

Have you heard about the Winchester Mystery House? It is the strangest mansion in America. It has staircases that lead nowhere and doors that open to nothing, woodwork upon intricate woodwork, windows all over the place, never ending hallways, addition upon addition upon addition. William Winchester married Sarah and inherited a fortune from his parent's company Winchester Repeating Arms, but William died and Sarah inherited what today would be around \$520M. She saw a psychic who told her to move West, and build a house for the spirits of all those killed by Winchester rifles. The only catch was that she would only live as long as she kept building. In 1886, she moved to San Jose, CA. Legend has it that the work never stopped for the next 38 years. **PIC**. It ended up with 161 rooms, and 24K sf. She just built and built. There was no purpose, no big picture of where the thing was going. No master plan. Sadly, many churches are much like the Winchester Mansion. Just building, plans, events and programs, with no overriding goal, no clarity, no master plan. But the master has given us the plan. We call it the Great Commission from Matt 28:18-20.

In a 2018 Barna study, they found that 51% of churchgoers said they had "never heard of the Great Commission," and 25% could recall hearing the words but not the meaning. Only 17% knew what the GC was. 83% of church attendees don't know the primary purpose for the existence of the church!¹ / Let me read it again: **28:18-20**. These are the church's marching orders. This is the conclusion to the Gospel, and is in many ways the key to the whole Gospel of Matthew. This is like Jesus' commencement address. It is fitting that we have commencement addresses at graduations. This is not the end for the graduate, but just the beginning. Jesus's last words are our first work.²

Main point: Because Jesus is the all-authoritative King, submit to him and help others submit to him. Jesus brings the Kingdom. He is the son of Abraham, the Son of David (1:1), but how will the kingdom spread? Through us. The *Great Commission*. Co-mission. Jesus spreads his rule through us. We pray in the Lord's prayer, your Kingdom come, your will be done – on earth as in heaven (Matt 6:10) and the Great Commission is how God answers that prayer.

This commission is for all Christians. I think the fact that Jesus uses the word "nations" makes Christians think that the Great Commission is only for people in other countries, but remember "nations" just means non-Jewish peoples, Gentiles, in other words people of every kind. All people. This is a command for all Christians. The Great Commission is not a calling for some, but a command for all. For ordinary Christians, not the super Christians. D.L. Moody said, "If this world is going to be reached, I am convinced it must be done by men and women of average talent."³ Listen to NT Scholar Michael Green talking about the early church in Acts: "The gospel spread most of all by the enthusiastic witness of the nameless people who loved Jesus and could not keep quiet about him. It was a people movement, this early Christianity. That is why it succeeded. It did not depend on big names, but on little people who had a big God and were not afraid to put him to the test as they went out in his name. And if that is not a challenge and a rebuke to the modern church, I do not know what is."

So what does it entail for us? / The main verb of the Great Commission is "make disciples." We need to do some grammar real quick. I have a **diagram** for you. The main verb is "make disciples." But he tells us how to make disciples with three participles: going, baptizing, and teaching. We talked going last week, and will talk more about baptizing and teaching in the weeks to come. Today, though, let's focus on the main thing Jesus commands: make disciples.

¹ <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>. Accessed 7.24.23.

² Gallaty,

³ D.L. Moody, *To the Work! To the Work!* quoted in Gallaty, *Replicate*, 109.

Let's ask, what is a disciple and then what does it mean to make disciples. First, **What is a disciple of Jesus?** Simply put, it means follower. A disciple is a follower, a learner, a student, an apprentice, a practitioner.⁴ A disciple follows and obeys Jesus' teaching. The noun disciple is used 269 times in the New Testament whereas the noun Christian only occurs 3 times. We need to redeem this language. Let's stop calling ourselves Christians and call ourselves followers of Christ. Jesus did not come, die, and rise to produce Christians, but followers, disciples, for whom the common Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" actually rings true.⁵ Do you remember what Jesus said when he called his first disciples? **4:19.**⁶ Notice the three elements of a disciple in this call: obedience: follow, relationship: me, transformation: I will make you, and mission: fishers of men. A disciple is "someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and is committed to the mission of Jesus."⁷ So a disciple is most basically a follower.

What does it mean to make disciples? If a disciple is a follower of Jesus, then in short, making disciples is helping others follow Jesus.⁸ That's it. Help others follow Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we want to help move people from wherever they are, to where Jesus wants them. Where does Jesus want them? Submitting every area of their lives to his Lordship. Our personal time, our finances, our relationships, our parenting, our vocations, our thoughts, feelings, and actions. All of it. *All authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He desires to be Lord of all and if he is not Lord of all he is not Lord at all. So, as we make disciples, we ourselves are increasingly submitting all areas of our lives to him and helping others do the same.

Listen to the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases the Great Commission: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in the way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."⁹

He could have said go and preach. He didn't. He said make disciples. Contrary to the King James Version. Here is how King Jimmy translates verse 19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The verb is not teach, but make disciples. As we'll see, teaching is part of that, but discipleship is much more than information transfer. The focus is on right living more than right doctrine. We are to grow ourselves and help others grow in ever-increasing loyalty to the commands of Christ.

Jesus is the master who gives us the master plan. John 17:4: "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." Robert Coleman wrote a book called *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, which is really the master plan of discipleship and he looks at the life and ministry of Jesus and summarizes it with 8 steps: Selection, Association Consecration (req obedience) Demonstration Delegation Supervision Reproduction Impartation (Jesus gave himself away). So following his plan, we should select teachable people, remain in close association and relationship with them, consecrate them for mission, impart His teachings and way of life to them, demonstrate how to daily live out of a Kingdom paradigm, delegate to them to begin sharing the gospel, supervise them as they continue to grow, show them how to produce multiplying disciples themselves.¹⁰ Intentional Relational Formation.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), xi.

⁵ Lee Camp, *Mere Discipleship*, 16.

⁶ See 4:20. A disciple is one who obeyed the call of Jesus to follow him and give up everything to do so (Mark 1:17, 3:13-15). A disciple is being with Jesus, telling his message, and doing his works.

⁷ Bobby Harrington and Greg Wiens, *Becoming a Disciple Maker* (2017), 13.

⁸ Mark Dever, *Discipling* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 13. Dever expands by saying "discipling is deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ." He also says "discipling really is just a bunch of church members taking responsibility to prepare one another for glory" 43. Bruner writes, To make students of, to bring to school, to educate, to mentor, to apprentice." 815.

⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 1474.

¹⁰ Jon Tyson and Suzy Silk, *Kingdom Values* (New York: Church of the City, 2019), 134.

Friends, the church in America has neglected this fundamental charge. Making disciples is the Great Omission. I think one of *the main* problems in the American church is that we have over-focused on getting decisions over making disciples. We have prioritized producing converts rather than fully-formed disciples. We have painted the Christian life as praying a prayer and getting fire insurance, a mechanical transaction that has little to do with everyday life. The New Testament could have been a lot shorter if it was all about praying a prayer and then waiting to die. The Bible nowhere mentions altar calls, or praying the sinner's prayer. You won't find it in there. The Bible focuses, not on one-time decisions, but following for all of life.

This has been a problem for Baptists in particular. On paper, on membership rolls, there are 13.2M Southern Baptists, but average weekly attendance is only 3.8M. Where are the 9,418,632 people?¹¹ Almost 10 million people have prayed a prayer or walked an aisle, but are not following Jesus.

Back in 2016, the SBC commissioned a task force to see how we are doing with evangelism and specifically discipleship. They studied the previous 20 years and found that SBC churches baptized 7.1M. One would think that church attendance would increase by around that same amount, right? You do what Jesus said, you baptize them into the local church, you disciple and teach. In reality, over those 20 years, lost 24K in church attendance. You heard me right. They baptized 7 million but somehow lost actual followers. Nashville, we have a problem, and it is not just a problem in the SBC. We have focused on one-time decisions rather than life-long followers. Baptism is not the finish line, but only the starting line.¹²

We push push push for decisions. Decisionalism. We emotionally manipulate. Cheap grace. The German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."¹³

We try to make it as easy as possible. Every head bowed and every eye closed. We wouldn't want anyone knowing that you are desiring to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord. You ever notice how Jesus approaches would be followers? How does he invite people to Himself? **Luke 9:23-26, 14:25-33**. Jesus doesn't make it easy at all. He says, you better be sure. He doesn't want half-hearted, one-time, emotionally-driven decisions. He wants disciples who will lay their whole lives down for his sake. Jesus doesn't want people who merely believe the right things about him. He wants people to *follow* him. Bring them in *and* build them up.

What, then, does this command to make disciples mean for you? We want to forge a better path. The path of Jesus, which is the path to a meaningful life. So the question is: Are you a disciple? . . . Is he really Lord? Luke 6:46: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" I am afraid we end up treating the Lord like we treat Siri when we think we know a better way. Re routing. Now, we need to be the ones doing the re-routing. Francis Chan gives the example of telling his kids to go clean their room . . . studied, memorized, diagrammed, looked at the Greek. But did you clean the room? Some of us are educated beyond our obedience.

Elizabeth Elliot said "The will of God is not something you add to your life. It's a course you choose. You either line yourself up with the Son of God . . . or you capitulate to the principle which governs the rest of the world."¹⁴ / This command is a self-replicating command. Disciples are those who make disciples.

¹¹ <https://www.baptistpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023-Book-of-Reports-Final-Online.pdf>

¹² Robby Gallaty, *Replicate*, (Chicago: Moody, 2020), 23-25.

¹³ *The Cost of Discipleship*, 43-44.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick, *The Disciple Maker's Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 12.

Here at SS, the main – not only – but main way this happens is through what we call D-Groups. I am probably more encouraged by our D-Groups than anything else in this church, and there is a lot to be encouraged by. You are a healthy congregation. A body that is serious about their walk with the Lord. You are doing awesome. Keep on.

If you are newer, D-Groups are 3-6 men or 3-6 women who meet weekly with the goal of spiritual growth. Jesus had 3 (Peter, James, and John), so it seems like 4 may be an ideal number. So, 3-6 women or 3-6 men who commit to grow spiritually together by meeting weekly for anywhere between 3-18 months for 60-90 minutes with the goal of multiplying when each person replicates the group by inviting others to take the same discipleship journey with them once they are finished. Disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

A D-Group consists of conversation, Content, memo, prayer (lost), accountability. Two goals: maturity and multiplication. The goal is to help one another follow Jesus, to build a culture of one on one discipleship in the church, to work towards meaningful church membership, to hold one another accountable, to encourage our hearts, and to build deep Christian friendships. Ultimately, the goal is to become more like Jesus for the glory of God and help others do the same. You can learn more on our new website: <https://www.ssbaptist.org/d-groups> One to One Bible Reading Tips.

What if you started a D-Group of 4 that multiplied? 3 becomes 9 becomes 27 becomes 81 becomes 243 becomes 729 becomes 2187. This is how the Kingdom expands. This is biblical success. Success – biblically defined – is not how many disciples are made, but how many disciples are making other disciples.¹⁵

These are marching orders. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples. CSL: “The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Hull, *Conversion*, quoted in Gallaty, *Replicate*, 285.

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 199.