



The Essentials of Disciple-Making

Session Two: Marching Orders

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

Imagine you needed to leave final instructions for your family or business to carry out after your death. What would be most important to say? What would you most want them to do? While it may be uncomfortable to think about life's final instructions, it can give help and comfort to those we leave behind.

The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:18-20, was Jesus's final instructions, not before His death, but before ours. He instructs us to use the life He has given us to be about His work: making disciples, baptizing, and teaching them to follow Jesus.

The work of the Great Commission is not only for credentialed believers or pastors, and it will not end until Christ returns. Each of us is meant to respond to Christ's authority and activity in our lives by joyfully sharing Him with others.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 28:16-20

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus's marching orders to the disciples remain our guide today. As we make disciples in Christ's name, we walk in step with His command.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What was Christ's final command to His disciples, and how does it apply to the church today?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Matthew 28:16-18 You might have multiple people in your life who have authority over you. Maybe it's a parent, teacher, coach, boss, or group of shareholders. Rarely do we live and work free from the authority and influence of others. For believers, our ultimate authority is Christ. When we correctly respond to His position as Lord over our lives, we rightly align our desires with His.

Matthew 28:19-20a In His final words before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gave the disciples, and us, final instructions. The Great Commission tells us that as we are going about our lives, we should be kingdom-focused, making disciples who, in turn, make disciples. The Great Commission was not just for the first century, it is for all believers who follow Christ.

Matthew 28:20b If the thought of sharing Jesus at home or around the world feels frightening, take heart. Jesus closed His final instructions to the disciples by reminding them He would be with them always. We do not pursue the work of evangelism alone. In fact, we should not. When we are in step with Christ, we come to love what He loves, and His heart for the world compels us to share the good news about Him wherever we go.



START HERE

We might think of the Great Commission as the marching orders of the church. Jesus's last words teach us that we are called to actively reach people for Him by evangelizing and baptizing them and continuing to disciple and teach them. This is no small task. Some people may feel called to share the gospel in a remote part of the world. Others will carry the gospel throughout their communities. The important thing isn't *where* we live out the Great Commission, it's *that* we live out the Great Commission in obedience to Christ's commands.

DISCUSS

Have you ever thought of the Great Commission primarily as a verse for people called to the mission field? How could a narrow view of Christ's command keep us from experiencing the fullness of God's plan for us?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Jesus is our authority.

Matthew 28:16-18: *The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."*

Unpacking Matthew 28:16-18

Did you participate in the marching band when you were growing up, or know someone who did? The transition from middle school band—learning an instrument, starting to read music, while seated in a chair—becomes a whole new thing when students must play an instrument, memorize the music, and do it while marching around the football field in a dizzying sequence. It can be an overwhelming experience when first-year students receive their marching orders for the first time. Suddenly, what they thought they knew about music becomes more difficult and more intense. It's no wonder the season's first performance can appear a little rough around the edges!

In Matthew 28, the church received its marching orders. Like first-year students in a high school band, the task of reaching the world for Christ can seem more difficult, slower, and more intense as we await Christ's return. Today, we will learn that sharing our faith isn't an optional part of our walk with Christ, nor is it something reserved for "advanced" Christians. Instead, making disciples is at the heart of Christ's mission for His church, and we are each commanded to join Him in His work.

In Matthew 28:16, the eleven disciples made their way to a mountain in Galilee, a plan that Jesus had pre-arranged. It is essential to note the number of the apostles—eleven, not twelve. Matthew 27:3-4 records that Judas, after having taken the silver from the chief priests, was filled with remorse for the role he played in Christ's unlawful conviction. He attempted to assuage his



guilt by pleading with the priests and elders to no avail. Denied the opportunity to remedy the situation he caused, Judas “threw the silver into the temple and departed. Then he went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5). Today’s Scripture sits in the timeline after Judas’s death. Still, before the apostles selected Matthias to take his place as one of the twelve apostles, as mentioned in Acts 1:26. Another notable aspect is the location Jesus chose for this reunion. In Galilee, Jesus inaugurated His earthly ministry at His baptism (Matthew 3:13) and called the first disciples, telling them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (Matthew 4:19). This connection is a good reminder that locations in Scripture are often meaningful and can point toward the fulfillment of God’s promises.

“When they saw Him, they worshiped” (Matthew 28:17a). This was not the first time the disciples encountered the risen Jesus. John 20:19-30 tells us that Jesus appeared twice to the disciples, showing them His hands and feet. In John 21, Jesus met with the disciples and reinstated Peter as the head of the new church. In Matthew 28:17, when the disciples met with Jesus in Galilee, they worshiped him, just as the women had done at the empty tomb in Matthew 28:8-9. The appropriate response to experiencing Christ is worship. Revelation 4:1-11 tells us we will worship Christ forever. Whether it is the first time we see Him or a million years into our eternal life, when we encounter the risen Jesus, as the apostles did, we will worship Him.

In Matthew 27:18, Jesus told His disciples, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” A chief way we express worship to Christ is by recognizing and living under his authority. Jesus did not gain authority after the resurrection. John 1:3 tells us that Jesus, the incarnate Word, was with God in the beginning, and all things were created by Him and for Him. Philippians 2:5-11 reminds us that Jesus is the very nature of God and is exalted to the highest place. We do not give Jesus authority, just as He did not earn authority. After He rose from the dead, His eternal authority was displayed for the world to see. Christ is exalted forever, and we come to live under His authority when we willingly submit our lives to Him.

In the mid-1930s, hymn writer B. B. McKinney met with a dear friend whose failing health prevented him from returning to Brazil and resuming his mission work. “What will you do?” the hymnist asked. His friend replied, “Wherever He leads, I’ll go.” McKinney was so inspired, he wrote the hymn, “Wherever He Leads I’ll Go,” in honor of the man’s faith.¹

Before the disciples received Christ’s final command, their marching orders, they worshiped Him and responded to His authority. Just as marching band members look to the drum major for instructions, we look to Jesus to align our lives with His will. When we joyfully align our lives with Jesus, we will say, like the great hymn, “Wherever He leads, I’ll go.”

DISCUSS

- *What is a difficult skill you’ve learned throughout your life? What kept you going, despite the difficulty?*
- *Can you think of an encounter you have had with Jesus that prompted you to worship?*



- *How can we respond to Christ's authority in our lives today?*

2. Making disciples is our mission.

Matthew 28:19-20a: *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you."*

Unpacking Matthew 28:19-20a

If you didn't grow up around marching band culture, you might be surprised to learn that there are different styles of marching bands, and they each have their own rules and culture. For instance, military marching bands are highly regimented, and in some colleges (Texas A&M, for example), members of the band must also be in the Corps of Cadets. These bands are known for their precision and uniformity. Other marching bands, such as those found in some historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs), are known for a more artistic marching style, characterized by high steps and expressive music. Other bands, such as those found in your local high school, may be a combination of the two and may include dancers, high steppers, or a large section of flag twirlers or majorettes. Even though the styles may differ, all these bands have one thing in common: They take their orders from the drum major. Whether they are marching on the football field during the halftime show or marching downtown in a parade, the drum major sets the pace of the music, reminds musicians when to start and stop, and determines the direction the band will move. Without an effective drum major, a marching band would fall apart rather quickly.

In today's text, Jesus established that He has all authority. He is the ultimate "drum major" of our lives. When we live under His authority, He sets the pace for our lives, teaches and reminds us how to live, and determines the direction we'll go. When we "march" in sync with His commands, we experience life as He intends. As Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

Now that we've established who oversees the pace and direction of our lives, let's consider how we know where to go and what to do. The Great Commission gives the marching orders for all who follow Christ. Jesus's words in Matthew 28:19-20a tell what believers are called to do: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. At first glance, the Great Commission may seem to apply specifically to missionaries and pastors, rather than all believers. Missionaries go, and pastors and church leaders disciple believers, baptize new converts, and teach the body of Christ. Without a careful look at the original Greek, we might assume that Christ's primary command is to "go," leaving many church members—the very young or old, parents with small children, college students, or those with physical limitations—to believe that the command doesn't apply to them or doesn't apply in their current season of life.

At times, the English translation of the original Greek is inadequate to reflect the original meaning. The Great Commission is an excellent example of why we want to get the language right. Failing to do so could communicate that Christ's command isn't for everyone, a mistake



that would carry us far from God's heart for His people. First, the object of Christ's command in verse 19 is "you all," which is clear in the Greek but only implied in English. The Great Commission isn't for certain believers, only for the disciples, or just for pastors. Jesus said, "[You all] Go, and make disciples." Each person who belongs to Jesus receives the same marching orders. The qualifier isn't based on your educational status or position in the church. The Great Commission is for every believer in every generation until Christ returns.

Another distinction in the Greek that is unclear in English is which verb is primary in the sentence. In English, we read this sentence as four separate commands: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. In doing so, we tend to think of "go" as the main verb, implying that the Great Commission occurs on the mission field as people travel to another place to share the gospel. In approaching these as four separate commands, we might see them not only as jobs that other people, such as pastors and missionaries, do, but we might also see them as separate tasks in which we might or might not participate.

But the only imperative verb (command) in the sentence is "make disciples." The word "go" in Greek in this sentence is in the aorist-participle form (think "-ing" adverbs). This participle and imperative verb go together, and could more accurately be translated, "In your going, make disciples," or "As you are going, make disciples." The Great Commission isn't something we participate in once a year on a mission trip or when we volunteer at the food bank. As we go about our lives—working, learning in school, and serving our families and neighbors—we are commanded to make disciples. The Great Commission isn't an event; it's a way of life.

In Mark Dever's book *Understanding the Great Commission*, he writes, "The Great Commission is normally fulfilled through planting and growing local churches. . . . So, the Great Commission involves you, the individual Christian. But the Great Commission also involves you through your local church."² The local church is the main artery through which most evangelical Christians will fulfill the work of the Great Commission. As we invite those who are far from God to come near through Jesus, we help them engage with the local church. As we disciple our children, we partner with the local church, and we grow in our own discipleship process through the ministries of the local church. In fact, evangelical efforts around the world usually begin when members of a local congregation work together to fulfill the Great Commission by empowering, funding, praying, sending, or going into mission fields worldwide. Reaching the nations doesn't happen in isolation. The reach of the gospel extends around the globe as individual believers in local congregations join forces to fulfill Christ's command. When we see the Great Commission as the current of the good news of Jesus flowing in, through, and around our lives, we better understand Christ's commands to be about His work "as we are going," wherever that may be.

The last two parts of this sentence are also integral to the mission. They are present active participles (another "-ing") that reflect on the main verb "make disciples." What does it mean to make disciples? The text reflects it accurately. We "make disciples" by baptizing and teaching others. As we go about our lives, in step with the Savior, we are called to actively participate in His mission—making disciples as we reach, baptize, and teach others about Christ. We might think of "baptizing" as the culmination of evangelism. We baptize those who make a profession



of faith in Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection. While only some believers might participate in the act of baptizing another Christian, we can all be a part of the evangelistic effort that helped that person hear and respond to the gospel. When believers rock babies in the nursery and tell them about Jesus, teach elementary Sunday School, or volunteer in the youth ministry, their ministry is compounded over time into a fuller understanding of the gospel in a person's life. While we may not all get in the water, we all participate in "baptizing" future generations of believers.

In this sense, baptizing and teaching go hand in hand. Discipleship doesn't end when a person accepts Christ. In many ways, it's just getting started. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in Acts 2, and three thousand people believed and were baptized on the same day, the early church was not yet finished with the work of the Great Commission. These new converts needed to learn the faith as it was passed down from the disciples. Acts 2:42 tells us that "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." These new Christians had been reached and baptized, but the process of making them into disciples would continue throughout their lives, just as it does in ours.

The ongoing process of discipleship is never final in our lives. As we continue to follow Christ, we always have room to grow in becoming more like Him. We may mistakenly believe that this means we will grow into a place of less awareness of sin in our lives and less need for ongoing faith and repentance. The opposite is actually true, as we grow in Christ, the light of His truth shines more brightly, and we see new ways we need Him every day.

The church community is vital in helping individuals grow as disciples. We learn to follow everything Jesus has commanded in the context of the church. This happens in our worship gatherings, in small groups, and in one-on-one relationships. Discipleship occurs in structured settings, but also develops organically. Who are you seeking to spend time with that you might mutually grow as followers of Jesus? Who can you invite to a regular lunch or dinner to ask intentional questions about their walk with Jesus? Who is a trusted brother or sister that you feel safe confessing your sins to, knowing they will support, challenge, and pray for you as needed? These are the rhythms of personal discipleship we are all called to seek out in everyday life.

The beauty of our faith is that we will never outgrow *participation* in the Great Commission, and we will never graduate *from* the Great Commission. As long as we live, we are called to partner with Christ in reaching people for Him and baptizing and teaching them, just as we are recipients of the Great Commission as we grow in discipleship and Christlikeness throughout our lives. We serve one another as we serve God. When the apostle Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy, he encouraged him by saying, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which can give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15). Timothy had been a recipient of the Great Commission as a child; he was participating in the Great Commission as a young pastor, and Paul encouraged him to continue growing in living out the Great Commission as he grew in wisdom and faith.



DISCUSS

- *The disciples likely didn't feel equipped for the task they were given, and neither do we. What is our ultimate hope in carrying out this call of Christ?*
- *How does an understanding of the verb usage in Matthew 28:19-20a impact the way you understand your role in fulfilling the Great Commission?*
- *What would look different about your church experience if you saw daily ministry in the local church as part of fulfilling the Great Commission?*

3. Eternity is our promise.

Matthew 28:20b (NASB): *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Unpacking Matthew 28:20b

A marching band director keeps a complex graph showing the exact position of every musician on the field at any given time. To the untrained eye, it appears to be a chaotic mess of lines and arrows, but the director can envision how the entire show will unfold, down to the smallest detail. As the band members take their cues from their director, the final plan is gradually revealed. It is not the job of the musician to understand how the whole graph works. Each player must do their part, trust the director, and believe it will all come together in the end, as each musician does their part.

Like players in a large band, we must look to Jesus to see how His plans will come together. In his Gospel, Matthew employed a peculiar word, "Behold," to get the reader's attention. This is an underused word in our vocabulary today. Sometimes it is translated, "lo," and it is used throughout Matthew's Gospel when the angels proclaimed God's Messiah. In Matthew 1:20,23 Joseph was told to "behold" (NASB) the good news. The magi from the east came to visit Jesus and "behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was" (Matthew 2:9, ESV). You might think of "behold" (*idou* in Greek) as an ancient exclamation point. It's an opportunity for the writer to proclaim, "Look right here! This is important!"

We see it again in Matthew 3:17 at Jesus's baptism: "And behold, a voice from the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (NASB). This word was used when Jesus calmed the storm (Matthew 8:24, NASB), when He dined with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10, NASB), at the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:3, NASB), and when He told the disciples He would suffer and die (Matthew 20:18, NASB). Finally, Matthew tells us to behold, the temple veil torn in two the day of Christ's crucifixion, removing the barrier between God and His people (Matthew 27:51, ESV). Again and again, Matthew pointed us toward Christ with an exclamation mark: Behold!

It should come as no surprise, then, that Matthew's Gospel ends as it began. When he recorded the final words of Jesus, Christ said to them, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the



age.” The Messiah whom the angels announced with a loud, “Behold!” in Bethlehem was the suffering servant who calmed the storms, healed the sick, and raised the dead, and finally, He is the Savior of the world we behold as we walk with Him for eternity. The angel declared to Joseph, “Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us” (Matthew 1:23). And in Christ’s final instruction to His disciples, He assured them, “Behold, I am with you always.”

As we participate in the Great Commission, we must begin as Jesus ends—He is with us, to the end of the age. Whether we are sharing our faith with the neighbor across the street or with someone across the world, Christ goes with us, and the Holy Spirit speaks through us (Matthew 10:19-20). The Great Commission, like anything else in our Christian life, isn’t supposed to be muscled through in our own strength. Instead, we partner with Christ, who will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He is our source of strength, and as we behold Him in our lives, we invite others to behold Him also.

DISCUSS

- *What does it mean to “behold” Jesus in daily life?*
- *What things get in the way of seeing His activity in your day-to-day life?*
- *How does knowing Jesus is with you help you overcome the fear you might have in telling others about Him?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

God could have chosen any way to communicate the good news of Jesus. At the birth of Jesus, He used angels. At the birth of the church, He used His people. The Great Commission isn’t busy work for the church—it *is* the work of the church. The good news of Jesus is that God loved us so much He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, be resurrected, and He invites us into an eternal relationship with Him. Those who have experienced God’s love and forgiveness will desire to share it with others. The Great Commission is our marching orders, and Jesus says He will go with us as we reach people for Him.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *What excites you about participating in the Great Commission?*
- *What frightens or holds you back from telling others about Jesus?*
- *How can you trust Jesus to be with you, no matter your doubts or other challenges?*



RESPOND TO THE TEXT

How does acknowledging Jesus's authority and reflecting on His constant presence help us overcome the fear we might have about sharing our faith?

APPLY

How has your view of the Great Commission changed through today's study? How does Jesus want you to participate in His command to make disciples?

REFERENCES

¹ Lamar Moring, "Wherever He Leads, I'll Go," The Baptist New Mexican, April 1, 2020, https://gobnm.com/perspectives/devotionals/wherever-he-leads-i-ll-go/article_7f58b460-7458-11ea-a8c6-0f6e78c6b761.html.

² Mark Dever, *Understanding the Great Commission*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2016).