

THE MISSION

4

CHAIR
DISCIPLING



WHAT JESUS CALLS US TO DO

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LIKE JESUS

CHAPTER THREE



OUR MISSION AND MOTIVE

Once we grasp the significance of the full humanity of Jesus, we are now poised to begin to understand Jesus' commands in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. In fact, we can't truly understand or fulfill these commands until we fully understand Jesus' humanity.

As we shall discover in detail in just a moment, the Great Commandment is to love God and love people (Matt. 22:36–40). The Great Commission is to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20). These two statements alone encompass the greatest of all commitments modeled by our Savior. During His earthly ministry, Jesus loved God, loved people, and made disciples. And He calls us to do the same. To put it another way, the Great Commandment speaks to the motive of our disciple-making. We are motivated by love of God and love for people. The Great Commission speaks to our mission. We are sent to make disciples. Fortunately Jesus modeled for us exactly how to do this!

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Every four years the summer Olympics begins with an event that captures the imagination of the world: the lighting of the Olympic flame. At the end of an international marathon relay, one final runner enters the Olympic stadium. After traveling by foot, by bicycle, by boat, or by air, sometimes over thousands of miles, the torch finally enters the stadium in the hands of a final runner who, to the thrill of millions, ignites the enormous Olympic flame.

Wouldn't it be exciting to be one of the bearers of the flame? Picture it. Each stride throbs with a sense of mission. Your fingers carefully encircle this forged symbol of Olympic competition. All fatigue fades as adrenaline fills you for this once-in-a-lifetime moment. Your experience would be a family legend. Grandkids would show your picture to their friends and boast, "That's my grandpa (or grandma) there. He (or she) carried the torch to the Olympics!" Can you imagine holding that piece of tradition in your hands and knowing that, for a brief moment, you were the link in that historic chain?

As Christians, we carry a torch.

We carry a flame of so much greater value that there is no comparison. The pomp and circumstance of the Olympics pales against the eternal significance of the ministry with which Christ has entrusted us. Proud athletes carry the Olympic torch accompanied by global applause, while Christians through the ages have borne the torch of the gospel despite centuries of persecution and trial. The flame we carry is not a symbol. It is the light of God that is desperately needed by a dark and dying world.

There is no better way to rediscover passion for the life we've been given to live than to return to the point where Jesus first passed the torch to His disciples. Understanding what He said in that pivotal moment will enable us to clearly understand our mission in this life.

THE ORIGINAL HANDOFF

Matthew records the words we call the Great Commission at the very end of his gospel. They were probably among Jesus' very last words to His disciples. Last words tend to be very important words. I clearly remember my father's last words to me over twenty years ago. He carefully chose words he knew I needed to hear. Words he wanted me to remember and live by. Words he lived his life by. I believe Jesus did the same.

The fact that we call this passage the Great Commission may intimidate you. The word "great" may make you think that this commission is given to "great" Christians or "great" missionaries. That's not me! I can't do that!

But Jesus' last words to His disciples were nothing more than a few short words designed to summarize Christ's life. The disciples' job, Jesus was saying, was to do for the rest of their lives what He had done in His. It was an everyday commission, given to every believer for every moment of his or her life. Jesus is charging His disciples to make other disciples who will make even more disciples, just as Jesus did. The Great Commission is every Christian's task.

Let's take a closer look at these final verses of Matthew. It was a day of challenge, a day for handoff. From the very beginning Jesus had told His disciples of His desire to make them "fishers of men." He had involved them in ministry. He had taught them His priorities and allowed them to observe Him in action. But things were different now. He had been crucified and raised from the dead, and the time for His ascension was near.

Over the course of forty days between His resurrection and His ascension, Jesus appeared to His disciples approximately ten times. Sometimes He appeared to individual disciples, sometimes to a group of them. Only once does Jesus announce His appearance before it happens—and this is the time, this meeting in Galilee. Excitement was running high. The women disciples were spreading the news that the angel had given them: "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Matt. 28:10).

Who all was Jesus planning to meet that day? I am convinced this was the gathering of the 500 that is referenced in 1 Corinthians 15:6. Matthew writes, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go" (Matt. 28:16). This doesn't mean that only eleven disciples total were present with Jesus that day. It simply could mean that the eleven had to travel from Jerusalem to Galilee, but there were already disciples in Galilee. I believe there were at least another 489 present. This is significant because many argue that Jesus' (Great) Commission was only given to the Eleven, Jesus' closest companions. In reality, Jesus gave this charge to every Christ follower. The commission is "great" because it has to do with the gospel. Even so, it is an everyday commission for every believer for every moment of their everyday lives.

It is important to recognize, too, that Jesus did not commission His disciples to take on this task in their own strength. Before He commands His listeners to make disciples, He tells them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). After the commission, he assures them, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (28:20). Wrapped around this Great Commission is a promise of the active and manifest presence of the Lord. This is no small promise! Jesus invites us to share His life, His passion, His calling. And He promises that any person, any family, any church that commits itself to doing what Jesus did can expect and claim that active manifest Presence in their midst! Jesus loves to show up in a supernatural way when we seek to do what He did.

TWO COMMANDS AND THREE VERBS

The Great Commission contains two commands and three action words. The first command is simply to “make disciples.” This single activity was the driving focus of Jesus’ life. Jesus poured His life into a few disciples and taught them to make other disciples. Seventeen times we find Jesus with the masses, but forty-six times we see Him with His disciples. These few disciples, within two years after the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, went out and “filled Jerusalem” with Jesus’ teaching (Acts 5:28). Within four and a half years they had planted multiplying churches and equipped multiplying disciples (Acts 9:31). Within eighteen years it was said of them that they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 ESV). And in twenty-eight years it was said that “the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” (Col. 1:6). For four years Jesus lived out the values He championed in His Everyday Commission. He made disciples who could make disciples!

The commission continues with three verb forms that modify the first command. These three verbs—go, baptize, and teach to obey—give us the three priorities of disciple-making.¹ Although the Great Commission is usually translated, “Go and make disciples,” the verb for “go” is better translated “going” or “as you go.” In other words, the “going” Jesus is talking about is not a special event, such as a mission trip. Instead, we are to make disciples as we go to work, as we go to school, as we go out into our

neighborhood. As you go, walk as Jesus walked! This truly is an everyday command you are to live every day *as you go*—wherever you go.

“Baptizing” is a critical element of disciple-making. It indicates identifying publicly with the work and cause of Christ. When a person comes to faith in Christ, they must then be baptized to identify externally with a change that has taken place internally. Baptism is an important external expression of an internal identity as a Christian.

Teaching others to obey “everything I have commanded you” involves a lifetime of following and learning from Christ. Jesus gives more than 400 commands in the Gospels and more than half of them are disciple-making commands. Becoming a disciple of Jesus does not mean completing a curriculum or attending a church activity. It is a lifestyle of becoming more like Jesus. As we learn to live a lifestyle of obedience we bear fruit, *more* fruit, and then *much* fruit (John 15:1–8). God multiplies our lives and our effectiveness to the ends of the earth, so that we can make disciples of all nations.

We can do what Jesus did if we walk as Jesus walked. In fact, we can even do greater things than Jesus did. Jesus had only four years to make disciples. By God’s grace we can have forty years or more to make disciples. But we *must* do what He did and walk as He walked. The rest of this book is dedicated to explaining how Jesus did what He did. The place to begin is to recognize that we share the same mission that Jesus had: making disciples who can make disciples.

But before we move on, let’s give attention to one more little detail in Matthew 28:18–20. For years I taught that there was only one command in this everyday commission. But upon further study and the help of a studious businessman, I realized that there is a second command in this text that most people miss.

One reason we miss this second command is because of how it is often translated in English. It is the little Greek word *idou*, which is translated in many Bibles as “surely” or “lo,” as in, “Surely I am with you always.” In the Greek language, *idou* is a command (in the imperative mood in Greek). The New Living Translation captures this second and powerful command: “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age”

(Matt. 28:20 NLT). In essence Jesus is saying, As you make disciples you *must* keep focused on Me. As you commit to this type of lifestyle, don't you forget that I will be with you and I will show you how to do this! I will make you disciple-makers!

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

While the Great Commission deals with our mission, the Great Commandment speaks to our motives. The Great Commission establishes our priorities. The Great Commandment clarifies our passion.

Jesus summarized all the Law and the Prophets, all the teaching of the Old Testament with profound simplicity: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37–40). Love is the greatest Christian motive. To commit to making disciples without love makes all our efforts sound to God like a resounding gong or a clanging symbol (1 Cor. 13:1). Without love we are nothing and can gain nothing (1 Cor. 13:2–3).

Walking as Jesus walked means walking in love. This love includes a deep love for God emblazoned upon our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. This love also includes loving people. Loving people involves both tenderness and toughness, both graciousness and truthfulness at the same time. Moreover, loving God means loving people, and loving people means loving God. You cannot separate the two. God is love and love comes from God. Loving God results in loving people. First John 4:20–21 tells us plainly, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. . . . whoever loves God must also love his brother” (ESV).

It is natural to wonder which people we are supposed to love. In Luke 10, an expert in religious law questioned Jesus about how to live out this Great Commandment. He wanted to know who Jesus meant, exactly, when He commanded us to “love your neighbor.” “Who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked.

Jesus answered by sharing the parable of the Good Samaritan, which teaches that anyone who crosses your path and has needs is your neighbor.

Then Jesus changed the question. The key question according to Jesus is not “Who is my neighbor?” but “Who is a good neighbor?” In the parable, it was the Samaritan who reached out and helped. It was the Samaritan who saw the need and moved toward the needy person. It was the Samaritan who gave what he had to help the person in need. He approached and embraced the person in need, whereas the other characters in the story retreated. Love was the difference—a love that manifested itself in compassion and mercy.

The Great Commission and the Great Commandment must be held together in one thought. Because we love God, we love people. Because we love people, we make disciples. To try to make disciples without love gains nothing. And if we say we love people but never try to make disciples, then our love is a lie. As we love God, we will love people. As we love people the way God loves us, we will be engaged in making disciples. The two go together and make the journey simple, not complicated.

Our motive drives our mission. Our passion fuels our priorities. Our heart energizes our hands. Loving God and loving people is our motive. Making disciples who can make disciples is our mission. Throughout His ministry, Jesus modeled what it means to love God and love people, and through His priorities He made disciples who made disciples. Then, in His final words to His disciples—including you and me—He summarized His mission and handed it off to us to complete.

In the next few chapters, we will look at the specific methods by which Jesus made disciples. It is a simple process I call 4 chair discipling.

PONDERINGS

1. Read Matthew 28 and Luke 10:25–42. What does it look like to focus on “making disciples” (Matt. 28:16–20) without a Great Commandment heart? Be specific.

2. What is the difficulty of trying to live out the Great Commandment, if you have no clear understanding of how Jesus made disciples?

3. Read Luke 10:38–42. How does this story illustrate the importance of living out the Great Commission with a Great Commandment heart? What can we learn from the real-life situation of Mary and Martha as we try to live like Jesus did?

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