

COMMISSION OF A DISCIPLE

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I have spoken with you about the *character* of a disciple, when we learned about following Jesus.

To follow Jesus as a Christian is to become His disciple. To become His disciple is to serve Him with your whole heart for your whole life.

I have also spoken with you about the *conduct* of a disciple, when dealing with interferences, receiving instructions, and performing initial responsibilities.

Today, I conclude this series by revealing the *commission* of a disciple.

“Commission” refers to the act of granting authority to fulfill a particular task or duty. When Jesus told His disciples what He wanted them to do, He also gave them the authority to carry it out.

What is commonly known as the Great Commission is found in all four of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-47; John 22:21-23), each with a unique emphasis. I will focus on Matthew’s record, from a modern translation known as God’s Word.

Matthew 28

¹⁹ *So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* ²⁰ *Teach them to do everything I have commanded you.*

“Wherever you go...”

In our faith, we follow in someone’s steps. A parent, a teacher, a hero—none of us are the first to walk the trail. All of us have someone we follow.

In our faith, we also leave footprints to guide others. A child, a friend, a recent convert—none should be left to walk the trail alone.

This is a principle of discipleship.

Making disciples is not limited to slot on the church calendar or a course of study for a select group.

Every person who has answered the call to follow Jesus Christ is on duty—whenever and wherever. Wherever life takes you—at school, on the job, or on vacation. Everywhere may be an opportunity for disciple-making.

“Make disciples of all nations...”

What is a disciple? A devotee, a student, and a practitioner.

What does a disciple do? Basically, whatever pleases the Master, the Teacher.

The scope of our field includes every nation—every kind of person. Young or old, male or female, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, able or handicapped.

There are just two primary lessons for disciple-making: immersion and obedience.

“Baptize them...”

Water baptism is about belonging. It is the universal badge of membership in Jesus’ Church.

But beyond an initiate’s testimony, baptism means immersion. Jesus said to “immerse them” in the presence and persons of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is not only about becoming a “card-carrying” member of the family of Christ, but also about becoming one centered and steeped in relationship with God.

“Teach them to do...”

Teach them *not* just to think or philosophize about what God asks of us, but to actually *do* it.

We become disciples not by “hearing only,” but by doing—by practicing the very things Jesus has taught.

None of us are very good at all of them. Most of us are inconsistent in many of them. But *all* of us should be engaged in practicing what Jesus said, or we cannot claim to following Him.

A disciple’s life is multi-dimensional

A disciple’s life includes a wide variety of components—far more than reading the Bible and attending church services. I suggest that these represent the breadth of the real-world spiritual responsibilities of any Christian disciple:

- Spiritual life
- Community development
- Service contribution
- Mission engagement
- Wisdom
- Stewardship

Think of it as a wheel with four quadrants.



Spiritual life

This first quadrant represents your personal devotion to Jesus Christ (Bible reading and study, plus worship and prayer).

This tends to be the primary emphasis and a strong suit among Pentecostal churches and believers, but it is only one piece of the roadmap of discipleship. Let's do this well and not neglect the rest.

Too much emphasis in this arena tends to generate legalism or elitism. To little emphasis here tends to promote social club religion.

Community development

The second quadrant represents our mutual engagement and encouragement (primarily through small groups, whether formal or informal—any group of two or more).

Pentecostal believers are usually not so good at this, perhaps because we depend too much on our individual sense of the Holy Spirit's leading and defer too seldom to others or to the larger group.

An overemphasis in this arena tends toward cliquishness and divisive factions. Underemphasis here challenges a sense of belonging and significance, and promotes isolation.

Service contribution

The third quadrant addresses building up the body of Christ (through serving needs, and teaching/training).

Assemblies of God people have done pretty well at this through their many programs and curricula, especially at conveying essential doctrines (though not so much at conforming to essential practices).

Overemphasis in this arena creates headstrong Christians, who would sooner argue than apologize. Underemphasis leads to uncertain hesitation and departure from the faith.

Mission engagement

The fourth quadrant involves the compassionate witness of the believer (acts of mercy, giving witness to the Gospel message).

This fourth component, though a significant piece of Assemblies of God foreign mission, was only recently added stateside to our statement of fundamental tasks. So, we are improving, but still finding our way in this arena.

Overemphasis of this component can produce insensitive "Bible blasting" of those we consider unsaved, without listening carefully to the story of their journey toward faith, or it may turn our faith into little more than a social campaign. Underemphasis renders our message irrelevant to many whose immediate needs are overwhelming, or hides the truth of the Gospel from those who need to know what God requires and expects.

The last two components are really the hub (heart) of discipleship. They are what keeps the wheel of discipleship balanced and functioning effectively.

Wisdom

The upper half of the hub represents the part that God puts into us through our followership/ leadership (that is, our submission and obedience).

One cannot lead well if one does not follow well. Remember that Jesus said, “If you want to be great, learn to be the servant of all.”

Wisdom for leadership comes from the experiences of wholehearted followership (the development of a servant’s heart).

Stewardship

The bottom half of the hub represents the part that we return to God—our resource management (giving, saving, spending).

This is *not* limited to money handling. All gifts, resources, and tasks are trusts from God to be esteemed and guarded. Therefore, a disciple must demonstrate integrity and trustworthiness, even in menial tasks and with material resources.

In conclusion, our first objective is to become active in each quadrant of the discipleship wheel, by building on your strengths, and not ignoring your weaknesses. In weaker areas, look for someone who is stronger than you to mentor and guide you (beware of pride which would cause you to pretend you have no weakness or to hide your weakness).

Then pursue *gradual* but steady growth in all six areas simultaneously to sustain balance and make real progress.

How are you doing?

Where are your strengths? Are you capitalizing on them? Finding ways to pass them on to others?

Is anything missing? Especially weak? Is there someone who can help you develop these areas?

What can you do this week to activate a sluggish area? How can you achieve greater balance of these six arenas?

How can you move each component of discipleship forward a notch? That’s the commission of a disciple!

When William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school in 1904, he was heir to the Borden Dairy estate, which made him a millionaire. For his graduation present, his parents gave him a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world’s hurting people. Finally, Borden wrote home to say, “I’m going to give my life to prepare for the mission field.” At the same time, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: “No reserves.”

During his college years at Yale University, Borden became a pillar in the Christian community. He learned, as he put it, to “say no to self and yes to Jesus every time.”

During his first semester at Yale, Borden started a small prayer group that mushroomed into a movement that spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting for weekly Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, one thousand of Yale’s thirteen hundred students were meeting in such groups.

Borden met with fellow Christians to make sure every student on campus heard the gospel. Often he ministered to the poor in the streets of New Haven. But his real passion was missions. Once he narrowed his missionary call to the Kansu people in China, Borden never wavered.

Upon graduation from Yale, Borden turned down several high-paying job offers and enrolled in seminary. He wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: “No retreats.”

After graduating seminary, he went to Egypt to learn Arabic so he could work with Muslims in China. While in Egypt, Borden came down with spinal meningitis. Within a month he was dead at age twenty-five.

But prior to his death, Borden wrote two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words “No reserves” and “No retreats,” he wrote, “No regrets.”

What is your commitment to Christ today? Could you write in your Bible “No reserves, no retreats, no regrets”?

If you were inside the cockpit of an airplane just before liftoff, you would hear the copilot or captain call out, “V1,” which means the “point of no return.”

As the airplane accelerates toward the end of the runway, the pilot must decide if the plane is moving fast enough for a safe takeoff. This targeted speed must be determined preflight based on several factors, including the air pressure, temperature, wind speed, and weight of the aircraft.

The pilot holds the throttle as the plane approaches the V1 speed so that the takeoff can be aborted if something goes wrong. However, after V1 the plane must take off.

As Christians, we also have a V1 commitment. Once we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord (become His disciples), we have reached the point of no return. There is no going back! It is time now to adjust your sights, apply full throttle, and take off!

Are you with me?!