

# 11

## SESSION ELEVEN

# The Great Commission

### SESSION SUMMARY

Believers are called to go to all nations with the authority of the risen King, Jesus—the One who empowers us to go. We are called to make disciples by proclaiming Jesus as the risen King. Jesus alone has the power to save, and we teach other believers to obey all that He has commanded, knowing that Jesus will finish the good work He began and that He will never forsake us.

### SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28:16-20

# THE POINT

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**Jesus calls all of His followers to go and make disciples.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Jim was rough around the edges. Blunt and brash; independent, yet insecure. Jim was struggling with some difficult life situations. Jim didn't need friends who only invited him to a Sunday event or offered worn out cliches. He needed friends who would listen, walk beside him, and bring the love and goodness of God near to him in everyday language and everyday rhythms. Tom and Kevin went to school, played baseball, and spent time with Jim, and they constantly spoke about the Bible in ways that defined their perspectives and relationships. They identified themselves by Christ and with Christ, and it made Jim curious.

Jim eventually asked Tom and Kevin if he could go to church with them. They had invited Jim before, but this time Jim wanted to go. So he did. One year later, Jim was in the baptismal waters, declaring himself as a follower of Jesus. And Tom and Kevin were still obeying the Great Commission.

- **Which of Tom and Kevin's actions in this story seemed easy? What actions do you think may have been difficult? Why?**

### Option 2

Jesus has called all of His disciples—including us—to go and make disciples. Sometimes the command to “go” means that Jesus will ask us to pick up everything and go across the world to tell others about Him. Some of us are not called to go to a foreign country, but we are all called to reach out to all of the people we meet—the people around us, in the places we “go” all the time.

- **Where are some places you “go”?**
- **How can you make disciples in those places?**

People often face the temptation to only reach out to people who are like them, who are already their friends, or who go to the same school or church. Encourage students to reach out to people they don’t always talk to or know well, even if that feels uncomfortable at first. Remind them that Jesus made no exceptions in His command about who we should “go” to, and neither should we.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus calls all of His followers to go and make disciples.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

## PLOT

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Before finally ascending to the Father, Jesus gave His disciples a commission to make disciples of all nations. We know this section of Scripture as the Great Commission. This call—the Great Commission—is one all Christians should take seriously because it contains specific instructions for how we should go about our daily lives as believers.

## TIMELINE

**AS YOU GO...**  
*Fulfilling the Great Commission wherever we are in life.*

**THE ASCENSION**  
*Jesus promises to send His Spirit.*

\***Bonus Session**  
**SONG OF THANKSGIVING**  
*Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.*

## JESUS AFFIRMED THAT ALL AUTHORITY BELONGS TO HIM

The King had risen from the grave, death had been conquered, and He was ready to give instructions to His disciples. The disciples were informed that Jesus would be heading to Galilee and wanted them to meet Him there (Matt. 28:7).

**16 “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matt. 28:16-18)**

The disciples went to Galilee to see the One they had been waiting for, the One they thought they had lost forever. As Jesus predicted, they worshiped when they saw Him. However, verse 17 also says that some of the disciples doubted.

It is not clear whether some of the Eleven doubted or whether a larger crowd followed the disciples to Galilee and some of that crowd doubted. We cannot be certain of the answer to that question. What is important is for us to see that doubt and hardness of heart were present in that moment.

Jesus wasn't shaken by their unbelief, and He wasn't discouraged. He was focused on the mission He would pass on to His disciples. But before He shared His commission with His disciples, He established the strength behind it—Himself. Jesus received complete authority and power from God the Father.

- **What are some other places in Scripture where we see Jesus possessing divine authority? (p. 72, PSG)**

*If your students get stuck, have them read the following verses: Romans 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:9-10; Philippians 2:9-10; and Colossians 2:9-10.*

Jesus has supreme authority. God has exalted Jesus, and His resurrection was further proof of His authority and His power. Here, at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus directed His disciples to go out in the world under His authority. They went and we also go—not on our own authority or in our own strength but with and by the authority of the risen King.

## JESUS COMMISSIONED HIS DISCIPLES

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The Great Commission isn't a long command and can be easily understood and memorized. The most difficult part of what Jesus commissions us to do is living it out.

**19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”  
(Matt. 28:19)**

Jesus' disciples needed to understand the importance of His authority over all things, and this is still important for us to understand today. The reality of His power and authority didn't end with His resurrection or ascension or at the writing of the biblical text. Jesus' kingdom and His authority are eternal. Jesus began this commission with the statement of His authority and then connected it to the command to "go," indicating that the power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him by the throne of grace is the same power available to us to live out this call to go and make disciples of all nations.

The disciples were instructed to go (Matt. 28:19). This was not a suggestion. Jesus wasn't telling the disciples that maybe they should go, or they could go if they could squeeze it into their schedules. Jesus used an imperative, a command, an order to be obeyed. Jesus, the risen King, commanded them to go.

"Go" in this passage is a verb that means to travel or journey, and the disciples were expected to obey. Our temptation and theirs would be to wait, but in essence, Jesus said, "Now that you've heard of My authority and seen My power—even over death—go out into the world and let others know of this good news for the forgiveness of sins."

But where do we go? Since Jesus has authority over all the earth, He commands His disciples to go to all nations. Every tribe, tongue, and nation is under Jesus' authority, even if they have not yet submitted their lives to Him. After all, we have been told that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord at the mention of His name (Phil. 2:10-11). So, we go.

For the disciples, going would mean being scattered among the peoples and nations of the world, and for many of us, it means the same. Jesus' call is for a multi-ethnic, cross-cultural focus of missionaries that may require leaving home and the known to travel into foreign lands of the unknown. But the Lord didn't tell us here exactly where to go. He didn't demand that we all leave home; He simply said to go and make disciples of all nations.

Does this mean we are called to go to a foreign land or to our neighbor across the street? He didn't say. But we do know that the call to make disciples is a call to action. Jesus' call to go to *all* nations was very intentional—*all* encompasses every place on this earth. Jesus wanted no one excluded, no land to be barren of His name—His desire was for us to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

## TIMELINE

\*Beginning  
Winter 2017-18

### PENTECOST

*The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.*

### COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

*John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.*

### COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

*The church displays unity and generosity.*

Once we have proclaimed the good news to all people, and once they have placed their faith and trust Jesus' finished work on the cross, then Jesus commands us to baptize these new disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Peter, as recorded in the Book of Acts, obeyed this command. Preaching to the crowds in Judea, Peter called the people to repentance and baptism, and repeated Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Repentance and faith come before baptism. Baptism is the faithful display of the saving work of Jesus—a proclamation of the work that has been done in the believer's heart, which calls out to an unbelieving world that Hope has come. Baptism is an outward sign of the inward transformation of the believer, a move from death (to sins) to life (in Jesus).

Baptism is also a part of the normal, everyday call of the Christian mission. In other words, just as evangelism or disciple-making is a part of the call to mission, so is baptism. Baptism does not save, but it is an important aspect of our Christian witness. Baptism publicly proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ to a watching world.

## JESUS ENCOURAGED HIS DISCIPLES FOR THE MISSION AHEAD

Jesus commanded the disciples to go, to act—preaching the gospel to all nations and baptizing believers in the name of our trinitarian God. But we see in the next verse that this isn't the end of the work.

**20 “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)**

Once again, Jesus didn't shy away from the use of the word *all*. Jesus told the disciples that they were to teach all the things Jesus had commanded them to those who believed the gospel so the new believers could, in turn, obey their Savior. On their own, this would be another daunting task, but we know Jesus gave them this instruction in light of His own authority and power. Teaching others is a daunting task for you and me as well, but God has given us His authoritative Word.

Baptism is a faith-filled proclamation of the finished work of Jesus in a believer's life, and obedience is the evidence of that work. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commands (John 14:15). Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and leads to obedience to our Savior. But if faith comes by hearing, why would we stop teaching once a person has believed?

That's why the Great Commission isn't only about evangelism—it's also about discipleship. God promises to finish the good work He begins (Phil. 1:6), and He instructs us to participate in that work through learning about and obeying Him. Christians are further instructed to disciple the disciple, and as we see in these passages, no one is exempt from teaching others (Matt. 28:20). We are all called to go and disciple believers in Christ.

Mission of the Church (p. 74, PSG)

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*The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.*

At the conclusion of His instructions and commands, Jesus lovingly reminded the disciples (and us) that they will not be alone in their mission: He would always be with them. What began with a declaration of His power and authority, ended with the declaration of His faithful presence to the end of time and then forevermore.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under Jesus' authority, we make disciples by baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by teaching them everything Christ commanded us. As we go, we trust in the presence of Christ, who promises to be with us on mission.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What fears do you have that could keep you from obeying the mission Jesus has given to us? Answers will vary.**
- **How does the reality of Jesus' authority over all of heaven and earth overcome those fears? Answers will vary.**
- **How might we unintentionally downplay the importance of baptism as a part of the Great Commission? We often think of the Great Commission only in terms of evangelism. However, as we have studied, the Great Commission is about much more than evangelism. The act of baptism does not save, but it publicly identifies the believer with Jesus—proclaiming the gospel message through action.**
- **What are some practical ways you can teach others Jesus' commands and encourage obedience? Answers will vary.**

**HIS STORY**  
God's Story of  
Redemption,  
through His Son,  
Jesus Christ.

**YOUR STORY**  
Where your story  
meets His.

# YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES

## HEAD

The disciples were commanded to go and make other disciples. By biblical definition, a disciple is a follower of Jesus, someone who learns from Him in order to live like Him. So, these Jesus-followers were commanded to go and find other people to become Jesus-followers. In other words, even though salvation belongs to the Lord and only He can save, He allows us to play a wonderful part in salvation. We do this by sharing the gospel, through discipleship of new believers, and by equipping them with a Christian worldview.

- **How have you experienced discipleship from a mature believer in your own life?**  
*Answers will vary.*
- **How can we encourage one another toward making disciples?** *Answers will vary.*

## HEART

Our temptation not to share with others is often rooted in fear: *What should I say? What if they won't accept me? How will I look in their eyes? What if the response is violence?* When Jesus is the focus and the message, we can rest from our fear. We don't need to fear human beings because, Jesus instructed: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

- **What are some ways we can unintentionally make the message of the gospel about us instead of about Jesus?** *If we always focus on the reasons we don't share—fear, ridicule, not knowing what to say—then we are essentially, though unintentionally, making this about us when it is about God and what He has done for us.*
- **How does Jesus' authority help us when we feel fearful?** *Answers will vary.*

## HANDS

Like most people, we become busy with life and our own schedules, and our busyness can lead us to forget our ultimate mission. We have a great treasure in the gospel. We have the best and only news this world needs. We also have been given the power to share it by the grace of God through His Holy Spirit, who is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to always be with us. Let's ask God for opportunities to go and make disciples of all nations and pray for our faithfulness and boldness as we share about our risen King—Jesus Christ.

- **What places have you gone in order to share the gospel and make disciples?**  
*Answers will vary.*
- **How can your group/church work together and support one another in this shared mission to go and make disciples of all nations?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #10, which contains an interactive poster designed to help students intentionally think about their part in the Great Commission.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPRisenFAL17](http://lifeway.com/TGPRisenFAL17))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject**