

Introduce Family

Read the Passage and Pray

What is this passage often called?

The Great Commission

What does that mean?—It means that this is a charge that Jesus is giving to His followers. A mission that He is setting them out on that is to be a central calling to their lives and ultimately to the lives of all those who follow after him. It is almost like a general gathering all his command officers around to give them final instructions before they launch a major campaign. It is vital that everyone knows the purpose of the mission at hand. We too must understand this great commission of Jesus because, while we weren't there on that day, He commissions us with the same mission through His word recorded for us here in the Bible.

This morning I want to address some common omissions in the Great Commission. Some things that we often believe or neglect to understand related to Jesus' charge to all His followers. Common misconceptions that have lead many Christians to partially fulfill God's mission for their lives rather than the full robust mission that He has sent us on.

First, we need to establish the basic parameters of the mission:

What is the primary objective, what is the central command in this great commission?

Looking at the instructions in English we see 4 verbs here; go, make, baptize, and teach.

In most of our English translations the verb, “Go” appears first. If you’ve been in churches for any amount of time and if you’ve ever been to a global missions conference you have likely heard the call to “go” in the sense of going overseas to spread the good news of Jesus.

The great commission of Matthew 28 is often paired with Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8 “you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” When we hear “go” and “remotest part of the earth” we begin to think of global missions, and people who leave their homes go to people around the world and tell them about Jesus. Whether it is the intent of the speaker or not, we narrow our understanding of this passage to be a charge for some to take up the call of global missions and for the rest of us to support them in this mission by sending them. This is one error in thinking that leads to the omissions we will discuss later.

Now going as overseas missionaries, and sending overseas missionaries are important and they are part of the great commission. But we miss a great deal of what Jesus is commissioning us to if we limit our understanding of the great commission as a call to global evangelization.

So the first error comes when we think the Great Commission is limited to global missions.

The second error that leads to omissions in our completion of the great commission comes by focusing too narrowly on another one of these verbs, “baptizing.” Now most Christians will never actually baptize someone else into the faith. Most churches, not all, but most hold that the practice of baptizing is limited to those who are called and ordained as leaders in the church. But what the word baptism represents here in this great commission is something that all Christians are called to.

Baptism is an act that symbolizes initiation into the people of God. It points to the beginning of someone's faith.

Thus many Christians see the Great Commission as a command to get people into the faith. A narrow focus on the initiation brings an emphasis on the conversion experience and makes it seem like Jesus is telling us to go rescue people from hell so they can get into heaven. Practically fleshed out this leads to an emphasis on a single conversation, or moment in a person's life where they pray a prayer, or make a commitment to follow Jesus.

Obviously that moment in a person's life is significant and I don't want to diminish or downplay the important work of being willing and able to speak to unbelievers and tell them the good news that Jesus died for their sins, but that is not the completion of the great commandment.

A misunderstanding in grammar is one of the big reasons for these errors and for the subsequent omissions that occur in our completion of the great commission. That ought to encourage all the school teachers and home educators out there and frighten those of us who didn't really pay that great of attention to our English lessons.

You see part of the problem is that what appear as 4 verbs in the English language are actually 1 imperative verb and 3 participles. Don't worry, if you don't remember the difference between a participle and a verb you are not alone. What it means is that in the original Jesus gives one command and then tells us three key components to fulfilling that command. The Great Commission could be reworded—"Make disciples, by going, baptizing, and teaching."

This grammatical misunderstanding leads to the first and biggest omission in the Great Commission

I. Omission One: We Leave Out the Main Point—Make Disciples

If the primary command given by Jesus is not going, a la global missions. Nor is it baptizing a.k.a. converting people to Christianity, and those two things have been the primary emphasis of the church then we have missed the main point of the Great Commission.

If we have been doing these things then we have been doing important work, work that helps us achieve the mission that we have been sent on but it is not actually the mission. If we send people around the world and tell them about Jesus and stop there, we are going to claim mission accomplished far too early.

The command, the central purpose of the Great Commission is not to make converts but to make disciples.

We make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching, but what is it that we are actually trying to make? Before we launch out on the mission we must understand what is the objective we are trying to achieve.

First we must define what a disciple is. Put simply a disciple is a learner, but not just any kind of learner. If you have ever tried to teach someone whether you are a teacher, a supervisor, a parent, you know there are different types of learners and I'm not talking visual vs. auditory vs. kinetic or anything like that. I'm talking about the depth of learning that is taking place in a person as they are present with a teacher.

Level 1: I am physically present when someone else is teaching

Students who are physically there but mentally checked out
Parents you have seen this with your children when you are giving instruction or discipline—why all the adults in Peanuts sound like a horn, kids are physically there but whatever is going on mentally is not translating or absorbing what is being said

Level 2: I understand what someone else is teaching

Level 3: I understand and agree with the teaching

Level 4: I want to live in accordance with that person's teaching

Level 5: I want to be like my teacher

Level 6: I want to be like my teacher and help others become like my teacher

Level 6 is a true disciple

Luke 6:40 “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.”

That word translated “pupil” in the New American Standard is the same word translated as disciple in Matthew 28. We are not called to make people who know about Jesus, or agree with Jesus' teaching, but people who are becoming like Him.

So if the point of the great commission is to make people who are becoming like Jesus, how do we accomplish this?

As far as baptizing is concerned, conversion is an important part of the discipleship process. You can't get full grown, mature adults without first making babies. People need to be reborn so they can grow to be like Jesus so be sure you are equipped to tell people how to have faith in Jesus. That is a call for every Christian not just preachers and evangelists.

Every one of us is called to be ready and able to tell someone how to become a follower of Jesus.

When it comes to going, if God calls you to overseas mission work follow His call. But remember, that is not the totality of Jesus words here. If you remember the Scripture reading this morning from Acts 1, Jesus told His followers they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remotest parts of the world. Where were they standing? Just outside Jerusalem. The going part means wherever there are people be there! Be around unbelievers so the light of God's love can shine through you and draw them to His love. That may be in your home, at your workplace, your school, your neighborhood, your social media feed. Wherever and however you interact with people be a testimony for God.

But that leaves us teaching which leads me to the second common omission in the Great Commission

II. Omission Two: We Aren't Teaching Correctly

If a church thinks that the great commission is fulfilled once someone has professed faith in Jesus then they will not continue on to the completion of the mission. They will ignore the third participle Jesus gives in fulfilling the actual command to make disciples. They will stop short of the ultimate goal. But if we are going to make learners we must be teachers.

But there are a number of ways we fail to teach. In some cases, although they are rather rare, we fail to teach converts at all.

A. Failure to teach at all

This more than likely might happen in settings where there is minimal relationship with a person with whom we share the gospel. Street

evangelism, crusades, short-term missions, door-to-door witnessing, sharing the gospel on the bus, plain, or train.

Now these are good things to do but we need to be mindful that even if the person professes faith their journey is not over, it is just beginning. In these instances, we should be sure to encourage them to find a bible teaching local church where their newborn faith can be nourished and flourish.

But if someone comes to faith in a church, more often than not they are going to receive some type of training in the fundamentals of the faith. But many of these classes fail in a different way

B. Teach to inform not transform

Many churches have a discipleship class. I don't want to discourage the existence of such a class, they are good. But we need to make sure that people don't get the impression that once they've completed the class discipleship is over, or that discipleship is something that takes place primarily in a class. Either of those two ideas fall short of what true discipleship is.

Many discipleship classes help someone understand what the basic doctrines of the faith. We sometimes call these classes fundamentals of the faith or something of that nature. We need these classes. People need to understand what it is that they have signed on for when they commit to follow Jesus. But again, filling someone's mind with doctrine is not what Jesus has called us to. Knowledge of God's commands and teachings is essential but it is not the end goal.

A discipleship class, like a fundamentals of the faith is like basic training. It is just the beginning of your time in service that orients you to the basic structures, ideas, and practices of the group you have just become a part of. But it is not the entirety of your experience and training. You can and should continue to grow, learn, mature.

You become more and more of what you signed up to be, a soldier, sailor, airman, marine, coastguardsman, or guardian. Most people who graduate from basic have no stripes on their sleeve. In the Air Force, when you graduate from basic training you are an Airman Basic. There is no such thing as a career airman basic. As you spend time in the service you get further training, both classroom and on the job. As your knowledge, skills, and abilities grow so does your rank and paygrade. If you never earned a stripe it would indicate that something was wrong. Something would be wrong with the branch of service for not propelling you forward, or something would be wrong with you. Potentially it may indicate that you didn't belong there in the first place.

The author of Hebrews condemns his readers for their lack of growth in the faith in Hebrews 5:11-14

Hebrews 5:11–14 — **11** Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. **13** For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. **14** But solid food is for the mature, ***who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.***

The whole purpose of our lives is to glorify God by becoming more and more like Jesus. The more your life imitates Jesus the more people see God shining through you and are drawn to Him. This is the call of

discipleship, not simply to learn a lot about Jesus, not simply to teach a lot of information to others about Him, but to become like Him and to exemplify Him and to help others do the same.

Another problem in our teaching is

C. We teach what not how

Look at verse 20 again “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”

Note that Jesus does not say, “teach them all I have commanded you” but “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Now we often think observe means to watch, like the other night I observed the Dodgers beating the Colorado Rockies. Or we observe a sunset on the ocean. But observe here means to keep, to do, to obey. Jesus doesn’t want Christians simply to know what His instructions for life are but how they can actually walk in the manner worthy of the calling He has given us.

It is very rare for someone to be struggling with some type of sin simply because they don’t know it is wrong. I can think of only one story where that has been the case and it isn’t even my story. My uncle was once doing discipleship with a group of Jr. High boys and when they came to the prayer time there was one young man, not a Christian at the time, who asked that the group would pray that God would help him score with his girlfriend that weekend.

My uncle was able to take him aside and share with him that his request was actually a wrong one because God would not want him to do that because it violates God's law.

Aside from that one story, and occasionally with new believers, I can't really think of other times where someone's problem was that they didn't know they were doing something wrong.

Typically, we are struggling with something because we do know it is wrong. Simply telling me that God forbids it is not going to put me on the right track.

Think about your own life and the sins in your life which so easily entangle you. Is the problem that you don't know they are sins? Would it help you to overcome them if someone simply kept telling you it was wrong? If you struggle lying, are you going to stop simply because someone reminds you that God says not to do it? No. Now you do need people reminding you of that truth because sin is insidious and deceptive and will tempt you to self justify, or excuse your sin. You may need someone to point out that fudging the numbers on your taxes even a little is still lying and a violation of God's law.

But more than simply knowing that it is wrong to lie, you need people in your life that will help you learn **how** to put off lying.

Some discipleship classes go beyond basic doctrine and teach many of the practices that build faith. Things we sometimes call spiritual disciplines, or habits of holiness, things like bible study, prayer, church attendance, meditation, and memorization of Scripture, etc. This is a good start. These practices are the basics of spiritual health. They are like the eating, drinking, and breathing of the Christian life. Without them, you cannot grow spiritually. But learning what these practices are is still just the beginning.

Discipleship involves getting into the life of another person. There has to be genuine relationship where people are fully knowing and being fully known. Without that someone can't help another understand that someone is lying, how they lie, what is going on behind the lie that is compelling them to speak falsehood, and then how can they overcome that temptation to lie.

Introducing someone to the Christian faith, teaching them the commandments that God has given us, teaching them the doctrines of what Christians believe, and equipping them with the spiritual disciplines are all vital steps in the discipleship process but as I have pointed out they are not the complete fulfillment of Jesus' command to make disciples. So how do we fill in these gaps? What do we need to know and do to fill out our understanding of discipleship? How can we be better equipped to make disciples? I'm glad you asked.

III. Overcoming the Omissions— 7 Principles to Foster True Discipleship

For this final point I'm going to use a case study of a young woman named Lexi to help illustrate the different aspects of discipleship that will fill in our gaps of understanding and practice related to it. This is not the account of a real person but a very real struggle that many people face and how the church can help.

Lexi is a 17 year old girl in your youth group who just finished her Jr. Year of high school. She is looking ahead to college but is stalling in her decision of which school to choose. She has been accepted to a few great schools but doesn't seem to be able to settle on one. She asks her small

group for prayer to help her decide and then asks you if you have time to talk because she'd like your thoughts about her decision.

When you get together over coffee you learn that Lexi's difficulty in the decision is not about the differences in curriculum, or location of schools but she is paralyzed by fear. As you dig into what she is afraid of you find that she has wrestled with anxiety for a few years. She had always been a cautious child but then in Jr. High she really began to struggle.

The pandemic, the lockdown, and school being put online exacerbated her fears. She often fears leaving her house, is worried every time she makes a decision that it is the wrong one, and the idea of messing up her entire future by picking the wrong colleges is overwhelming her.

What is your part to play in Lexi's life? How will you help her be transformed into the likeness of Christ?

Some principles to help guide your discipleship of Lexi

1. Every Christian is a disciple and disciple-maker

Jesus Command in Matthew 28 is to all of us, you included. You don't get a pass on this one. You are called by God to help this young woman in her journey to be more like Christ.

When Paul instructs Timothy to disciple others in the Church he says this in 2 Timothy 2:2

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

We see here at least 4 generations of discipleship relationships, Paul disciples Timothy, Timothy, disciples faithful men, who in turn disciple others also.

In your relationship with Lexi, you want to help her transform to be like Jesus and encourage her to be doing the same toward others as well. I cannot tell you how many times I have had people who come for counseling share how they passed along counsel they had received to others. It not only helps the person they talk to but it also reinforces that truth for them and helps them walk in it as well.

Even when you are discipling Lexi, or others it is good to remember that you are still being discipled yourself. You are still in process too. You are still growing and being transformed into the image of Christ. So you won't have all the answers. But you will have some, and hopefully you have others who are pouring into your life so that you are growing in your knowledge and ability to help Lexi and others like her.

2. Disciples are not perfect

Look back at verse 17 again "some were doubtful." Now most people agree that Doubting Thomas is one of the disciples in mind here but he was not the only one. It says "some" that is more than one. And this is out of the 11 remaining after Judas. So some of the men who have been with Jesus in close relationship with Jesus for all or most of His earthly ministry still had doubts.

You and Lexi have not finished the race. You are still works in progress. But God has still called you to help her. Discipleship is not for those who have arrived, those who have reached some level of spiritual maturity.

You shouldn't put off sharing God's wisdom because you aren't perfect. If you did that you'd never pour into the life of another.

One of the things I love about the Mighty Oaks Warrior Programs is their encouragement to the alumni that they need to start investing into the lives of others. They tell them, you don't need a degree in counseling to help your fellow warriors. You just need to help them see how you got from where they are to where you are. Even if it is only three steps forward show them how you made those three steps.

Maybe you struggle with anxiety too. Maybe that is why Lexi wanted to talk to you. The fact that you still struggle doesn't mean you have nothing to share so pour into her life, and be sure others are pouring into your life as well and helping you grow too.

One thing I would encourage you to do, if you haven't already, is to take the courses offered by the Cornerstone Biblical Counseling Training Center. Even if you don't want to become a certified counselor, those classes will equip you to help people like Lexi deal with the difficulties of this life with God's Word.

3. Discipleship addresses all of life

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

As I mentioned before, many discipleship classes, or programs focus on the intellectual life. The concept of teaching/learning in many cultures focuses on the thought life and is patterned after classroom learning. But the teaching Jesus mentions is more like an apprenticeship with on-the-job training than a lecture consumed by students.

It is also not something that is contained to formal meetings where a book is being discussed or some agenda is at hand. Discipleship takes place all around us all the time. It is the work of living life faithfully before God and man that points others to Jesus.

You want to help Lexi understand that knowing and assenting to what the Bible teaches are essential but not sufficient for transforming her life to be like Jesus. Having the right thoughts does not always lead to the right life.

Her thoughts, feelings, desires, actions, ambitions. Her words, her job, the food she eats, the cloths she wears, the relationships she has, all of life needs to come into conformity with God's will for her life.

It could be tempting to for you and for her to both simply focus on the anxiety component of her life, and maybe even narrowly on the decision about college which has heightened the anxiety at this time but you want to help her see how her whole life is involved in her walk with God.

Many of the things that might seem unrelated to the anxiety could be playing a role. If she is not sleeping well, not getting the right nutrition her struggle with anxiety will likely worsen. If she is involved with relationships that are pulling her away from God rather than toward Him, that is connected as well. If her finances are not in order, her work ethic out of whack, her desires out of alignment with God's will, all of this will contribute to the anxiety but also many other problems as well. We can't go into every aspect of life here but it is important for you to help Lexi see that God is concerned with and has desires for every aspect of her life.

4. Discipleship lasts a lifetime

Since discipleship is about transformation not merely information, it is not something that can be accomplished in a class, or in a season of life. I have often fallen into this mindset. I'll ask students if they have ever been disciplined by anyone. In my thinking and in that question I communicate the common misunderstanding that discipleship is something we do with new converts to set them on the road of Christian living.

But true discipleship only ends when we come face-to-face with Jesus and the transformation process ends.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

As you disciple Lexi she may grow significantly in the area of her anxiety. But there are many other areas of her life that need transformation as well and there are likely to be seasons ahead of her that will test and try her and reignite her anxiety. It is good for you and for her to realize that the presence of ongoing struggle is not necessarily an indication of unfaithfulness but opportunities to continue to grow and be transformed more into the image of Jesus. It is fool hearty and discouraging to set the expectation that we can reach a level of maturity or perfection in this life where we can put life on cruise control and coast.

We are in a race, one that requires endurance, and one that lasts a lifetime.

5. Discipleship is hard

The race that I alluded to is described in Hebrews chapter 12

Hebrews 12:1–3 — 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, ***so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.***

Jesus knows the life He has called you to is a hard one. He knows that living this life can wear you down and tempt you to despair. That is why He wants you to keep your eyes on Him and follow after Him. He knows suffering and hardship more than any of us and He wants us to walk as He walked, to live as He lived. To not give up in despair, but to persevere to the end.

Lexi needs to know that Jesus didn't promise life would be easy. He didn't promise to give us everything we want in life, to take away all our pain and suffering. If she has this mindset, and her struggle with anxiety prolongs, she will be tempted to throw in the towel and say something akin to, this Christianity stuff doesn't work. Or God either doesn't exist, or He doesn't love me. So take Lexi to the many passages in Scripture that don't promise ease and comfort but actually assure us that we will face pain, suffering, persecution, and death.

While Jesus did not promise us all our dreams would come true He did promise us something even better, He promises us His presence. Look again at verse 20 "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

6. Discipleship is a team effort

One of the first things to remember is that you are not alone. You are not the only one who will be involved in Lexi's life helping her to become like Jesus.

Ephesians 4:11–16 — **11** And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. **14** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **15** *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,* **16** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, *according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Lexi's parents, as believers, are the first disciplers in her life. They have been teaching and modeling the Christian life and faith to her whole life and they should continue to do so.

She has friends, her small group at youth group who can listen to her, pray with her, encourage her, remind her of the many good things in life God is doing in and through her, and sometimes just be with her.

She has a group of pastors who preach and teach God's Word, week in and week out on Sunday's and Wednesdays. God will use them as instruments to communicate His word in ways that will sharpen her and keep her eyes set on Jesus.

The music team will lead the church in singing that will help her connect her suffering to God's heart in lament, or help her soul be lifted on high in praise to Him.

She will have countless people in the church who welcome her, let her know they are glad to see her, give her a hug, pray with her.

She will hear the testimony of others who struggle in ways similar to her own struggle and be encouraged that she is not alone.

She may meet with someone in the church who is trained and gifted as a biblical counselor who can help her dive deep into her struggle and find growth through God's Word.

God uses many members of the body to care for each member of the body. Help Lexi to see all the ways God is loving her and growing her through the body. And be encouraged the growth of any other individual, and yourself, is not all on your shoulders.

7. Discipleship is Holy Spirit empowered

Not only does God provide us with many friends and family in the body of Christ to help us grow to be like Him, He gives us Himself. We just saw how Jesus promises to be with us always. How does He do this? He does this by sending the Holy Spirit to live in those who have faith in Jesus.

Look at verse 18 and 19 again. Jesus basis His instruction to make disciples in the fact that He has been given all authority in heaven and on

earth. The power and authority that was given to Jesus is the power by which we go forward making disciples.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

When you meet with Lexi pray, pray before, during and after your time with her. Help her understand that her transformation is not ultimately depended upon you, or her, or any other person in the church but upon God's Spirit. She needs to lean into Him and trust His work in her to develop and grow her. He conquered sin and death for all who believe in Jesus, He can help her overcome.

What About You?

Two questions you must answer:

Are you a disciple?

Maybe you have never heard of Jesus before this morning, maybe you have and you understand what you hear but you aren't really convinced? If that is you I encourage you to talk to one of the pastors after the service, or maybe the person who brought you and ask them how you can become a true disciple.

Maybe you are a disciple but you have focused on knowing about Jesus rather than becoming like Him. I encourage you to reach out to some friends in the church and ask them to help disciple you, to encourage and push you toward Christ likeness rather than just Christ awareness.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, then the next question to ask is, are you making disciples of Jesus?

Curtis Solomon
Cornerstone Community Church
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Are you introducing people to Jesus? Are you helping them grow in their knowledge of Him? Are you helping anyone become more like Him?

If so, praise God, keep doing so. If not pray and ask Him to put people in your life who you can invest in and help become more like Jesus. Ask others around you what gifting you have to utilize for this end.

Let's Pray