Go Make Disciples
The Great Commission of the Followers of Christ

Summary and Goal

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He gave His disciples a commission to make disciples of all nations. Based on the authority of Jesus, we are to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded us. As we go, we trust in the presence of Christ, who promises to be with us on mission.

Steps to Prepare

1. Read the main passage for this lesson, recording your insights and questions:
   - Matthew 28:16-20

2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 109-115).
   - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
   - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your group.

3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 107-108).
   - Refine the lesson plan based on your group’s particular needs.
   - Adjust the plan if necessary.

4. Pray for the Lord’s guidance as you lead your group through this material.

Lesson Outline

1. Submit to the power and authority of Jesus (Matt. 28:16-18).

2. Obey the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20a).

3. Depend on the presence of Jesus (Matt. 28:20b).
Introduction
Recount the writer’s story of Jim coming to faith through the obedience of Tom and Kevin to the Great Commission (leader p. 109; personal study guide [PSG] p. 89).

Consider the actions of Tom and Kevin in this story. What aspects seem easy to you? What aspects seem difficult? Why?

Mention the various questions that arise in considering the Great Commission (leader p. 110). Then summarize the lesson (leader p. 110; PSG p. 90).

1. Submit to the power and authority of Jesus.
Set the context for the Great Commission as requiring Jesus’ total authority; then read Matthew 28:16-18. Show how Jesus’ authority results in our worship of Him and our obedience to His command (leader pp. 110-111; PSG pp. 90-91).

Who obeyed the Great Commission in leading to your own conversion? Why is the authority of Jesus so important for understanding the Great Commission?

2. Obey the Great Commission of Jesus.
Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 28:19-20a. Note that the main verb of this passage is the imperative “make disciples.” Explain that a disciple is a “learner.” We “make disciples” through a lifestyle of “going” on mission and “baptizing” those who believe in Christ (leader pp. 111-112; PSG pp. 91-92).

What is the significance of being identified with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

What is the relationship of baptism to belonging to God’s people?
We also make disciples by “teaching.” Explain who we are teaching (leader p. 112; PSG p. 92).

How can we encourage one another toward making disciples rather than just participating in “discipleship”?

Explain four aspects of what we are teaching (leader pp. 113-114; PSG p. 93):

- **Knowing and Communicating the Big Story of the Bible.** This helps make sense of what Jesus did for us, what He is doing in us, and what He will do in the world.

- **Encouraging and Equipping Others to Read the Bible.** Reading the Bible is not simply a “spiritual discipline”; it is our spiritual nourishment.

- **Helping Others Encounter Christ.** The Scriptures testify of Christ, and we need to know Him in whose image we are being made.

- **Challenging Others to Obedience.** We are to be obedient to the teaching of the Bible as we call others to obedience.

Which of these four aspects of teaching comes easiest for you? Which of these aspects is most challenging? Why?

Finally, explain where we teach, not just classrooms but everywhere. We must also remember the worldwide scope of the commission—of all nations (leader p. 114; PSG p. 94).

Where are some places you go often that you could be more intentional about making disciples? In what ways are you or could you be involved in disciple-making in other countries?

3. **Depend on the presence of Jesus.**

Read Matthew 28:20b. Emphasize our need for Jesus’ presence, through the Holy Spirit, for security, power, and direction in fulfilling our mission (leader p. 115; PSG p. 95).

In what ways has the presence of Christ been apparent to you as you have followed Him?

**Conclusion**

Show how the Great Commission given to us is surrounded by the power and presence of Jesus (leader p. 115; PSG p. 96).

*Apply the truths of this lesson with “His Mission, Your Mission” (PSG p. 96).*
Jim was rough around the edges. Blunt and brash; independent, yet insecure. Tom and Kevin worked with Jim at a large investment company. They traveled together, lunched together, and grabbed coffee together. You would call them friends, not just coworkers. And that was a good thing because Jim was walking through a marital crisis.

What Jim didn’t need were friends who only invited him to a Sunday event or offered worn out clichés. He needed friends who would listen, walk beside him, and bring the love and goodness of God near to him in everyday language and everyday rhythms. Tom and Kevin spoke about the Bible in ways that defined their perspectives and relationships. They identified themselves by Christ and with Christ. And it made Jim curious.

Jim eventually asked Tom and Kevin if he could “go to church with them.” They had invited Jim before, but this time Jim wanted to go. So he did. I was preaching that morning. Afterward, he came up and embraced me with a bear hug; then backing away and hitting me in the arm, he said loudly, “That was a *-*#%^* good speech.” I just smiled and said, “Thanks.”

One year later, Jim was in the baptismal waters, declaring himself as a follower of Jesus. And Tom and Kevin were still obeying the Great Commission.

Consider the actions of Tom and Kevin in this story. What aspects seem easy to you? What aspects seem difficult? Why?
The Great Commission is the label Christians have given to Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:16-20. We agree on the label, but there’s discussion about what Jesus’ words mean.

• Was Jesus commanding us to evangelize? Certainly, baptizing people and teaching them implies that we are sharing the good news. But is that all?

• Was Jesus commanding us to “do missions”? Certainly, local churches ought to pray and send missionaries to the nations. But is that all?

• Was Jesus commanding us to “do discipleship”? Certainly, teaching people to obey everything Christ has commanded is part of making disciples. But is that all?

Lesson Summary
In this session, we will seek to arrive at a clearer understanding of what Jesus intended when He commanded that His followers make disciples. Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He gave His disciples a commission to make disciples of all nations. Based on the authority of Jesus, we are to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded us. As we go, we trust in the presence of Christ, who promises to be with us on mission.

1. Submit to the power and authority of Jesus (Matt. 28:16-18).

The Great Commission is one of the most well-known passages of Scripture. Most of the time, we think of it as starting with “Go” in verse 19, but the word “therefore,” also in verse 19, points back to the strong statement in verse 18 of Jesus’ total authority in heaven and on earth. Let’s take a look at the verses that come just before Jesus’ command and why they matter.

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Why is it important to remember verse 18? Because we only fulfill the Great Commission when we obey the Great Commander.

What is unique about this Commander is that Jesus’ power empowers and Jesus’ authority authorizes. He is unlike people in power who like to make their subjects feel powerless. No, this Commander invites His followers to experience His power—which is demonstrated in the giving of love.
Jesus also differs from authority figures who make subjects feel oppressed. Instead, He frees His followers to exercise the King’s authority over the forces of darkness who work to destroy life-giving love. He is the authority over all, who became subject to death on the cross and now calls His followers to subject themselves to His mission of love (John 13:35).

So, we go as a people under the authority of Jesus. But we also go as a people who worship Jesus. Before the imperative to His followers in verse 19 (“make disciples”) is the description of His followers in verse 17. They came to Him and “worshiped.”

Worshipping Jesus is a declaration of your high regard for the authority of Jesus. He is worth obeying. He is worth submitting to His Great Commission.

Who obeyed the Great Commission in leading to your own conversion? Why is the authority of Jesus so important for understanding the Great Commission?

2. Obey the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt. 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 all that I have commanded you.

As we look at these important words from Jesus, it’s important to dig a little into the grammar. The only main verb in these verses in the original language is the imperative “make disciples.” The subject, of course, is understood—“you.” The Great Commission of Jesus is for His disciples, you and me, to “make disciples.”

What is a disciple? It might be helpful to use the synonym “learner”—someone who follows or learns from someone else. But the word doesn’t refer only to something we do. It’s about who we are. As Mark 1:17 suggests, over the course of our being a disciple of Jesus, of our learning Him and His ways, He transforms us into “fishers of people.” In other words, our being made a disciple of Jesus transforms us into makers of more disciples of Jesus. We learn Jesus (not just in an educational sense but also an experiential one) while helping others learn Jesus.

Sometimes we feel the pressure of thinking we have to know everything about Jesus or Scripture in order to make disciples. But biblical discipleship means you are not the learnED but the learnER. You are a learner of Jesus tasked with teaching and learning alongside other disciples.

How does one “make” a disciple? Here we see the instructions, or in the original language of verses 19-20, the participles (-ing words) that further explain the main verb.
The first instruction given is translated “go,” meaning we must be on the move for the purpose of making disciples. This command has also been understood “as you are going” or “while going.” When we go, wherever we go, in both the going and the coming, whether common day-to-day paths or uncommon special trips or outings, we make disciples. Making disciples is a lifestyle involving conversations and relationships, not just curriculum and classrooms. Making disciples of Jesus is our everyday mission.

The second instruction given is “baptizing.” As someone becomes a disciple (or learner) of Jesus, they make a public communication about their belief, commitment, and gratefulness by being baptized. It is a statement of our identity, of who we are in Christ and who we are becoming.

Jesus said to baptize in the name of the Father and Son and Spirit. This act lifts up the love and goodness of the Father. It exalts the Son who came to give us new life and a new name. At the cross, He killed off all the self-absorbed ways of living that grab after more than God’s goodness and love (like the hand that reached for the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden), and with an empty grave He gave us the name of “Forgiven, Resurrected One” rather than our former name, “Condemned, Dead One.” Baptism also declares that we live not according to sinful desires but are surrendered to the Spirit and belong to His people.

What is the significance of being identified with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

What is the relationship of baptism to belonging to God’s people?

“Baptizing” is followed by “teaching.” Let’s look at the who, what, and where of teaching.

Who are we teaching? Are we teaching those who are already disciples of Jesus? The command to make disciples implies that the person starts out as someone who is not a follower of Christ.

Too often we think of “discipleship” as a believer learning more about God. A more biblical understanding doesn’t discount this idea but expands it substantially. In order to make disciples, we must commit to ongoing relationships with those who do not yet follow Jesus. The process of disciple-making and discipleship doesn’t begin or end when someone becomes a Christian. It starts with evangelism and doesn’t end until we see Jesus face to face.

How can we encourage one another toward making disciples rather than just participating in “discipleship”??
What we are teaching? Sometimes Christians teach personal preferences rather than the actual words of Jesus. We emphasize moralistic behavior rather than reliance on the Messiah. We must instead show people Jesus—speaking truth with our lips and modeling truth in our lives.

Here are four aspects that should be part of our teaching others to obey Christ:

**Knowing and Communicating the Big Story of the Bible**

You cannot properly understand what Jesus taught or what the Scriptures command without a foundational understanding of the big story the Bible tells and His plan of redemption. As we “make disciples,” we help people see themselves within the bigger story God is writing. Then they grow in understanding what Jesus did for us, what He is doing in us, and what He will do in the world. (For an overview of the Bible’s grand story line, see the presentation “God’s Word to You” on the inside front cover of this guide.)

**Encouraging and Equipping Others to Read the Bible**

Reading the Bible is not simply a “spiritual discipline”; it is our spiritual nourishment. Jesus said that we must not live by bread alone but by God’s living Word (Matt. 4:4). We don’t typically force ourselves to eat. We eat because we need sustenance. The same is true with reading the Bible. We need constant nourishment to refresh and energize our starved way of thinking and our selfish way of living, and we must have ongoing nourishment from the gospel to keep remembering our need for grace.

Reading the Bible is necessary in order to better discern the leadership of the Spirit among the many voices daily calling for our attention. We need the Bible in order to bring the message into the flow of our thinking and talking and, of course, our actions. As Eugene Peterson said, “To follow Jesus is as much, or maybe even more, about feet as it is about ears and eyes.”

**Helping Others Encounter Christ**

The Gospels, from different perspectives, proclaim to us the story of Jesus, and this story is fundamental to our journey as disciples. The rest of the New Testament unpacks the significance of the events in the Gospels. We need to return to the Scriptures to encounter Christ again and again, fixing our eyes on the Savior in whose image we are being made.

**Challenging Others to Obedience**

There’s no point in reading the Bible if we are unwilling to do what it says. Part of disciple-making means we teach others to obey. This implies that we are to be obedient as we call others to obedience.

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**Voices from the Church**

“Jesus’ final Great Commission makes sure that we do not become ingrown, complacent, or callous. We must look outward and bring the good news of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven to people of all nations.”

–Michael Wilkins
Jesus summed up the law with two commandments: love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:34-40). He demonstrated His compassion for the poor and the sick—the kind of people who get overlooked in society. He challenged His disciples to love others the way He loved them—not based on how lovable, likable, or valuable they were but based on His great and sacrificial love for them. We are to hold each other accountable as we live on mission for Christ’s kingdom, passionate about taking the transformative gospel across the street and around the world.

Which of these four aspects of teaching comes easiest for you? Which of these aspects is most challenging? Why?

*Where do we teach?* Classrooms and auditoriums are certainly one place where teaching takes place. But this can’t be the only place. If we are to make disciples the way Jesus did, we have to be around and among others. We are to make disciples everywhere we go.

I have some friends who speak of disciple-making in terms of “gospel pathways.” Gospel pathways are those places you frequent. Intentionally. Kind of like my dog marked a pathway in the grass in the backyard wherever he ran the most. Wherever you go most and the people you see most, these are the places where and people with whom God would have you share the good news.

God wants us to be letters of His love to the people we encounter along our path. As we go with our family. As we go in our neighborhood. As we go to work and to school. As we go to recreate. As we go to gather with God’s people. As we go to shop and eat and converse. Making disciples as we go is the where of our teaching.

Baptizing is an initiation into faith while teaching offers the instructions that direct our faith. Baptizing is a beginning of new life while teaching is a learning of new ways. Baptizing is a profession of what Jesus did while teaching is a confession of what Jesus wants us to do. Baptizing is a depiction of resurrection while teaching is a realizing of resurrection.

Let’s not forget three other words in verse 19 that expand the where of our disciple-making activity. Those three words offer the scope of the commission—“of all nations.” The commission has a worldwide scope. We are to be a people who go make disciples of the nations that reside in our own towns as well as the nations that have not heard the good news on the other side of the world.

*Where are some places you go often that you could be more intentional about making disciples? In what ways are you or could you be involved in disciple-making in other countries?*
3. Depend on the presence of Jesus (Matt 28:20b).

As we submit to the authority of Jesus and obey His Great Commission, we are reminded of His breathtaking promise of presence:

_20b And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age._

It sounds like a simple question, but what would be different if God actually walked present with you everyday and everywhere? Doesn’t He?

Jesus promised His presence as we are going to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. This has been the message of God’s love and goodness from the beginning—He is with us. And this is the security and power of our mission—His presence.

We need King Jesus’ presence. We need to be reminded of it whenever we worry about our ability to obey the Great Commission. Joshua wondered about his part in the great mission of God, and the Lord promised Joshua His presence in the midst of Joshua’s worry and fear (Josh. 1:1-9). We need to remember His presence when we are afraid. Whether we are afraid of failure, rejection, or for our own safety, we can rest assured in the One who is with us.

We need King Jesus’ presence to know where to go and what to say and to whom to say it. He promised the Spirit to help us with the right words to lift up His name (John 14–16). We need the power of His presence to be seen in our efforts rather than the perfection of our efforts. Paul spoke of the early Christians as “jars of clay” that display the all-surpassing power and glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:7). We need His presence to encourage us on mission as we spread the news of His kingdom.

In what ways has the presence of Christ been apparent to you as you have followed Him?

**Conclusion**

The Great Commission (make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching) is surrounded by power and presence. The power and authority of Jesus is the basis for His command to make disciples (Matt. 28:18). The presence of Jesus is the promise and power for our fulfillment of His command (v. 20). As we go, we make disciples, confident and blessed by the King who has saved us.

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**Further Commentary**

“The final promise is introduced by Matthew’s characteristic ‘and look’... NIV translates with ‘and surely,’ which conveys some of the reassurance the term implies here. The Gospel ends with Jesus’ breathtaking promise that He is with his followers all the days to the end of the age. He does not say ‘I will be with you,’ but ‘I am with you,’ and his / is emphatic, ‘no less than I’...The Jesus of whom Matthew writes is no small Palestinian figure, but a mighty Person who is with his followers wherever they may be. And this, he says, will last through time. He is not speaking of a temporary residence with first-century disciples, but of a presence among his followers to the very end of time. This Gospel opened with the assurance that in the coming of Jesus God was with his people (1:23), and it closes with the promise that the very presence of Jesus Christ will never be lacking to his faithful follower.” 11

–Leon Morris

**Voices from Church History**

“[Jesus] reminds them also of the consummation, that He may draw them on more, and that they may look not at the present dangers only, but also at the good things to come that are without end.”12

–John Chrysostom (circa 347-407)
For helps on how to get started using The Gospel Project, ideas on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading a specific session, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

Study Material
- “Outward”—Chapter 9 from Transformational Discipleship by Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation
- Disciplism—Free eBook by Alan Hirsch; find a link to this free eBook (and more) at gospelproject.com/additionalresources
- Previous Biblical Illustrator articles, including “A God for All Nations,” can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon Podcast
David Platt: “Two Simple Words: Make Disciples”

Find a link to this at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Tip of the Week
Great Commission Praying in Your Small Group

When it comes to prayer, every small group operates at one of three levels: class, community, or commission. At the class level, prayer requests tend to be general and safe. At the community level, prayer requests become more personal—and a little less safe. A group sticks its toes in the commission level when it begins to pray about missions in general. It goes deep when it starts praying for people who are far from God right in the offices, schools, stores, teams, recreational centers, and neighborhoods where group members do life every day.
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