

# *Stay and Make Disciples: A New Look at the Great Commission*

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The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is typically seen as a sending text. However, when we look at the structure behind Matthew's words, we quickly discover that it's a "staying" text, one that calls God's people to make disciples in the everyday places of their lives.

## **Introduction**

**Ask:** When you hear the word *evangelism*, what comes to mind? How about when you hear the word *mission*?

**Shared Responses:** While you will get a variety of responses, if your group is like most, *evangelism* will prompt unpleasant thoughts of uncomfortable confrontations with people who really don't want to hear the Gospel. *Mission* will most likely prompt responses of work overseas or among targeted people groups.

**Say:** In our study today, we're going to explore evangelism and mission as Christ calls us to do them in the Great Commission. However, as we take a fresh look at these words from Jesus, our understanding of how Christ calls us to evangelism and mission could very well undergo some dramatic changes.

**Opening Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your Word, a Word that shapes not only our faith, but our lives. As we open Your Word and explore Your Son's Great Commission to us, mold our lives according to Your will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Exploration**

**Read:** Matthew 28:18-20. **Ask:** What is the primary command that Jesus gives in this verse? Why do you think that?

**Shared Responses:** The options are *go*, *make disciples*, *baptizing*, *teaching*, *observe*, and *commanded*. It's easy to rule out *observe* and *commanded* because they are linked to teaching. If the historic use of the text doesn't prompt people to say *go*, most English readers will assume word order indicates importance and therefore see *go* as the primary command.

**Say:** Most people's first reaction is to assume that Jesus is commanding us to *go*. This actually makes sense because that's how the text has often been used and, in English, we identify a word's importance based upon where it is in a sentence, with more important words appearing first. However, Greek has a different way of identifying importance so, in a case like this, while translators maintained the Greek word order, there's more to the sentence than meets the eye.

**Say:** In order to grab onto the ideas behind Jesus words, we need to do a quick grammar review, so, let's define what a *participle* is and what an *imperative* is.

participle – a word formed from a verb (an action) that is used as an adjective (a describing word) or noun (a person, place, or thing)

imperative – a verb that gives an authoritative command

**Say:** Now that we've defined the terms, let's label the main words in the sentence with verb roots (*go* is a participle, *make disciples* is an imperative, and *baptize* and *teach* are participles).

**Ask:** So, given that, what is Jesus' primary command (the answer is *make disciples*)?

**Ask:** Now the big question becomes, "How do these other words, namely *go*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*, relate to the primary command of *make disciples*?" Perhaps the easiest of these words to work with is *teaching*. So, how does *teaching* inform *make disciples*? How does this help us understand the role of *baptizing*?

**Shared Responses:** It shouldn't take too long for the group to identify that *baptizing* and *teaching* are how we *make disciples*. Of course, this can give the impression that only pastors are to engage in disciple making so it's important to expand on the idea of *teaching* with the question, "What are different ways you can teach?" To press for answers beyond a classroom setting a good question is, "How do babies learn?" This drives to the idea that, by witnessing our lives of obedience, non-believers are drawn to us, asking what's behind our lifestyle (see 1 Peter 2:9-3:17).

**Say:** So, to recap, we have Jesus commanding us to *make disciples* and He tells us that disciples are made through *baptizing* and *teaching*. Moreover, some of our most effective initial *teaching* isn't something that happens in a formal setting, but is a result of non-believers witnessing our lifestyle of not only obedience but also repentance as we return to our baptism daily. This sets the stage for identifying what Jesus means when He tells us to *go*, because Jesus is answering where people witness our life of obedience and repentance.

**Ask:** Where are the disciples when Jesus gives the Great Commission (the answer is, on a mountain)? How might this impact our understanding of the word *go*?

**Shared Responses:** This can be a paradigm shifting question so allow people some time to wrestle with their answers. Ultimately, the goal is to get to a point where they realize that Jesus is saying something to the effect of, "As you go back to your daily lives ..."

**Ask:** So, where are some places in your daily life where people can witness your life of obedience and repentance?

**Shared Responses:** There should be a variety of answers, but they should all key in on the idea of our vocation, that is, our life in the home, workplace, community, and congregation.

**Ask:** Why is this study titled, "Stay and Make Disciples"? (Because Jesus calls us to make disciples in the everyday places of our lives ... the places where we already are)

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, as we prepare to leave this place, we praise You for using us to make Your name known in the everyday places of our lives. Fill us with Your Spirit so that we may live lives of obedience and repentance that serve as a witness to those outside the faith. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

May 2007. Rev. Joseph Burnham is husband to Anita, father to Robbie, pastor of Genesis ([www.genesisdenv.com](http://www.genesisdenv.com)), leader of The Fishbowl team ([www.lifeinthefishbowl.com](http://www.lifeinthefishbowl.com)), and is actively involved in the Capitol Hill neighborhood where he lives. Accompanying Participant's Guide is also available from the Center for U.S. Missions.