



**Mission: Possible! Sunday School Lesson: Adult**



By John Johnson,  
Regional Coordinator for Africa

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## *Understanding the Great Mission*

Early in my life, I felt God call me to missions. When asked, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” I would most often answer, “I want to be a missionary.” Of course, I didn’t know what that meant, but it sounded exciting and adventurous, and I would be following in the footsteps of my mom and dad. They had been missionaries in the West Indies. “Go into all the world ...” was my calling!

By 1980 I was ready, or so I thought. I had a degree in Bible, Christian education, and theology tucked in my pocket (and hopefully some of that study tucked away in my heart, as well). I had married Gwen Plough, who had agreed to join me in the Great Adventure of missions, even though we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into.

We left the States shortly before our first

anniversary to begin our cross-cultural lives and ministry teaching English in Mokpo, South Korea. We felt certain that we were living the Great Mission: going, baptizing, and teaching among the people of South Korea. In addition to all we were doing, we were developing friendships with people from the church, from our school, and in the community.

In January 1992 our family (we now had two children) relocated to Cairo, Egypt. And after a decade of living and working cross-culturally, I finally came to understand Matthew 28:16-20.

It happened in a surprisingly natural way. As part of my missionary assignment, I was asked to be a member of the leadership committee of the Nile Christian Bookshops. Every month I would travel from Cairo to Alexandria for meetings. A young man from a

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congregation in Alexandria asked that I meet him and some other young men from the church to eat some ice cream before I caught my train back to Cairo. What fun we had!

That began an understanding of my calling in cross-cultural ministry. I came to learn about discipleship through this experience. Doing life with these young men in Alexandria, Egypt, on the street, in coffee shops, and in their homes, led me back to scripture, back to the stories of Jesus, back to his teaching on discipleship.

## ***Bible Background***

One of the most powerful scenes in the gospel of Matthew is the closing (chapter 28:16-20), which is often described as the Great Commission. In these few verses, the risen Christ appears to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee and announces to them that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. Jesus then commissions his disciples to embark on a new mission. He charges them to make disciples of all the nations, and instructs them to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He tells them to teach and to obey all that he has commanded them, and he sends them on their mission with the comfort and assurance that he will be with them always.

These five verses that conclude Matthew's gospel are a fitting, powerful, and memorable end to the gospel. Matthew surely wrote his

Somewhere along the line, Matthew 28 came into focus for me. I learned that the import of this passage was not solely about going to people of all cultures and backgrounds to baptize and teach. Rather, it was about making disciples in all our goings and in all our teaching. Ultimately, in this way we bring people to maturity, to Christlikeness, to fullness (see Luke 6:40).

Since then, across many miles, cultures, and contexts, making disciples of Jesus has been and continues to be my passion, commitment, and calling.

gospel to be read from beginning to end, and the Great Commission was written as the climax of his long narrative. But the Great Commission does more than conclude and recap Matthew's gospel. The Great Commission is forward-looking. The all-powerful and all-authoritative risen Christ is sending all disciples on a worldwide mission, the Great Mission to build the Kingdom of God.

The challenge for us is to not get stuck at the evangelistic aspect of The Great Commission. It is important to remember that Jesus' command is not an order to "make Christians" or to "make converts." Jesus' order was to "make disciples." Becoming a Christian is a moment in time; it is just the beginning. Being a disciple of Christ is a lifelong journey. Disciple-making is long-term investment in a person's life.



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## A Brief Look at the Text

The Great Commission found in Matthew 28 is one of five Great Commission passages found in the Gospels and Acts. (See Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23; Mark 16:14-15, Acts 1:6-8; and, of course, Matthew 28:16-20). Examine each of these passages individually and collectively to get a sense of the commonalities and divergences.

The most common elements are that all are post-resurrection passages, and in all five stories Jesus draws near and teaches his disciples. The texts diverge on when and where the event happens, the context, and what Jesus actually instructs. Common among them is that a sending takes place. Explore these passages to note the divergence in what the disciples are sent to do and say.

### Matthew 28:16-20

#### New King James Version

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

### Matthew 28:16-20

#### New Living Testament

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

## Zeroing in on Matthew 28

- The women go to see the tomb on the first day of the week (v.1).
- Suddenly there is a great earthquake. An angel of the Lord, bright and glorious in appearance, rolls back the stone and sits upon it (vs. 2,3).
- At the earthquake and the angel's appearance, the tomb guards are literally

scared to death (v.4).

- The angel speaks to the women: "Do not be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified" (v.5).
- "He is not here. He has been raised from the dead" (v.6).
- "Go tell his disciples he has been raised from the dead and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. He will meet you there" (v.7).



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- The women leave the tomb, running toward the disciples with “fear and great joy” (v.8).
- And as they are running, Jesus appears to them. The women fall at his feet and worship him (v.9).
- Jesus tells the women to not be afraid. Then he says, “Tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (v.10).

### **Skipping to verse 16**

- The eleven disciples have gone to Galilee. They go to the mountain that Jesus has

identified (v.16).<sup>1</sup>

- When the eleven see Jesus, they are a mixture of worship and doubt (v.17).
- Jesus declares that, as a result of his death and resurrection, “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (v.18).
- In summary, Jesus says, “Make disciples in your going, baptizing, and teaching (v.19).<sup>2</sup>
- Jesus concludes this teaching with a promise (in fact, Matthew concludes the entire gospel) saying, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (v.20).

## **Recommended Resources**

### **Short Videos**

- *Who Is a Missionary* [3:20]  
by Pioneers  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLdxHvoiNeA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLdxHvoiNeA)
- *State of the Remaining Task* [4:36]  
by Global Frontier Missions  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfHC7hXNoV8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfHC7hXNoV8)

### **Reading**

- **“Teaching Missions to Adults”**  
By Mike Ford  
[www.chogglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/missions-emphasis-working-paper.pdf](http://www.chogglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/missions-emphasis-working-paper.pdf)

- *Great Commission, Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World*

by Paul Borthwick  
[www.amazon.com/dp/B017T4FBH6](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B017T4FBH6)

- **What Is the Great Commission?**  
by R. C. Sproul  
[www.amazon.com/dp/B07NZ1XC8J](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B07NZ1XC8J)

- *The Key to the Missionary Problem*  
By Andrew Murray  
[www.amazon.com/dp/B0092TN8FO](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0092TN8FO)

### **Community**

- **Mission: Possible! Facebook Group**  
Share your experience with others!  
[www.facebook.com/groups/omgmp/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/omgmp/)

## **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> In Matthew’s gospel, when Jesus has important things to say and do, it happens on a mountain.

<sup>2</sup> “Make disciples” is the primary verb in the sentence. Going, baptizing, and teaching are all participles specifying by what means we are to make disciples.



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### **On Mission for God!**

You don't have to be a missionary to be On Mission for God! Mark 10:44-45 explores some ways you can engage in the Great Mission!

Being on mission for God starts with intentionally being a disciple of Jesus yourself. To sit at his feet. To count the cost. To follow Jesus. "To cover yourself with the dust of your master," as one rabbi said. Or, put another way, "to follow Jesus so closely that you find yourself covered with the dust of his journey."

But it is not enough to just follow. We must become disciplined disciples. (Isn't it interesting that those two words come from the same root?) We become hearers and doers of his teachings. Our lives reflect him. Our actions are in tune with his agenda, teachings, commands. We live in the paradox of living under his authority and command and simultaneously finding our home, hope, and freedom there.

The natural result of becoming a disciplined disciple is that we are intentional about making disciples. It is not about teaching a set of morals or restating ethical commands in contemporary terms, but rather inviting others on a journey with

Jesus, inviting others to follow us as we follow Jesus (1 Cor 12:1).

How does this affect your

- Resources?
- Prayers?
- Travels (international or to the grocery store)?
- Time commitments?
- Giving (finances, time, energy, creativity, other tangible resources)?

### **Questions to help you process**

Most Christians will recognize on some level that the Great Commission applies to all disciples of Christ, yet there is often not much guidance in living that out in busy adult lives.

1. How would you define for yourself this task of making disciples in this present time, in your present context?
2. How might this redefine your personal call to ministry?<sup>3</sup>
3. How important is it for you to know that surrounding a command or a commission is a declaration that Jesus has all authority and Jesus is always with us?
4. In light of Matthew 28, how has your understanding of the resurrection been changed or enhanced? 🌍

### **Footnotes**

<sup>3</sup> Something to ponder: All ministry is cross-cultural.