happens after salvation? One of Jesus' final commands to his followers was to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19, NIV). Is there a difference between becoming a convert and becoming a disciple? Jesus called a group of people to follow him very early in his ministry. The Gospels refer to them as disciples. Yet, could they be described as converts to the Christian faith at that time? By most readings of the Gospels, it would be a couple of years before Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Christ." Even after that confession, however, it was clear that neither Peter nor the other disciples really understood what it meant. What would it mean for the practice of disciple-making if the church saw discipleship as an extended process that begins before conversion and leads past conversion to a spiritual change in all areas of life?

The inspiration for this article came from an interview with a business executive. The purpose of the interview was to talk about how the executive attempted to live out his faith at work. During the conversation, he described his role in developing employees as "discipling." He explained that regardless of whether a new employee was a Christ-follower, he had the opportunity to share

what it means to follow Christ in the practice of business. He saw his role in mentoring employees as intimately tied to the practice of disciple-making (Lueck, 2010). Building from that idea, the thesis of this article is that discipleship is a process that begins before conversion and carries on through an individual's development as a Christ-follower. Business leaders have an opportunity, therefore, to connect the normal process of developing employees to disciple-making and help people move through the process of becoming disciples of Christ. The assumption often made in discussions on discipleship is that evangelism happens first, then conversion, then discipleship (Hanks, 1981; Horton, 2011; Foss, 2000; Trnethem, 1969). Instead, this article will assume that discipleship describes the whole process of helping a person learn what it means to follow Christ. Even if the reader cannot accept that argument, however, the discipleship development process could still be seen as a sort of soft evangelism that offers a non-threatening introduction to the faith.

While it certainly would be true that not all employee development is discipleship, there are many areas where Christian theology speaks to the business world. It probably is not necessary or wise for a manager to point out the connection to faith in every single area, but there is opportunity in showing a better way and then being able to explain the source of that way when given a chance. One advantage that Christian business leaders have in

modeling things like service, grace, and transparency is that these characteristics are often unexpected in the business world.

There are three sections to this article. It begins with an examination of the example of discipleship set in the Gospels. The author analyzes the different ways that the various Gospel writers approached the disciples and confronts the supposition often made in writings that discipleship begins after salvation. Instead, in the second section, the author offers a model where discipleship is a process that begins before conversion and carries on after the conversion event.

In the third section of the article, the author examines how Christian business leaders can see the efforts of managing and mentoring as an opportunity to move people along the continuum toward fully committed discipleship. This section seeks to help business leaders think about how they can use the normal process of developing employees to begin the process of disciple-making and, therefore, further the kingdom of God. It should also help business professors think about how they can help future leaders think about the potential of their future role as business mentors to move people along the process of discipleship.

THE GOSPELS AND DISCIPLESHIP

Most of the church's understanding of discipleship comes from the Gospels and Acts. Paul, for instance, never calls himself a disciple or talks in terms of "following Christ" (Donahue, 1986). Therefore, he does not contribute much to our understanding of the specific term "discipleship." On the other hand, the word "disciple" shows up almost 300 times in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. The word is used narratively, though, to refer to the followers of Jesus rather than descriptively to explain the meaning of discipleship. Readers of the Gospels are left, therefore, to figure out the meaning of discipleship from the story of the Gospels. This process is complicated somewhat by the fact that each of the Gospel writers takes a slightly different approach in his description of discipleship. The analysis of this section will demonstrate some of those differences while looking for the unifying themes.

The concept of discipleship was developing in the society of Jesus' day. According to Longenecker (1996), the term disciple was not commonly used in the Septuagint. It was, however, used by groups like the Cynics, Stoics, and Epicureans to describe teacher/follower relationships.

The practice was also common in the rabbinic relationships of the Hebrew teachers. Many Hebrew teachers of the time developed a group of learners who simply followed them and learned from them. Young (2007) argues that the word "disciple" most clearly means "learner." A clear understanding of a disciple was one who was willing to listen, to learn, and to change.

Discipleship in The Gospels and Acts

Among the four Gospel writers, Mark's picture of the disciples is probably the most unflattering. Mark's picture of the disciples tends to be of a group that chose to follow Jesus before fully understanding where he was leading them (Henderson, 2006; Hutardo, 1996; Witherington, 2001). This often leads the disciples to fail to measure up. Meye (1968) points out that the idea of a disciple as a follower was a common theme in the New Testament world. In Mark's Gospel, the disciples are clearly a work-in-progress. Peace (1999) sees this as in contrast to sudden conversions like that of Paul. Sudden conversions do happen in the New Testament, but they are something of a minority experience. Most conversions seem to require an investment of time (Peace, 1999). Mark's Gospel presents a group of people who chose to follow but then grew slowly in their understanding of what that meant.

Matthew's picture of the disciples is somewhat more positive than Mark's, but he still portrays them as progressing slowly. Did the disciples really understand much about who Jesus was during his earthly ministry? Brown (2002) argues that they saw Jesus as being worthy of following, but their level of understanding was uncertain. The disciples sometimes seem committed to Jesus and at other times make it difficult to understand why they stay with Jesus (Carter, 1994; Edwards, 1985). Pittarumadathil (2008) is one of few Gospel scholars who explicitly argues that discipleship is a process. Others recognize the disciples' lack of understanding but still tend to see the disciples more as imperfect followers of Jesus than as people in the process of becoming disciples.

Luke places significant emphasis on the critical role of the twelve in developing a Christian community (Nelson, 1994). There is a close connection between the work of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and the work of the church in the Book of Acts (Longenecker, 1996). Luke seems to see the twelve as a bridge between the work of Jesus and the growing church (Kingsbury, 1991; Talbert, 1985). Luke seems to emphasize the authority of the twelve—referring to them as apostles more than either of the other Synoptics—but he also tends to put more emphasis on

the disciples beyond the twelve than either Matthew or Mark (Kingsbury, 1991). Luke, therefore, has some interesting contrasts in his understanding of discipleship. He refers to all of those who follow Jesus as disciples, even if they later turn away. Yet, he still emphasizes the twelve as critical to the building of the church. One of the first acts of the church after the resurrection is to replace Judas Iscariot in the twelve. Discipleship is closely connected to the community of believers, but there are those who do not remain faithful who are still called disciples.

John's description of discipleship is somewhat different from the synoptic Gospel writers. When John refers to Jesus' disciples, he is often more ambiguous about whether he means the twelve or the larger group of followers (Hallner, 1996). The twelve are sometimes contrasted with the larger group that goes away when Jesus' words prove too challenging (John 6, for instance). Yet, both groups are called disciples. Contrasts are a part of the picture in John's Gospel. Segovia (1985) notes that the first three appearances of the disciples after their calling all reveal their lack of understanding. Yet, the next one reveals the commitment of the twelve to stay with Jesus even when others abandoned him. John's references to disciples beyond the twelve broadens the picture of discipleship. While the twelve stick with Jesus even when they do not really understand, the broader group of disciples include some who are faithful and some who walk away when things get difficult.

The New Testament Context of Discipleship

This summary reveals a somewhat diverse picture of the New Testament articulation of discipleship. While some scholars seem to assume that the initial calling of the disciples was a point of conversion, many Gospel scholars note the shifting nature of the disciples' faith and understanding. As the next section will show, this is in contrast to discussions of discipleship in the modern church, which tend to assume that discipleship begins after conversion. That view does not seem to fit with the New Testament narrative. It has a particularly difficult time explaining disciples who abandoned Jesus and, most especially, Judas Iscariot.

Stock (1982) gives a clear summary of the reasons to see the disciples' journey as one of moving toward faith throughout the Gospels. He notes that the lack of understanding and incomprehension which characterize the disciples is never explicitly dispelled anywhere in the Gospels. The disciples simply could not understand Jesus until the climactic event on the cross (Stock, 1982). At the time

they responded to Jesus' call, they had no specific preparation to understand what they were committing to do with their lives. Discipleship involves following and learning and exposing oneself to risks, but it is a journey that begins before full understanding of the Gospel message.

RECONSIDERING DISCIPLESHIP

Scholarly writing that is specifically about discipleship, especially among evangelical writers, tends to focus on a contrast between evangelism and disciple-making. Many writers object to an emphasis on conversion that ignores discipleship. Others see a problem in the church caused by a lack of commitment to growing disciples. Most start with an assumption, however, that discipleship is something that happens after conversion. Horton (2011), for instance, argues that the focus of evangelism should be making disciples, but he assumes that it begins with preaching and baptism. While he notes Jesus' teaching of the disciples, he assumes that they were already believers during the whole process. Arn and Arn (1992) similarly critique evangelism efforts that focus strictly on decisions, but they also see discipleship as part of what happens after conversion. This assumption can be found in Trnethem (1969), Hanks (1981), Wilhoit (2008), and Hull (2010) as well. All of these writers take discipleship seriously, but all of them see the relationship as moving from unbeliever to salvation and baptism and then to the process of becoming a disciple.

Discipleship-oriented writing tends to be concerned about the lack of spiritual maturity in the church. Smith (2001) contends that an inadequate theology of conversion creates spiritual immaturity in the pew. Garrett (1964) contrasts the great importance of discipleship in the New Testament with the limited sustained discussion of it in Christian theology. Foss (2000) discusses the tendency to focus on church membership rather than on individual discipleship. He argues that a lack of emphasis on discipleship undermines the church's mission. Both Garrett and Foss, though, see discipleship as something that happens to the converted believer rather than seeing it as something that begins before conversion. Similarly, Coleman et al. (1994) place evangelism and conversion first, then discipleship is taught to help grow in faith. What all of these writers have in common is the starting assumption that discipleship happens after conversion. There are two key difficulties with this assumption. First, it fails to adequately accommodate the New Testament's

more diverse picture. Second, splitting conversion and discipleship almost certainly contributes to the problem of believers who are not growing in discipleship by focusing on initial decisions rather than ongoing life change.

Advantages of Seeing Discipleship as a Process

An alternative view of discipleship is to see it as a process that begins before conversion and carries on through the experience of conversion and into growth in Christlikeness. This may be especially true in a society that is increasingly secular and post-Christian. For secular people, coming to faith may be more of an organic journey than a binary decision (Everts, 2012). This requires a relationship between believers and non-believers that allows individuals to move together through different challenges. For some, for instance, there is no way to become a Christian until they can learn to trust a Christian (ibid.). Morton (2003) argues that this process takes the pressure off the average conversation about faith. A disciple maker can simply try to move a person along the “links of the chain” until they are prepared to experience a new birth. This requires the patience to invest in a person’s life over a long term, and it can look a lot like mentoring an employee. Post modern individuals are generally more interested in relationships than in institutions (Poe, 2001). A process view of discipleship opens the possibility of a long-term relationship that can lead to faith.

This process perspective of disciple making has several key advantages over a conversion-driven understanding of discipleship. As mentioned, it can take the pressure off individual encounters with non-believers. With a long-term vision, a Christian can think in terms of moving a person forward toward commitment, and trusting to the work of the Holy Spirit in that person’s life rather than insisting on a quick decision. Another strength of this approach is that it allows the opportunity to invest meaningfully into the lives of others, even if they are not close to making a commitment to follow Christ. Teaching someone the value of God’s way of doing things gives a disciple maker the opportunity to expand the rule of God in the lives of others—even if they do not yet recognize why those changes matter. A process approach also opens possibilities for connection to community. The New Testament picture of discipleship is not private; those who are called to follow Jesus are formed into a community (Donahue, 1986). Most importantly, however, this approach benefits from fitting the example of Jesus’ work of discipleship. As the analysis of the Gospels showed, Jesus was willing to work with disciples who would follow

him for the rest of their lives, with those who would turn away, and even with one who would actively betray him. Although believers may not be able to imitate Christ in all areas, Jesus did instruct that believers follow his example (John 13:13-17).

A Historical and Modern Example

One powerful picture of how a process- and community-driven perspective happened historically is the Celtic Christian communities in the early development of Irish Christianity (Hunter, 2010). While the Roman monastic communities on the continent tended to be about individual growth toward maturity, the Celtic communities were more about sharing life together. They were working in an area where the majority were resistant or indifferent to Christian witness, and their approach provided a means to engage outsiders by inviting them into the community. One area where the Celts proved strong was in working in the common areas that tend to affect the lives of many people. This helps to avoid what Hiebert (1982) describes as the “Flaw of the Excluded Middle.” Hiebert argues this is a key missing piece in a lot of modern and postmodern thinking. The bottom level of life is direct sensory experience, what is often called “secular” areas. The top level relates to ultimate questions about origin, purpose, and destiny. In between lies an area that tends to be ignored but is often very important to people—the near future, small crises that impact our lives, looking back at good or bad decisions, etc. (Hiebert, 1982). While modern Christians tend to ignore the middle realm, it may be the most important area of life for many people (ibid.). When people do not get help in these common areas of life, they tend to go looking for help from “shamans” (Hunter, 2010). A Christian business leader might address these types of issues by praying routinely about small events, sharing God’s wisdom on difficult decisions or helping to show the relevance of Christ’s teachings for day-to-day problems. The next section of the article will expand on how that developmental relationship could also be a discipling relationship.

The Celtic communities invited seekers to be their guests. They welcomed them into a common life centered on meals, work, and prayer. The abbot would wash the newcomers’ feet to demonstrate the expectation that even the leaders of the community would serve. Someone would serve as a guide to deal with questions and problems the seeker had. The community gave people an opportunity to meet credible Christians. This credibility was focused in genuineness, but also reflected attempts

to be trustworthy, caring, and informed (Hunter, 2010). When seekers engaged in a relationship with the community and discovered that they did desire to believe in Jesus, they were invited to commit to following Christ.

Russell (2010) identified a modern version of the Celtic model in business as mission (BAM) work in Thailand. He found that business leaders who sought to invest in blessing the local economy, to develop long-term culturally sensitive relationships, and openly to reflect their faith were dramatically more effective than leaders who attempted to focus directly and immediately on conversions. In both the Celtic example and the BAM example, the model of long-term teaching for discipleship provides the roadmap for how a business leader might build relationships with employees in a way that allows the managing relationship to promote disciple making.

Discipleship as Evangelism

Seeing discipleship as a process that begins before conversion allows the Christian manager to use a similar approach to the Celtic communities. A leader can use Jesus' teachings of right behavior to show that Jesus knew what he was talking about. That demonstration of the pragmatic truth of the faith gives an opportunity to move someone closer to belief. Christian managers have an opportunity to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel message by both living out Jesus' teachings and by helping employees see the benefit of living those virtues out themselves. However it is defined, this approach can have a powerful impact on employees. If the reader prefers the idea that discipleship can only happen after conversion, feel free to think of what this article is calling discipleship in this example as the early stages of evangelism.

THE BUSINESS LEADER AS DISCIPLE MAKER

In a business environment, developing employees can be a formal or informal process. Some businesses create intentional mentoring relationships between long-term employees and new hires. In other cases, a developmental relationship might grow up more organically from interactions between employees. Usually managers are expected to develop their employees at some level. The relationship offers an opportunity to teach an employee not only skills for work but also skills for life (Sample, 2006). From the perspective of Christian discipleship, those life skills can be tied to the truths that are known from Scripture. Lueck (2017) notes that the desire to gain

knowledge from managers or leaders seems to be especially strong among the millennial generation. They care about building relationships, but they are also concerned with learning directly from senior leaders.

The similarity between a process-oriented picture of discipleship and the general requirements of effective management is striking. Engstrom (1989) noted a set of traits required to be a good business mentor: objectivity, transparency, commitment to the protégé, belief in the employee's potential, credibility, and the ability to be a good role model. That could easily be a good description of someone who makes disciples effectively. While the goals of disciple-making and employee development are not the same, the practices overlap in such a way that one might see how a Christian who is an effective manager has an opportunity to also be an effective disciple-maker.

What, then, would be the set of practices that a Christian business leader should teach in order to move someone along in the discipleship process? Certainly, most of the virtues of the faith could be considered, but the power in the process would be teaching the practices that would help a person to see the wisdom of following Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus himself declared that the principles he taught reflected wisdom. He concluded his most significant sermon on discipleship by stating that failing to "put into practice" his teachings was the mark of foolishness. Jesus made it very clear that his approach to life was the way of wisdom (Matthew 7:24-27). Christians sometimes struggle to believe that some of what Jesus said applies in the business world: "I know Jesus said that, but it just isn't practical in the business world." Jesus' warning in Matthew 7 does not allow for that notion. This is a fallen world and right principles might not give the results we want every time, but Jesus makes it clear that the wise person realizes that Jesus speaks from knowledge.

From the perspective of disciple-making, the virtues or practices that might be most valuable include those that are somewhat counter-cultural in the business environment, yet still tend to be effective for business leaders. This gives the opportunity for the believer and the disciple to see that God's principles ultimately work better than the wisdom of the world. In this section of the article, the author will examine five of those practices: service, genuineness, integrity, grace, and humility. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list or to be a list of the best virtues to practice in business. What these virtues have in common is that they are clearly part of Jesus' teaching and that they tend to contrast with the practices

of the business world. Therefore, they have the chance, like many of the practices of the Celtic Christians as they lived out faith among skeptical people, to demonstrate the wisdom of Jesus' teachings in comparison to the practices of the world.

Service

Jesus made it clear that service is a core part of imitating him. In defining greatness, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:27-28). Jesus even noted the counter-cultural element of his perspective, noting how secular rulers exercised power and "lorded over" those they ruled. From the Christian perspective, the master came to serve and calls all his followers to do the same. It might be tempting for a business leader to emphasize to a subordinate the importance of serving the organization. Following the model of Jesus, though, means for the business leader to serve the new employee as well.

The growth of servant leadership in the business world and the advocacy of writers like Collins (2001) for a leader's whole-hearted commitment to serving the organization have made the idea of service somewhat less counter-cultural in the current business environment. However, servant leadership remains a minority position in business thinking. An early writing by Kotter (1977) and a recent writing from Pfeffer (2010) both argue for the critical importance of the practice of power for success in an organization. Even where servant leadership is practiced, it is often intended as a means to leadership success within an organization. While there may be nothing wrong with attempting to succeed, the Christian understanding of service is that a person should serve for the sake of Christ and of others, not self.

Those who make the choice to serve and to place the needs of others over their own are taking an important step toward learning the kind of self-sacrifice to which Jesus calls his followers. By helping a person grow in service to others, a mentor helps an employee see the value of Christ's calling to serve. That vision can be an important link in the chain toward faith.

Genuineness

Jesus was quite clear in his distaste for phony behavior. He criticized the religious leaders for cleaning the outside but leaving the inside filthy (Matthew 23:25-27). The "pure in heart" are the ones who will see God (Matthew 5:8). Modern business terminology tends to

utilize the term "transparency" for this idea. The concept is to be the kind of person who does not feel the need to hide behind a mask.

There is some support for the idea of transparency in writings about business leadership. Zand's (1972) research demonstrated a positive relationship between trust and business success, and that trust, or mistrust, tends to be reinforced unless there is clear evidence to change employees' minds. Most leadership writers tend to suggest that both leaders and organizations need to be transparent in their actions. The argument is that trust is built on behavior that is consistent and easy to understand. On the other hand, writers like Pfeffer (2010), Ferris, Davidson and Perrewe (2005), and McClelland and Durham (1995) all seem to suggest that political skill and manipulation are more valuable than transparency. While transparency has advocates and examples in the business world, it is still largely counter-cultural.

Political maneuvering can certainly be effective, but it may also create long-term issues when people feel they cannot trust an individual or an organization. Consistent, genuine behavior has the potential to build lasting relationships. Ultimately, when individuals are dependably genuine, those around feel they can count on them to do what they say they will do. In the short run, political maneuvering may work, but in the long run, trusting relationships work better. Therefore, as with service, following the master's better way can show the wisdom of following Christ in general.

Integrity

Integrity is often understood as a synonym for honesty, but it also carries the idea of wholeness and undivided character. Jesus spoke clearly to this idea when he rejected oaths in favor of "simply let your 'yes' be 'Yes' and your 'no,' 'No'" (Matthew 5:37). Jesus would describe himself as "the truth" (John 14:6). His life and example present a consistent, undivided character for believers to imitate.

This principle is also one that is both accepted and counter-cultural in the business environment. Most leadership texts argue that business leaders must be people of integrity. Many organizations emphasize integrity in their corporate values statements. However, many follow the example of Enron which presented it as a value but failed to live up to it. Companies such as Arthur Anderson, Wells Fargo, Volkswagen, and Hampton Creek have demonstrated that deceitful behavior is possible even from organizations with a reputation for high ethical standards. Wertheim (2016) argues that lying appears to be a deeply

embedded attribute of our humanity. While most people feel a desire to tell the truth most of the time, they often move away from that commitment when they feel they have something to lose from telling the truth.

Christian leaders have the opportunity to both demonstrate consistent integrity and call for it from those they develop. A lifestyle of consistent integrity will build trust in relationships and can validate the idea that honesty is ultimately the superior approach. Consistent integrity is certainly a challenge, even for those who are wholly committed to it. Because of that challenge, mentors need to recognize the close relationship of genuineness (especially about failures) with integrity. They also need to recognize that those they are helping to develop will sometimes fail in their attempts to grow in integrity. However, those instances can also be opportunities to help individuals see the value of transparency in dealing with problems and to see the value of the next practice.

Grace

Jesus consistently showed grace to those who were fallen. He did this despite living in a religious culture where grace was not the norm. John tells us, “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1: 17). In direct challenge to the culture of the time (“you have heard it said, but I say . . .”), Jesus told his disciples to return good for evil (Matthew 5:39) and to show mercy even to the repeat offender (Matthew 18:21-22). Jesus offered grace to those who had failed, even when the failures were their own fault.

Grace can be a complex issue in a business environment. On the one hand, there are numerous examples of business leaders who have extended second chances to those who have made significant mistakes. Some level of risk is necessary in business, and individuals often grow best in learning from mistakes (Freiberg & Freiberg, 1996). On the other hand, accountability for failure is also an important business concept. That is especially true if the failure represents an ethical or moral breach. Some willful ethical failures would certainly call for significant discipline or even immediate termination. Even a person who needs to be fired, however, can be treated with grace. Grace may be most significant when an employee’s actions require discipline but the employee’s career can still be salvaged. Restoration is a core part of Christian grace. Jesus often had to correct his disciples, but he also continued to invest in growing them into who they should be.

Of the practices mentioned here, demonstrating grace may represent the most difficult tightrope for a business

leader to walk. It may also be difficult to teach an employee to practice grace. However, grace offers an employee an opportunity to feel valued, even when he or she fails. That application of grace has the potential to build loyalty to the leader and the organization. In the end, it will also demonstrate that grace can be superior to condemnation in response to mistakes and possibly help a person to see the value of extending grace as well as receiving it. Ultimately, a manager’s extension of grace may attract her employees to the ultimate grace giver, Jesus Christ.

Humility

Jesus made it clear that humility is a key attribute of those who follow him. The very first words of his most famous sermon call for “poverty of spirit” (Matthew 5:3). His call for discipleship emphasizes the humility he demonstrated: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29).

Support for humility as a virtue for business leaders received a significant boost from Collins (2001) when he identified humility as a key characteristic of eleven of the most successful CEO’s of the 1990s. Writers like Argondona (2015) and Frostenson (2016) have supported Collins’ conclusion that humility is a core asset for a leader. The value placed on this virtue by researchers seems a bit surprising when compared to the apparent narcissism of many business leaders throughout history. This may be an area where the business community is slowly discovering biblical truth. Humility is probably still counter-cultural in the business environment, but those who practice it may be realizing the benefits.

Humility may be gaining some acceptance in the business environment, but one suspects it is still a minority position. It is, after all, a minority position within society. Humility is not the natural state of most human beings. The tendency to self-interest is at the heart of a lot of economic theory, for instance. There is certainly ample evidence of business leaders putting their own self-interest ahead of the interests of the organization. Many of the more famous recent ethical failures demonstrate that, but the most obvious demonstration of it may be the attempts to justify holding lower-level employee salaries static while raising executive pay to extravagant heights. However, if leaders tend to be more successful when they focus on those they lead instead of themselves, it gives one more way in which a mentor can demonstrate the truth that Jesus taught.

CONCLUSION

These practices are not intended to be an all-inclusive list of Christian virtues or practices. While most are expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, they do not even represent all the practices Jesus advocates in that Sermon. However, the five practices discussed here represent examples of the opportunity a Christian manager has in discipling employees. The combination of their largely counter-cultural position in the business environment and their solid foundation in Jesus' explanation of how life really works makes them ideal opportunities to show the wisdom of Christ. Similar to the Celtic communities, leaders have the opportunity to show the efficacy of Christian faith in Hiebert's (1982) "middle ground." The Celtic Christians did not begin their contact with outsiders with a focus on presenting a Gospel message. Instead, they invited those outsiders into their world in a way that those outsiders could see the truth of the story before being asked to make such a commitment. In the modern business world, that may look different from the way it did in sixth century Ireland. Yet, the model provides an example of how a Christian might apply the everyday practices of following God to show people that Jesus' teachings represent truth. Pragmatic postmoderns tend to respond positively to seeing that a lifestyle produces positive results. That positive response can provide the "links in the chain" to move the person toward faith.

Managers who are trying to follow Jesus have a unique opportunity in teaching employees what is required to be successful in business. By practicing the teachings of Jesus, they can be an example of how the wisdom of Jesus works. Possibly even more importantly, they can help employees see the value of practicing that wisdom for themselves. When employees practice these virtues and see the benefit for themselves, the learning may be even more potent. When people see that service and humility and grace are better practices than the alternatives, they can become more open to the possibility that Jesus was not just a philosopher suggesting what he wished was true but rather someone speaking with authority concerning the truth. That experience can provide the open door to make an impact. It may be that an employee might learn to practice virtues like humility and service and still move on from having a relationship with a manager without coming to faith in Christ, but the manager can still be confident that the employee has moved several steps closer along the path of following that may someday lead to faith. Again, this understanding of discipleship takes the

pressure off attempting to get an immediate decision and leaves room for this step in the discipleship process to be more in the nature of "seed planting."

This perspective on discipleship would presumably be less effective if the Christian mentor never talked about the connection between virtues and faith. However, it opens the door for a long-term relationship that can move a person toward faith as they see the impact that Christ's teachings can have on life.

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