

On Mission Together
Matthew 28:18–20
North Center || Jan 21, 2024
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Story: James Knoop sleepwalking in the motel, waking up in the hallway, wondering what he was doing there.

About 20 years ago, I read a book by Ted Dekker called “**The Slumber of Christianity**”. Ted grew up in the jungles of Indonesia where his parents were missionaries to cannibals. Years later, he wrote this book where he describes the American church that (from his point of view) looked very much asleep. We are walking around and doing things in the world, but it’s as if we are sleepwalking. Well, eventually, by the grace of God, some churches wake up, but then the question on our mind is, “**What are we doing here?**”

In **Matthew 28**, Jesus answers that question. **READ MATTHEW 28:18–20.** PRAY.

There is only **ONE COMMAND** (*imperative*) in this passage: **make disciples** (μαθητεύσατε).

- What is a disciple? It’s somebody who **follows** *the ways* and *the life* of their teacher.
 - A **student** learns from a teacher how to think *about a particular topic* (e.g., math).
 - A **disciple** learns from a teacher how to think *about life*.
 - Being a **student** is often about *learning facts and copying a teacher’s method*.
 - Being a **disciple** is about *learning truths and following a teacher’s way of life*.

This passage is often called “**The Great Commission**”. The **GREAT COMMISSION** is **not** to help people know lots of Bible facts or copy a particular method of worship or Bible study. It is to help people become followers of Jesus. It’s **not** about knowing facts; it’s about knowing a person because you are following Him everywhere He goes. It’s **not** just about *thinking* like somebody else; it’s *becoming* like somebody else.

By the grace of God, I’ve had several men who have discipled me throughout my life. My **parents** discipled me as I was growing up in their home. Before I entered pastoral ministry, I spent three months being discipled by a pastor named **Frank Puffer**. During my early years of ministry, I was discipled by an evangelist named **John Sahlstrom**. During my years of seminary, I was discipled by a music leader named **Dan Holst**.

During my college years, I was discipled by the music leader of my church. His name was **David Bryan-Ehr**. I spent hours in his home, in his office, studying the Bible at coffee shops around the city, praying together, watching him lead our church music team, walking around different music stores as he talked to me about music... And there came a Sunday when he was going to be gone, and so he asked me to lead the music that Sunday. During rehearsal, the piano player asked me a question about one of the songs, and she didn’t like my decision. She rolled her eyes and said, “*Ugh, you’re just like him.*”

That’s what it means to be a disciple. It means that you follow someone until your life begins to look like theirs. You think the way they think. You respond the way they respond. You love the things they love and hate the things they hate. You do the things they do, and you go the places they go.

Last Sunday, we were looking at a story in **Acts 4** when two of Jesus’ disciples (Peter and John) were brought before the religious leaders & interrogated. After the religious leaders watched them & listened to them, they came to conclusion that these two men had spent time with Jesus. It was evident to the people around them that they had spent the last 3 years with Jesus. “*You’re just like him.*” That’s what it means to be a disciple.

And that’s the singular mission of the church. Jesus has called us to “**make disciples of all the nations.**”
Make followers of Jesus.

This is where Jesus earthly ministry began, and this is where ours' begins: with **a call to Follow Him**.

- Jesus comes to rough fishermen and says, “*Follow Me*” (**Matt 4:19**).
- He comes to the greedy tax collector and says, “*Follow Me*” (**Matt 9:9–13**).
- He looks into the eyes of the wealthy ruler & says, “Quit following your money. *Follow Me instead*” (**Matt 19:21–24**).

If you are not following Jesus, nothing you do in your entire life is going to matter when this life is over.

- You can be the most faithful husband, the most dedicated mom, the hardest working employee, the life of every party, the most successful businessman, the smartest student, the most beloved friend, the most inspiring speaker, the best neighbor, the most compassionate friend...but if you are not following Jesus, none of it will matter for your soul when you step into eternity.

This world is full of people who think they are good with God because they are a nice person or a religious person or a moral person or a spiritual person or a benevolent person or a compassionate person...and the reality is that none of those things matter for your soul if you are not **first** a follower of Jesus.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father *except through Me*.

~ **John 14:6**

Many will say to Me in that day,

**‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied... cast out demons... and done many wonders in Your name?’
And then I will declare to them, ‘*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*’**

~ **Matthew 7:22–23**

God’s call on your life is to surrender your life to Jesus and follow Him.

God’s call on the life of the church is to compel others to follow Jesus by the words that we say and by the way that we live. The only command given to the church here in the Great Commission is to “**make disciples**”. This is what the church is for? Which also means that this is a significant part of what our weekly Gathering is for.

The Sunday Gathering is...

- A training ground for making disciples.
- Where we teach one another what it means to be a disciple.
- Where we encourage one another to be making disciples.
- Where we remind one another that God is the greatest treasure in the universe so that we would live in such a way that those around us desire God more than anything else in their life.
- Where we remind ourselves that we are not alone as we seek to make disciples.

Something that I’ve come to see in the recent years is that the church is not primarily a defensive weapon against the attacks of Satan. It’s an offensive weapon. The church is not a bunker where we hide from the spiritual war raging around us. It’s an army on the frontlines breaking down the very gates of hell. Jesus said, “***I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it***” (**Matt 16:18**).

Using this metaphor, hell seeks to enslave as many people as it can for all of eternity, but it won’t prevail because the church will never stop taking ground until King Jesus returns. And how does the church take ground? By compelling people to trade the temporary pleasures of this earthly life for the joy of everlasting pleasures in following Jesus.

2,000 years ago, there were approximately **120 Christians** in the world. Today, there are approximately **2 billion**. If you think Christianity is dying, you are subscribing to the wrong newspaper! Christianity is taking ground across the planet like never before (*just as Jesus promised*), and this growth is happening as the body of Christ (the church) fulfills its purpose of making disciples.

If you are a follower of Jesus, what is your God-given mission? Your mission is to link arms with other Christians in the local church (**the command is plural**) and make more followers of Jesus. This is one of the reasons I love being part of the **SBC**, because it exists for the sole purpose of combining our resources for the sake of taking the gospel of Jesus into all the nations.

Every other word in this passage is there to support this one command.

- **Verse 18** gives the **sovereign authority** behind this command. **WHY** make disciples? Because this is the mission given to us by the sovereign King of the universe.
- **Verses 19–20** tell us **HOW** we are to go about making disciples by giving us 3 different participles:
 - Going (πορευθέντες) || go out... || start with your neighbor.
 - Baptizing (βαπτίζοντες) || go public... || don't keep it to yourself.
 - Teaching (διδάσκοντες) || go deep... || teach them the words/ways of Christ.
- And then **verse 20** ends with the reason for our confidence and boldness: *I am with you always, even to the very end...*

As you speak of Jesus to your classmates, He will be with you.

As you speak of Jesus to your coworkers, He will be with you.

As you speak of Jesus to your family, He will be with you.

As we seek to be used by God to bring the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth, He will be us.

This is our mission – whether we choose to accept it or not.

How do I get involved in the work of making followers?

- **JOIN.** Become an active member of a Bible-preaching local church and get involved in the different ways that your church is seeking to make followers. Jesus never calls people into this mission in isolation. Nobody in the NT was doing ministry apart from the fellowship of the local church. Missionary efforts were funded by the local church. Missionaries were sent out by the local church. Discipleship is not an individual thing or a family thing; it's a church thing.
- **PRAY.** Ask God to give you opportunities. Ask God to provide for whatever needs your church has in making disciples. Pray for the missionaries that are being supported by your church and by your denomination. Ask for wisdom and boldness in how you can participate in the discipleship efforts of the local church (going on a mission trip, financially supporting a missionary or mission organization through the local church, attending a Bible study, coming alongside somebody else in the church as a disciple).
- **TAKE A STEP.** Do something. Start somewhere. Following Jesus always begins by taking the first step. Take a step of faith with your church and see what God does. Don't worry about what you are going to do tomorrow. Don't worry about next year. What does it look like for you to take a step of faith with Jesus today – right now? Start there.