

NAVIGATORS

— LEAD ON —

MISTAKES WE'VE MADE IN DISCIPLESHIP - Scott & Tami Brown

We've been involved in full-time vocational ministry for 15 years - and involved in the work of making disciples for about 20 years. Along the way, God has provided us with numerous experiences to grow and learn... and some of that learning has come through getting it wrong. What we hope to do today is share some of the key mistakes we believe we've made which may have contributed to people not becoming life-time labourers. Our hope is the discussion will help you evaluate and assess your efforts to make labourers and potentially avoid similar missteps.

In other words, This is one of those "don't cut that tree branch above your head while you're standing on a ladder balanced on a trailer" moments (yes that situation was real - and the result for my Dad was exactly as you imagined.)

To begin we must clarify a few things - particularly what we mean by labourer and some of the biases we are operating from. We're not going to devote time to shaping your view of these things, we simply want you to know where we are coming from so that you can filter our discussion through the appropriate lens.

On the top of your handout -

Labourer = An ordinary person who is growing in their intimacy with Jesus and who is working in the harvest with a generational mindset.

Biases -

- 1) All followers of Christ (believers) are to be labourers. It is not the work of a few chosen believers, but it is to be the natural outworking/by product of those who follow Christ.
- 2) There is no distinction/difference between a disciple and a labourer. Labourers are disciples, disciples are labourers.
- 3) Labouring is "normal" - not the exception

We'll be looking at the scriptures to discover, or probably more accurately to reconsider some things that were important in the development of labourers for a lifetime. Which is ultimately our goal...

Debate - Look at the following passages (and any others you would like to reference in building your case) and debate where your focus should be in your discipleship of others - a focus on them following Christ (their relationship with Christ) or a focus on becoming fishers of men (the vision/call to Labouring)?

Matthew 4:19-20, John 15:1-11 and Mark 3:14-19?

Following Christ - the relationship with God -
(*other passages Deut 6:4-5, Luke 10:38-42, John 17:25-26, Matt 22:37-40*)
vs.
Becoming Fishers of men - the purposes of Christ
(*Matt 28:18-20, John 14:12-14, John 15:8;16, John 17:18-22, Acts 1:8*)

When we elevate one side over the other, we miss half the picture - these two things go hand in hand...one leading to the other, so over biasing our discipleship on one can produce unintended consequences. Mistakes can be made both ways -

Question: What dangers might come from elevating the work they are to do (labouring) ahead of the importance of their relationship with God?

Discipleship focused mainly on becoming a labourer -

Mistake #1: We assumed too much about their relationship with God

- We didn't help them become lovers of God - Matt 22
- We didn't address sin in their life which stunted their growth
- Built more into the "how" than the "why"
- We equipped them for a work they were not resourced to sustain

{HELP THOSE YOU DISCIPLE BECOME LOVERS OF GOD - MATT 22}

Question: While it might seem strange to consider, how might focusing your discipleship only on their personal walk with God contribute to them not labouring for a lifetime?

Discipleship focused mainly on their personal walk with God -

Mistake #2: Failed to pass on the call/vision of being a labourer - didn't begin well with the end in mind and make that clear.

- Discipleship became mostly about them, they became the focus
- Failed to help them embrace the calling to labour - i hoped they would catch it
- Inadvertently built a perspective that labouring was the "advanced course" which some might get to after developing enough
- Reinforced a model where they were consumers not contributors
- Set them up to be simply church attenders

Question: How would you bring up the vision of labouring early??

{TRANSFER THE VISION FOR LABOURING EARLY AND OFTEN}

In reality Jesus invited those he called into a Relationship with a Purpose ... and we've learned we need to strike that balance in how we disciple others. We need to focus on both their relationship with God and on embracing his purposes... to help them follow Him AND become fishers of men at the same time.

Transition

What was critical was how Jesus brought those two things out in the lives of the disciple

Question: In Mark 3:14 you read that he appointed the twelve to be "with Him". Using your knowledge of the scriptures, share some thoughts on what it looked like for the disciples to be "with him." (i.e. where they were, what they observed, when they were with him, how he instructed them, etc.) Here are a few examples to get you started.

Mark 4:10-14, 5:35-37; 9:2-4; 14:32-42.

What were your observations?

Another mistake we've made is how we viewed and implemented what is often referred to as the "with them" principle...which is essentially the recognition that disciples were included in nearly every aspect of the disciples life. We believe this is a pretty crucial means of building up labourers, but in different seasons missed the mark of what this should look like.

What mistakes did we make?

Mistake #3 - Our discipleship was not life-on-life. They were not with us.

- We didn't have them with us. They didn't follow along watching, following, doing as we did...and the relationship rarely went to a deeper level.
- reduced the disciple-making process to teaching. Good teaching can be found in a lot of different areas now - there is no shortage of information or good teaching....what people most need is life-on-life investment. They need to be with you ..to observe, to see your way of life to know the real you in the midst of God's purposes.
- made entering into their life the focus of "with them" - We went to them and made it fit their schedule and agenda. We'll flesh this out a bit more in mistake 4.

Question: How might these mistakes hinder others from becoming life-time labourers themselves?

- as full-time staff, we present a model that is unreproducible for others.
- presents a model that as parents there isn't enough time left to be able to invest outside the home.
- without the opportunity to observe them, my perspective of them is limited. I don't get to see the "real" them with any regularity.
- We don't normalise the practise of labouring by inviting them to join in it with us.

{BRING THEM ALONGSIDE YOU TO SHARE IN YOUR LIFE & MISSION}

What I've learned is there is no substitute for time spent - it's crucial in the disciple making process that we invite those we hope will become fellow-workers into our life and mission. And it's imperative that while they go with us, we help them begin being fellow-workers, which leads into our next mistake...

Question: Start to finish, Jesus' public ministry lasted 3 years. In what ways did the disciples become fellow-workers during that time? Here are a few verses to start your discussion.

Mark 6:34-44, Luke 9:1-6, Luke 10:1-12; 17-21

They began labouring early - they didn't merely spend three years with him training so that they could eventually take up the work of the gospel. They became fellow-workers with Jesus.

The 72 were the answer to their own prayer....they were sent to harvest and they saw the power and authority of God on display as they went.

Acts 18:24-28 is another example with Apollos taking up the work of labouring early - even before he had been schooled in all the right answers.

Question: The disciples became fellow-workers early in the discipleship process. How might we be hindering that with those we disciple?

- A misplaced idea that the work is dependent upon us and our competencies rather than on the Spirit of God.
- Fear of “failure”
- Perfectionism - the “right way” of doing things
- over complicating the process
- pride
- a belief they don’t know enough
- an belief that the work is not for “Children”

Mistake #4 - We didn’t get them started as labourers.

They learned the principles and purpose of labouring, but never began the practice.

Because of our developmental mindset, I began to believe those I was investing in needed great training and development before they could start labouring. Therefore everything was too theoretical or academic - there is value in these things, but what they needed early was a bit more practical and immediately applicable. Here is a simple task....lets go do it....together

Get them started, keep them going, build conviction.

After evaluating our campus ministry in the US, I realised the following:

- I presented a model which couldn't be easily reproduced. I created an environment that made it seem like they needed a doctorate to go about the work of making disciples correctly. Failed to help them master simple things! Do Simple Better!
- I didn’t put the work into others’ hands ... i worked hard to do things, which actually may not have left room for others. Or gave them the permission to labour. Full time staff did all the work.
- I didn’t give them a freedom to fail - and thereby restricted their willingness to try. Failure reflects on me and my discipleship - their failure is my failure ... and I don't like failing. We want to be validated and well thought of, which is easier to maintain if the people I’m working with don't make a mess of things.
- Didn’t give them enough practical help to get going and didn’t get them labouring with me.

Question: How might this mistake hinder others from becoming life-time labourers themselves?

give the vision for labouring early and often, make it accessible and get them going along with you. Get them started, keep them going and build conviction... If you have questions about how to do this, I would recommend referring to Robin Dennis’ workshop titled Get Them Started, Keeping Going.

{HELP GET THEM STARTED AS A LABOURER (WITH YOU)}

Final Debate: Those you are discipling most need the benefit of: your protection from difficulty OR your willingness to allow difficulty?

Counting the Cost Verses: Matt 10:34-39;19:16-23, Luke 9:57-62, John 6:52-60;66; 15:18-20; 16:32-33, 1 Peter 2:18-21

Mistake #5 - We made discipleship too easy and didn't allow them to persevere.

Questions:What do we mean by this? How might this happen?

- It cost them little to nothing - leading to a low commitment. Made it all about them. what they got out of it rather than what they gave up for it.
- I made the sacrifices, I tried to make everything fit for them. I counted the cost and they became a separate task to fit in among our other labouring - not a fellow-working joining me. They were individual projects in some ways.
- When it no longer fit what they wanted or "met their needs" they quit following (John 6)
- Tried to remove all the challenges, answer all the questions
- To build their faith in God, our disciples need to see and experience God's faithfulness?

Question: How might this mistake hinder others from becoming life-time labourers themselves?

Of course we need to have compassion and to help others - to carry burdens, etc. But we don't want to surrender the opportunity for them to take their cares to Jesus who cares for them. To see him as their solid rock and fortress amid distress and trial.

We must help them learn to consider it a joyful pursuit to face trials of various kinds, in order that the testing of their faith would produce in them perseverance. And ultimately that the perseverance would lead to them becoming mature and complete, not lacking anything. All of this by the loving grace and compassion of our infinitely caring God.

We learned you shouldn't over-shelter or protect those you are discipling from hardship - rather teach them to trust God and to persevere in faith - otherwise they will not endure until the end.

For additional information on this, view the notes from Mike Johnson's workshop on "Maintaining your passion for labouring".

{ALLOW THEM TO WORK THROUGH STRUGGLES & CHALLENGES AND HELP DIRECT THEIR FAITH and CONFIDENCE TOWARD GOD}

Questions for Personal Assessment:

- 1.) How can I help those I'm discipling deepen their love for God? What has helped fan a love for God in me? What specific resources (books, Bible Studies, sermons, etc.) have helped me?

- 2.) How soon in the discipleship process am I passing on the vision of generational labouring? How can I communicate the vision to those I disciple and help them begin to take ownership of it?

- 3.) Is my discipleship focus ministry "to them" or ministry "with them"? What things am I doing presently that I should invite my disciples to join me in? Is my time with those I'm discipling reduced to teaching and instruction? If so, how can I better join my disciples with me in life and ministry? What are they observing from me? What are they doing with me?

- 4.) Are the things that I'm doing with them easily reproducible? Can they pick them up and start doing them with someone else in the near-term? If not, what steps I can take to help those I'm discipling get started as fellow-workers now? In what ways can I make labouring more accessible and transferrable?

- 5.) Who is paying the cost of discipleship - me or them? How might I be making the call of discipleship "too easy"? What challenges or persecutions are common to those I disciple? How willing am I to allow those I'm discipling to walk through difficult things? How am I preparing those I disciple to persevere? What faith stretching opportunities would deepen their discipleship?