

## “Marching Orders” (Matthew 28:16–20)

I'd like to ask you a very important question: What is the greatest problem facing America today? Is it our governmental leadership? Is it our war with drugs and alcohol? Is it the pornography epidemic? Is it abortion? Is it relativism and liberalism? Or is it none of these? What do you think? I would submit to you that the greatest problem facing America is there are not enough disciples of Jesus Christ. For years now, research has revealed that over a third of Americans consider themselves born-again Christians. Now if that's true it poses a great problem. How can we have all these Christians in all these churches, led by all these pastors and leaders, and still have all this mess? The answer is simple: We don't have enough disciples.

However, instead of being depressed and defeated over this reality, our goal must be to encourage one another to raise up disciples that will impact this generation and the one to come. If we succeed in this endeavor, Thurston County will no longer be the most unchurched county in Washington State. Washington State will no longer be the most unchurched state in our country. We will be able to influence our state government and public schools. We will not have so many troubled marriages and families. We will not have so many financial woes. We will see countless people place their faith in Christ. But this will require you and me to *be busy about Jesus' business*.

We are in the midst of a church vision series. Our vision is “transferring truth to the next generation.” Our vision strategy is “learn the Word, live the life, love the body, and lead the world.” This is the last sermon in our series and it deals with our final strategy “lead the world”—or disciple people in Christ. This is what it means to *be busy about Jesus' business*. In Matt 28:18–20, we will look at three blessings of discipleship. These three blessings will equip us to *be busy about Jesus' business*.

**1. Jesus gives His authority to His disciples (28:18).** In 28:16–17, Matthew states that after Jesus rose from the dead He immediately called a meeting—but it wasn't any ordinary church committee meeting. It wasn't held in a boardroom but on a hillside in Galilee (28:16).<sup>1</sup> In 28:17, Matthew records a fascinating verse: **“When they [the disciples] saw Him [Jesus], they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful.”**<sup>2</sup> The eleven disciples are still struggling in their faith. After all the disciples had observed and experienced you would think that they would be rock-solid in their faith. But that was not the case with the first disciples, nor is it always true of you and me. Fortunately, God is a God of grace and compassion. In 28:18a, Matthew writes, **“And Jesus came up and spoke to them...”** Instead of stepping away from His doubting disciples, Jesus “came up” to them.<sup>3</sup> This emphasizes Jesus' perfect patience with doubting disciples. Jesus graciously takes disciples as they come. If they only worship Him, whatever doubts they have can be handled.<sup>4</sup> Christ then asserts, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”** (28:18b).<sup>5</sup> The entire gospel of Matthew stresses the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus exercised authority in His teaching, healing, and forgiving sins. He also exercised authority over Satan and even delegated that authority to His apostles.<sup>6</sup> This is why Matthew closes his gospel by saying that Jesus has “all authority.”

It's worth noting that there are two different Greek words for “authority” or “power” in the New Testament. One means the ability to perform and is properly translated “power” (*dunamis*). The other means the right to use power and is properly translated “authority” (*exousia*). Here, Christ uses the latter word. He is claiming that He has the ability to do all things and the right to use that ability. Suppose I walked out of Bank of America and for no reason at all, a 6-6, 250-pound madman came charging down the street, body slammed me, and sprawled me all over the sidewalk. Since he is bigger than me he has power; but he has no right to do crush me like some bug. On the other hand, suppose I had just robbed that same bank and it was a 6-6, 250-pound policeman who tackled me. He would have the authority—the ability, and the right to use his power.<sup>7</sup> That's what Christ is claiming. He has “all authority” in the entire universe. If we are to be successful in our disciple-making we must appeal to the authority of Christ.

This means we must recognize who Jesus is. Jesus is no longer a penniless preacher. He is no longer a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief...stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted (Isa 53:3–4).<sup>8</sup> Now He is revealed as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Phil 2:10–11). Please understand, while Jesus has always been God, His resurrection further validated Him as God before the world (Rom 1:4). When Jesus declares, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth,” He saying that no one or nothing can stop you and me from accomplishing His disciple-making purposes. While we may doubt, we must persevere in worship with the confidence that we have everything we need to do all that God has called us to do. Today, will you bring your doubts to Jesus and worship Him? Will you recognize that time is short and there is an urgency to move forward and prioritize discipleship? *Be busy about Jesus’ business.*

[Now that we’ve recognized Jesus gives His authority to His disciples, it’s critical that we understand...]

**2. Jesus gives His mission to His disciples (28:19-20a).** In these two verses, Jesus issues a clarion call to carry on His work by making disciples. In 28:19–20a He says: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”** The word “therefore” (*oun*) in 28:19a is significant for it connects Jesus’ mission with His authority. Because Jesus has “all authority” (28:18b), we must go and make disciples.<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that in 28:19–20a there is only one command: “to make disciples.”<sup>10</sup> Clustered around the imperative are three participles “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” The main verb (“to make disciples”) tells us *what* to do and the participles (“going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching”) tell us *how* to do it. So the emphasis is clearly on the command “to make disciples.” Nevertheless, it is important to note that when a participle precedes an imperative it can share the force of the command.<sup>11</sup> So in this case “going” or “go” carries the sense of GO! Go for the purpose of making disciples.

So what is a disciple?<sup>12</sup> A disciple is one who has decided that following Christ takes precedence over everything else in life.<sup>13</sup> A disciple is a man, woman, or student who loves Jesus Christ more than self, spouse, children, parents, and friends. A disciple is one who denies himself, takes up his cross daily, and follows Jesus Christ. A disciple is one who is consumed with an eternal perspective and has surrendered himself completely to the lordship of Christ (Luke 14:26–33; Luke 9:23–26). The book of Acts teaches that a disciple is one who has believed in Jesus Christ and expressed his faith in baptism. He then remains in the fellowship of the believers that he might be taught the truths of the faith (Acts 2:41–47). He then goes out and wins others and teaches them. That’s a disciple!

Please notice that disciple-making doesn’t stop in our church or neighborhood. Jesus says that we are to “make disciples of all the nations.” This verse expresses God’s missions heartbeat. It also informs us that God yearns for us to have a heart for every ethnic group. We’re to have a burden for disciples to be raised up throughout the entire world. Our focus must always be on the world. If it isn’t, we’ll have a weak Western faith. The Lord wants us to give sacrificially so that disciples are made in every nation. Yet, I also believe that for many of us money is not enough. God may be calling you to go on a short-term mission. He may be calling you to contact Stephen Henry and join our Missions Commission. If so, please indicate your interest on your communication card. In the same way that we’re to be a “house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17), we’re here called to be a house of discipleship for all the nations. I’m absolutely convinced that to the degree that Emmanuel has a heart for the discipleship of the world, to that same degree; the Lord will bless our local church. With that said, there are many people from “all the nations” coming to America, and even Washington State. Are you reaching out to share Christ with someone from another nation? What a privilege to do cross-cultural mission work in the United States at work, school, or even in your very own neighborhood. *Be busy about Jesus’ business.*

Now that we know our mission, let’s break down the specifics of Jesus’ three-step plan for disciple-making.

**Step One: Going.** The first step in disciple making is to go. Now I've checked the Greek word "go," I've looked at its Hebrew cognate, and I've even looked at the Aramaic, and "go" means "go." It means "don't stay!" This may seem pretty obvious but it's a problem because we like staying better. Yet, Jesus tells us to leave the security of the church and go out into the world and represent Him in the marketplace. Did you know that nowhere in the Bible are we told to bring our unbelieving friends and co-workers into the church to win them to Christ? There's nothing wrong with doing that but the biblical strategy is to go to others and be a witness where they are *and then* bring them to church so that they can become disciples. The Bible is clear that we must go to sinners if we expect sinners to come to the Savior.

Have you ever stopped to realize that God has left us in the world to be witnesses to the world? That's right! In heaven we'll enjoy an eternal existence of worship, discipleship, and fellowship. But we'll not be able to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus Christ. Everything that we're presently doing can be better done in heaven, with the exception of sharing Christ with those who don't know Him. That's why it's critical that we go and share the good news with others. If you've accepted Christ's invitation to come, have you obeyed His commission to go? Are you currently sharing with your family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances the love of Christ and the difference He's made in your life? If you are, praise God. If you're not, recommit yourself that you will go and be Christ's witness.

You can do this by developing a military-mindset. If you are soldier or former military, you understand the importance of "going." When Uncle Sam calls, you enter the battlefield for the purpose of saving lives. Similarly, we, we need to enter the battlefield of the day-to-day grind of daily living and share the gospel with those who need to hear it—so that we too can save lives.

- ***Pray for opportunities.*** Prayer is where outreach begins. Please take out the "Seven for heaven" and "Seven for earth" card in your bulletin. On the "Seven for heaven" side, write down the names of seven people who you want to believe in Christ. Pray that they become Christians, but also pray for their families, for their jobs, for finance and health and cars and house and apartment or whatever the issues of their lives may be. Pray for them for a year and see what God does. On the "Seven for earth" side, write down the names of Christians who need to be deployed into the world. Begin praying every day and watch what the Lord does in their lives.
- ***Read a book on sharing your faith.*** I read what I am interested in. If I feel like I'm waning in an important area of my life, I begin to read a book or a magazine about it. One of the ways to keep zealous in your heart for outreach is to read about it. Go into our church library as you leave this service and ask Claudette if she has any books on how to share Christ. You can also e-mail me and I'll be happy to provide you a list of books that I've found helpful. There are plenty of books that will motivate you to share your faith.
- ***Open up your home to others.*** When the church began, there were no buildings to meet in so the church met in homes. Now that we have buildings, our tendency is to close our homes. Yet, one of the greatest ways to impact unbelievers is to invite them into your home. In time, perhaps you can even have a small group Bible study that works through the gospel of John and examines Jesus' claims. You could also have host a marriage or parenting study. I'm sure Dan and Candra Fisher could recommend materials for you.
- ***Join Emmanuel's outreach team.*** Ernest Stukes and I are starting up an outreach group that will seek to bless unbelievers in Thurston County. We will not be walking around downtown Olympia wearing a sandwich board that says, "Turn or Burn!" Instead we will be attempting to find creative ways to bless schools, neighborhoods, and businesses. If you have a servant's heart and a burden for others, let me know of your interest on your communication card.

**Step Two: Baptizing.** The second instruction for disciple making is to baptize new believers “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The word translated “baptize” (*baptizo*) means to plunge or immerse.<sup>14</sup> The second step of Jesus’ mission is to baptize new believers in water. Baptism is like a wedding ring—an external reminder of an internal reality. I can be married without a ring but wearing it informs others that I’m married and unavailable. It also serves to remind me that I’m married and unavailable. So, although a gold band worn on the third finger of the left hand is a symbol of marriage it doesn’t make the wearer married. Salvation is a free gift. The sole condition is faith alone. However, the Lord’s expectation is that every single believer be baptized. In the book of Acts, every recorded believer was baptized within a 24-hour period! Therefore, even though baptism has nothing to do with one’s salvation it should be a natural response to one’s salvation. Every week we must expect that we’ll be baptizing people. If our baptismal tank is growing cobwebs and we have to vacuum the dust and dirt out of it something is terribly wrong! We should be witnessing many new births like Saint Pete’s Hospital. Let’s begin to expect the Lord to do great things at Emmanuel. If the Holy Spirit is tugging on you because you’ve never been baptized, will you be obedient to God’s call upon your life to do so? Please check the box expressing an interest in baptism on the response card in the chair in front of you and we’ll be glad to contact you to discuss your baptism further.

In 28:19, Jesus is urging disciples to go public with the act of water baptism but He’s also urging His disciples to become identified with the Trinity. Please notice that the word “name” is singular, although it is the name of three persons. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. This carries the identification aspect of baptism a step further. For not only are we to think like Christ, our behavior is to be Christlike. In everything we do we are to remember that we represent the Trinity. If you’re a disciple, you are the Trinity’s representative to the world and everything you do reflects on God in His Trinitarian fullness, whether good or evil. In the workplace, at home, in the neighborhood, you are God’s man or woman. This theological emphasis of baptism reminds us that when we receive Christ God’s work isn’t over—it has just begun. Many churches and many Christians are satisfied with converts and decisions. But the biblical mandate is for disciples. At Emmanuel we must never be satisfied with a saved soul and a wasted life. We must grow people up in Christ. *Be busy about Jesus’ business.*

**Step Three: Teaching.** The last of Christ’s three instructions was for us to teach. One of the reasons that our church preaches through the Bible (i.e., practices expository preaching) is that Jesus has commanded His disciples to teach “all” that He has commanded in His Word—both the Old and New Testaments. This is one of our most fundamental responsibilities and privileges as a church. So please make sure that you are supportive of the preached Word, get behind it. It’s interesting that teaching comes after baptizing. Why not offer instruction before baptizing? The reason is that if you don’t baptize new believers you won’t be able to sit them down long enough to teach them. You see if they don’t become identified with Christ they’ll always have something else to do instead of learning about Him. Once they are identified with Him they’ll want to learn how they’re supposed to live as representatives of Christ. Too many pastors and missionaries think that preaching the gospel and having people walk an aisle, raise their hands, pray a prayer, sign a card, or be baptized is fulfilling the Great Commission. This is one reason that more than 300 Christian denominations and thousands of cults exist in the world. The teaching aspect of the Great Commission has been greatly neglected. Sadly, the church of Jesus Christ has many Christians who should be on the front lines that are still in basic training. While they may know the Word it hasn’t made a difference in their lives. Yet, God is only excited about our knowledge and learning if it impacts our lives. If all our knowledge and study doesn’t affect our lives it’s worthless. Attending church—even if you’re there every Sunday for 50 years isn’t important if what you learn doesn’t make you love and serve Christ Monday through Saturday. Did you know that a good way to learn God’s truth is to teach it to others? If you are mature in your faith help others mature in their faith. That’s a common courtesy and it’s our responsibility before God. As always, begin with your immediate family. Make sure that your spouse and children are growing in the Lord.

[Jesus has given us His authority and His mission, now we’ll find encouragement in His final blessing.]

**3. Jesus gives His presence to His disciples (28:20b).** An astounding blessing is that Jesus will be with disciple-makers in a unique and powerful way. The last phrase of 28:20 reads: **“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age<sup>15</sup>.”** Matthew’s gospel begins with the prophecy that the Savior’s name would be “Immanuel,” that is, “God with us” (1:23)<sup>16</sup> and it ends with Jesus’ promise to be with His disciples forever. The gospel of Matthew thus forms an inclusion (i.e., a textual sandwich or bracket) about Jesus in His relationship to His people that suggests His deity. This is further confirmed by the phrase “and lo, I am,” which is literally translated, “I, even, I.” In this verse Jesus distinguishes Himself from the other two members of the Trinity. Because it’s such an impressive promise, people often quote it out of context. For example, when someone gets sick or loses his job a fellow believer will remind the sufferer that the Lord is with him always. But this verse isn’t about being sick or losing a job. It’s talking about making disciples. What Jesus is saying is that when we make disciples He’ll be with us. In other words, if we want to know where to find Jesus we need to look where disciples are being made. Do you want to know what church Jesus is attending this Sunday? Look for Him in a disciple-making church. I’m confident that Jesus doesn’t attend many of the churches in the United States because disciple-making is not much of a priority. Regardless of the quality of the service, the size of the church, the beauty of the facilities, if disciples are not being made, you won’t find Jesus. If you are a disciple, your companion is Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Many years ago, J. Edgar Hoover (former director of the FBI) invited 200 leaders to New York to discuss the plight of our country. The focus of this particular meeting was to discuss the Black Panther party that had all of New York City absolutely terrified. These Black Panthers were roaming the streets, they had shut down all the stores by 5:00, they had closed up Central Park, they made people hurry across the bridges, they had even closed “Lovers Lane” and numerous churches. In all about 4 million people were fleeing for their lives or, at the very least, were scared silly because the Panthers were on the march. The great preacher and pastor, Dr. E.V. Hill, was one of the leaders who was present on this leadership committee. Dr. Hill asked a very pertinent question: “Just how many Panthers are active in NYC?” The answer that came back was 81! 81 Panthers were controlling over 4 million people. Yet those 81 Panthers were anything but ordinary. Those 81 Panthers willing laid their lives on the line. They didn’t care whether they lived or died; they were just pushing their agenda.<sup>18</sup>

Did you know that Emmanuel Bible Fellowship could impact our county and our entire state? We have 81+81+81+81+81. If we developed a holy Black Panther mentality our impact for Christ could spread throughout our community, state, country, and world. Our lives would be earthly and eternally significant. And ultimately isn’t that what we really want? When it’s all said and done, don’t we want to have fulfilled our mission in life? I sure think so. Let’s *be busy about Jesus’ business.*

### **Questions worth asking**

1. How does our church define discipleship?
2. What does a disciple look like?
3. Do we have an intentional process of discipleship?
4. Does our church know this process?
5. How does this process relate to the purpose of the church?
6. Has our church prioritized distinct practices that relate to the discipleship process?
7. Does our church practice the principle of abandonment based on the idea that activity doesn't always mean productivity?
8. How does our church measure maturity?
9. How does our community describe our church?
10. Do our church families spend more planned time in a week at church with each other or in the community with non-believers?

### **Scripture References**

Matthew 28:18–20

Mark 16:14–18

Luke 24:44–49

John 20:19–23

Acts 1:6–11

2 Corinthians 5:11–21

Colossians 4:2–6

### **Study Questions**

1. At what point in my life have I seriously doubted Jesus (Matthew 28:17)? What specific circumstances brought about this doubt or disbelief? How did I process my intellectual or emotional concerns? When do I find myself filled with doubt or anxiety? How should I respond when I find myself feeling this way?
2. Do I regularly reflect on Jesus' authority (Matthew 28:18)? How does confidence in Christ empower me to share my faith? When have I boldly shared Christ with someone? What gave me such courage? How can I cultivate courage in my life? Read 2 Timothy 1:7 and 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12.
3. Who am I currently discipling (Matthew 28:19)? How am I transferring truth to this person? What content or skills am I passing on? Over the course of my Christian life, how many people have I discipled? How has God used me to mark these believers' lives?
4. In what ways am I currently involved in "going, baptizing, and teaching" (Matthew 28:19)? Have I taken spiritual responsibility for my children and grandchildren? In what ways am I reaching out in my church, school, neighborhood, workplace, and community? Am I seeking to invite others to participate in ministry and growth with me?
5. When have I tangibly experienced Jesus' presence in my disciple-making (Matthew 28:20)? How did this enable me to see another believer "conformed to the image of Christ" (Romans 8:29)? What will I do to ensure that I am making disciples so that I have Christ's power and presence?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> According to 1 Cor 15:6 more than 500 believers showed up for the meeting.

<sup>2</sup> The word “doubtful” (*edistasan*) is the same word used of Peter’s wavering faith when he walked on water and saw the wind (Matt 14:31). This word is closely related to “little faith” in Matt 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase translated “came up” here means “to move towards.” See BDAG s.v. *proserchomai* 1.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, Volume 2: The Churchbook Matthew 13–28* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 1094.

<sup>5</sup> Turner observes, “God’s bestowal of universal authority or power upon Jesus echoes Dan. 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27 (cf. Matt. 11:27; 26:64; Eph. 1:20–23; Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20; 1 Pet. 3:18–22; Rev. 5:1–14).” David L. Turner, *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 689.

<sup>6</sup> See Matt 7:29; 8:1–13; 9:6; and 10:1.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted and revised from G. Michael Cocoris, *Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 22–23.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 745.

<sup>9</sup> The Great Commission is also recorded in Mark 16:15–18; Luke 24:46–49; John 20:21–23; and Acts 1:8. It’s worth noting that Mark, Luke, John, and Acts also contain similar assignments. However, only Matthew’s recorded assignment emphasizes discipleship; the other four focus on evangelism. The reason for this seems to be Matthew’s purpose. Matthew’s book focuses on kingdom living. While he wanted to ensure that people were heaven bound he was absorbed in motivating God’s people to be salt and light in a sick society. So the goal of the church is to make disciples, not just converts. Think about that. The church’s goal is not just to increase attendance, have great programs, preaching, music, and fellowship. It’s not even solely to see people believe in Christ. The assignment of the church is “to make disciples.”

<sup>10</sup> Matthew has already introduced the idea of being discipled in Matt 13:52. The only other NT uses of the verb *matheteuo* (“to be a disciple,” “make a disciple”) are found in Matt 27:57 and Acts 14:21.

<sup>11</sup> See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan 1996), 628–29, 640–45 and Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746.

<sup>12</sup> Wiersbe writes, “The term ‘disciples’ was the most popular name for the early believers. Being a disciple meant more than being a convert or a church member. *Apprentice* might be an equivalent term. A disciple attached himself to a teacher, identified with him, learned from him, and lived with him. He learned, not simply by listening, but also by doing. Our Lord called twelve disciples and taught them so that they might be able to teach others (Mark 3:13ff.)” Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Follow the King of Kings* (Grand Rapids: Victor), Electronic ed.

<sup>13</sup> The word “Christian” is only used three times in the NT. In contrast, the word “disciple” is used a whopping 266 times.

<sup>14</sup> BDAG s.v. *baptizo* 2: “to use water in a rite for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship w. God, *plunge, dip, wash, baptize.*”

<sup>15</sup> The phrase “to the end of the age” (*pasas tas hemera*, lit. “all the days”) is without parallel in the NT. See John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1271.

<sup>16</sup> In this prophecy, Matthew links Isa 7:14 and 8:8, 10, together.

<sup>17</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 749–50 writes, “The Gospel opened with the assurance that in the coming of Jesus God was with his people (1:23), and it closes with the promise that the very presence of Jesus Christ will never be lacking to his faithful follower.”

<sup>18</sup> I heard this illustration in a sermon preached by E.V. Hill at a 1993 Promise Keepers conference in Portland, OR.