

# A Review and Summary of “Walking together on the Jesus Road: Intercultural Discipling” by Evelyn & Richard Hibbert

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## Review

Evelyn and Richard Hibbert believe that core to the missionary task is discipling those of other cultures. But they note that most of the books on disciple-making are written for the Western church context, and even those books which talk about cross-cultural disciple-making seem to assume that the methodology used in the West can also be used in non-Western contexts. I would concur with their observation. Discipling others to maturity in Christ when those disciples are from a different culture than yours is a significant challenge, and many mistakes can be made if one just follows a programmatic approach to disciple-making used in Western churches. Their new book, "Walking Together on the Jesus Road" is an excellent book helping to address that challenge and showing us how to avoid the mistakes.

The Hibberts write from the perspective of experience. The Hibberts served as missionaries in Bulgaria among a Muslim people group, and the majority of their illustrations come from their experiences living and working in this context. They share from both their successes and failures in intercultural disciple-making. The authors emphasize that the disciple-making process is a process of mutual learning from one another. The disciple-maker also learns from the disciple. They walk on the Jesus road side-by-side.

How is intercultural disciple-making different from discipling those from your own culture? The Hibberts stress the importance of giving lots of time to building deep relationships with the disciple, learning their culture and listening carefully to their concerns before selecting the content and the methodology for discipling new believers. The book really emphasizes the importance of giving lots of time to the discipleship process. I found 12 occurrences of the expression “lots of time” and 18 of “takes time” applied to the disciple-making process. I suspect that the Hibberts' personal experience and their observation of other Western missionaries led them to conclude that our Western task-orientation can be a significant hindrance to effective cross-cultural disciple-making. Again, in keeping with their sensitivity to collective cultures, the Hibberts do not promote the model of a one-on-one mentoring relationship, although some of the illustrations from their ministry use that model. Instead, the authors encourage discipling people in groups where possible.

Although not unique to non-Western contexts, I was intrigued by the Hibberts' insistence on respecting disciples as adults, and allowing them to be full participants in the process of choosing what topics to study. I found most helpful their explanation of the different facets of how the church lives out the gospel. Each culture will find the gospel to be good news for them

in different ways. In the people group in which the Hibberts worked, Jesus' power to heal and his love to make them feel special were particularly attractive. The cross-cultural disciple-maker needs to find out which facet of the Gospel is most attractive to their disciples and to start with discipleship conversation on this topic. Over time, the disciple-maker needs to introduce them to the whole spectrum of Christian truth regarding how the community of faith lives out the gospel.

How does this book fit into Disciple Making Movement (DMM) strategy? The model of inductive Bible studies that is presented near the end of the book is slightly adapted from the of Paul & David Watson in "Contagious Disciple Making". The Hibberts are clearly familiar with the DMM strategy, and talk about instilling the DNA of multiplication in their disciples. However, the Hibberts' book does not focus so much on the development of a movement, but rather on the relationship between disciple and disciple. "Walking Together on the Jesus Road" also does not deal with the initial process of building a relationship with someone who is not a follower of Christ, and then beginning to tell them the story of Jesus. Rather, it focuses on how to disciple someone who has already chosen the Jesus Road - or who has at least identified themselves with other believers.

"Walking Together on the Jesus Road: Intercultural Discipling" is a book that I would highly recommend to those of us who are engaged in the challenging work of making disciples of all nations. The authors have provided very helpful summaries of their key points at the end of each chapter, and the content is well organized and easy to follow. It will encourage us to do good ethnographic work and free us to "waste time" in building relationships with those we are discipling. It will help us avoid some of the pitfalls of blindly following a discipleship model from our home churches, and help us recognize that both the content and the method of our disciple-making needs to be adapted to fit the cultural context.

## Summaries

The following summaries are taken from the book (Kindle location 338 and at the end of each chapter).

### Section 1

This introductory chapter and the next form section 1 which focuses on intercultural disciplers sharing their lives with disciples. As part of this first section, chapter 2 expands on the intercultural discipler's role as a living reference who models key qualities to disciples. The most powerful lesson that disciplers leave with those they disciple is their model of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

#### Chapter 1: Important Points to Remember

- Intercultural discipling means walking alongside disciples.
- It means spending lots of time together and making the most of spontaneous opportunities to learn in the midst of normal life.

- By sharing their lives with disciples, intercultural disciplers become living references of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in real life

## Chapter 2: Important Points to Remember

- Disciplers are living examples of what it means to follow Jesus.
- We need to provide a welcoming context in which disciples can see our whole lives.
- We model:
  - Growing in relationship with God
  - Being a learner
  - How to relate to others
  - How to work through problems
  - How to do ministry
  - How to make disciples

## Section 2

**Section 2** emphasizes listening to disciples in the following ways:

- learning their culture (chapter 3)
- respecting them as adults (chapter 4)
- responding to their concerns (chapter 5)
- helping them engage with unseen powers (chapter 6)

## Chapter 3: Important Points to Remember

- Disciples need to be able to follow Jesus in a way that is meaningful for their own cultural context.
- Disciplers need to learn and adapt to the culture of those they disciple.
- Ethnocentrism means assuming our way is the right way.
- As both disciplers and disciples learn about each other's culture, they develop a shared understanding that helps them to understand and relate to each other.
- Communication involves more than words.
- Mistakes are inevitable but they are also fruitful learning opportunities, if we are humble.

## Chapter 4: Important Points to Remember

- Discipling is a mutual relationship.
- The Holy Spirit is at work in his disciples (including us).
- Our way of living out our Christian faith has been shaped by our own culture. Disciples need to be free to discover how to live for Jesus in their own culture. As they learn, we also learn.

- Disciples, as adults, choose what and how they learn, and have responsibility for their choices. Discipling, therefore, is a mutually negotiated process between equals.

#### Chapter 5: Important Points to Remember

- A good discipler is a good listener.
- We need to identify and let go of our culturally driven agendas.
- The Holy Spirit may convict disciples about sin that does not have a high priority for us.
- We need to be open to indigenous expressions of worship.
- In order to discover disciples' concerns we need to spend time with them, ask them questions, and create a safe environment for them to ask questions.

#### Chapter 6: Important Points to Remember

- We have to empower disciples to engage with the unseen world.
- Disciples need to experience God's power in the midst of their everyday lives.
- We have to intentionally be open to learning about things that are beyond our own experience. For Westerners, this means being open to what is happening in the unseen realm.
- God is supreme over all spiritual powers.
- Dealing with spiritual powers and objects should be a community activity.

#### Section 3

**Section 3** highlights the need to focus on disciples' relationships—their relationship with Jesus, the intercultural discipler, other disciples, and their families and friends. Intercultural disciplers do this by:

- leading disciples through the process of growing towards maturity in Christ through relationship to Christ and the discipler (chapter 7)
- helping disciples come to a clear sense of identity in Christ by helping them belong to a local church and develop strong relationships with other believers (chapter 8)

#### Chapter 7: Important Points to Remember

- Becoming a follower of Jesus is a gradual, relational process that takes a variable amount of time.
- A specific point of conversion is often difficult to discern.
- Each disciple's journey is different.
- Focus on disciples' orientation towards Jesus, leading them step-by-step into closer relationship with him.

#### Chapter 8: Important Points to Remember

- The communities we belong to provide us with our sense of identity.
- Disciples need to feel like they belong to a community of Jesus followers.
- Disciples need time and a safe space to find a settled sense of identity as followers of Jesus.
- Nurture opportunities for disciples to experience Christian community.
- Build intercultural bridges between disciples and members of the established church.
- In multicultural contexts, ensure that disciples from each non-dominant group have a genuine voice.

## Section 4

**Section 4** focuses on the need for intercultural disciplers to contextualize the way they explain the gospel, create community, and teach the Bible, and discusses practical ways to do these things. The four chapters in this section discuss:

- contextualizing the gospel (chapter 9)
- contextualizing Christian community (chapter 10)
- contextualizing the content of what intercultural disciplers teach from the Bible (chapter 11)
- contextualizing the approach or methods intercultural disciplers use in teaching the Bible (chapter 12).

### Chapter 9: Important Points to Remember

- Sin is multi-faceted.
- The gospel is multi-dimensional and addresses all the facets of sin.
- People from different cultures are attracted to Jesus by a gospel message that addresses the facet of sin that troubles them most.
- Once people have entered the church, they gradually learn about the riches of all that Jesus has done for them.
- Disciplers should aim to eventually teach disciples about all aspects of healthy church life in such a way that the community of Jesus lives out the breadth of the gospel in a culturally relevant way.

### Chapter 10: Important Points to Remember

- Disciples need to be able to become Christians within their own cultural identity without having to take on the discipler's culture.
- Enable disciples to express their faith in ways that are meaningful to them.
- Disciples need culture-specific discipling:
  - for their own growth as Christians, as this addresses the specific challenges they face out of their own cultural experience.

- so that their family and friends will be open to learn about Jesus.

#### Chapter 11: Important Points to Remember

- Disciples need to develop a lifelong habit of listening to God's word and relating it to their lives.
- Bible teaching should be relevant to everyday concerns and responsive to events as they arise.
- A contextualized creed and/or catechism helps disciples to evaluate what they encounter.
- Disciples are living examples of how to connect the Bible with real life.
- Our curriculum is the whole Bible and we are working with disciples towards a comprehensive picture of what it means to follow Jesus and be a healthy church in a culturally appropriate way.

#### Chapter 12: Important Points to Remember

- The way we teach the Bible should connect it directly with disciples' everyday life.
- There is more to teaching the Bible than just reading and analyzing its words.
- Those who cannot read can still learn.
- Focus on the environments where you teach. Make them welcoming and comfortable. They should evoke positive feelings in relation to learning God's word.
- Relate the Bible to people.
- Teach groups of disciples together.
- Use art forms from the disciples' culture.
- Use an easy-to-remember set of questions.

#### Section 5

The final section (containing just one chapter, chapter 13) discusses how intercultural disciplers prepare to leave the intensive discipling relationship. This chapter gives guidance to intercultural disciplers about how to move on from discipling, including knowing how and when to do this, how to help disciples become disciple makers, and which disciples to train as leaders.

#### Chapter 13: Important Points to Remember

- Prepare to move on from the beginning of the discipling relationship.
- Develop a two-way relationship.
- Make sure the disciples are well-established in a community of believers before you leave.
- In ongoing interactions, after leaving, focus on encouragement.
- Select and train disciples for leadership in culturally appropriate ways.
- Grow in Christ together with disciples.

## Key passages highlighted:

Location 90 - As we tried to address the real- life challenges faced by cross- cultural missionaries, it became clear to us that discipling people from other cultures was the core of the missionary task.

Location 121 - I think this is the primary task of discipleship— meeting Jesus through another’s experience of him. It is not so much what I have to give, but what I have to learn through another person’s discovery of Jesus. Discipleship is a mutual exploration of what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus in the various contexts we find ourselves in. The Holy Spirit is the teacher. We walk together alongside him.

Location 155 - Our aim in this book is to address the felt need of Christian workers for help in how to disciple people from cultural backgrounds other than their own.

Location 179 - The kind of discipling we focus on in this book is similar to the discipling Jesus did with the small group of men who were with him almost all the time for three years

Location 230 - A further challenge in intercultural discipleship is the time and patience it requires.

Location 366 - Being an intercultural discipler is costly. It takes time, money, space, and often intrapersonal resources and strength when you do not feel like you have anything more to give. It will usually have a higher cost than discipling people from your own cultural background,

Location 444 - A vital first step towards effective intercultural discipling is learning what is important to the disciples.

Location 574 - Being a friend takes time. As intercultural disciplers, we need to be available to the people we disciple. Spending unstructured time with disciples is likely to be a huge challenge if you are from a more task- oriented culture. But we need to “waste time” with those we disciple in order to get to know and understand them. A Ukrainian believer was asked, “What is the most important thing I can do to build relationships with Ukrainians?” He responded, “Be willing to waste time with them.”

Location 1430 - Effective intercultural disciplers try to discover what issues the Holy Spirit is raising in disciples so that they can work along with him.

Location 2172 - It details three practical ways that intercultural disciplers can help them work out their new identity: helping them maintain relationships with their family and friends, helping them bond to a local community of believers, and enabling them to have a voice in the church.

Location 2581 - The first step to help disciples see how the gospel “scratches where they itch” is to research the needs felt by people in the disciples’ culture. The next step is to search the Bible to find out how the gospel addresses their particular felt needs. We will then be able to communicate how Jesus is good news for people from that culture.

Location 2623 - They illustrate the breadth of ways in which the church lives out the gospel. The five facets, shown in figure 19, are: • Instruction—Teaching God’s ways from the Bible; • Belonging—Helping people feel part of God’s family; • Security—Providing a social structure that is trustworthy, sustainable, and feels secure; • Power—Empowering people to live for God

and overcome sin and Satan; • Service—Enabling people to serve God’s people and the broader community.

Location 3468 - Both disciple and discipler bring something to the discipling relationship. They each share whatever God has given them. As they get to know each other they both grow in their understanding of God.