

Great Commission Lifestyle - Part 1

by Robert Coleman

The Great Commission is a call to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded, and it begins with understanding the context and principle of incarnation or identification.

Duration: 41:59

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 28:17, Matthew 28:19-20, John 1:35-46

Topics: "Great Commission"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of discipleship and the Great Commission mentioned in Matthew's Gospel. He uses a humorous anecdote about a farmer in court to emphasize the need for context in understanding passages. The preacher also shares a personal story about his son bringing him a drink, highlighting the significance of love and understanding in relationships. The sermon concludes with the importance of staying together and the basic principles of association for developing potential and making a positive impact in one's immediate influence.

Transcript

We're using as our reference the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel, the Evangelist Matthew, where we are simply told to disciple the nations. But it's well to put this in context, helps us understand passage if we can see it in its larger setting. It reminds me of an old farmer who had contested the decision of the insurance company denying him compensation after an accident.

And the reason given was after the accident, the farmer told the police officer there was nothing wrong with him. So it had to go to court and the judge turned to the farmer and says, is it true that at the accident you told the police officer there's nothing wrong with me? Well, sir, he said it was like this, your honor. I was going down the highway and my pickup and Betsy, my cow, was in the back.

Your honor, interrupted the counsel for the insurance company. The man is not answering your question. So the judge looked at the farmer and said, you will have to answer, sir.

Well, it was like this, your honor. I was going down the highway and my pickup and Betsy, my cow, was in the back. Your honor, again spoke the representative for the insurance company.

The man is still not answering your question. So the judge looked at the farmer and then looked over at the lawyer and said, well, why don't we let the man go ahead and tell his story? Well, it was like this, your honor. I was going down the highway and my pickup and Betsy was in the back and this pickup pulled right out in front and I crashed into the side of that truck and I went flying this way and Betsy went flying that way and when I came to, this police officer was standing beside me and he looked over there at Betsy and I heard him say, this old cow is in bad shape.

And you know, he pulled out his gun and shot her dead. Then he turned to me and said, now how do you feel? You know, it's the context that helps us understand. And it's good to put the Great Commission in the setting in which it was given.

For in the preceding verses, you will read there in the 28th chapter of Matthew, Jesus has gone to the mount where the disciples were to meet him. And when they see Christ, the disciples worship him. Now that's very understandable.

Jesus appears to them in the glory of his resurrection body. And it's only appropriate that you worship. But then the scripture says, there were many that doubted.

Now that's intriguing. How could you doubt in the presence of the resurrection? They certainly don't doubt the fact that it happened. But I can imagine they may have doubted how they're going to get along because Jesus has already told them earlier that he's going to leave.

He's going back to the Father in heaven. And I can imagine how they're feeling their own sense of being alone and how they will survive without Jesus beside them. That was the context.

Because as you'll note in the scripture, Jesus came to them. He understands our doubts, our fears. You don't have to explain your problems to him.

He knows more about it than you know. And then he said, all authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Jesus is simply affirming that he has all power, that he is God.

If we would turn that around and make it our statement, it would become the first confession of the Christian church. You know what it is? Jesus is Lord. Which is to say we agree with what Jesus said of himself.

He is Lord. He has all authority in heaven and earth. And it's on the basis of that authority that now we're confronted with the cross.

And when we see that authority affirmed in the resurrection, we have to give account what happened at Calvary. And we're brought to see it was for us he died. And we realize we must repent and turn from our sin in brokenness like a little child and embrace the grace of God by faith.

And indeed, that is the message that we want to proclaim. We want to go forth and tell others. And yet we face a world that is hostile, a world that has crucified our Lord, and there will be opposition.

These disciples are going to face that very soon. Jesus knows what is before them. And they're already beginning to feel an inner sense of loneliness.

That was the context for him to say, you don't have to fear. There's no reason for you to hesitate because I have all power, all authority in heaven and earth. And that's the assurance with which we can go forth.

And when that is clearly understood, then you can understand the command, which is simply therefore. When you see therefore in the scripture, know what it's there for. Therefore, you go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you.

And then he closes with that beautiful promise, oh, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age. But as you look at that command where we're going to give our great attention this morning, though, later we will conclude with the promise. He tells us very simply what our responsibility is when we affirm that Jesus is Lord.

We're to make disciples. It's the only verb actually in the command, go baptizing, teaching, or participles. And the same is true in the Greek text as is the case in English.

Participles are not designed to stand alone. Now, you haven't always observed that rule, and that's why you got those red marks on your term paper. No one could figure out what to do with that dangling participle.

You always find the leading verb, and that gives direction. And when you recognize this in the great commission, it simplifies the command. We are to make disciples.

That's the only verb. And that tells us then why we go, why we baptize, why we teach. It's all for the purpose of discipling the nations, not to convert people, though you certainly must be converted to enter the kingdom.

And that is a beginning. But a disciple interprets learner or follower as in the sense of an apprentice. And this becomes the key to his strategy for reaching the nations.

Because disciples will keep learning, they'll keep growing in grace and in knowledge. And in that process, they will become more conformed to him whom they follow. And in time, they'll begin to do what he has been teaching them.

They'll begin to make disciples. And they will begin to teach them to follow the same pattern. And through the process of multiplication, you see what's going to happen? Someday, the whole world will have opportunity to hear the gospel.

Now, that's the plan. And what makes it so obvious for us as a way of life is that we can look to Jesus. He's simply asking us to do what he had been doing himself.

And so we see in him a pattern. And he says, I'm the way, the truth, and the life. You follow me.

And that's what I'm going to attempt to do this morning and lift up some very basic principles that will unfold in his life. Now, I recognize that we live in a different age. And therefore, some of the things that Jesus did 2000 years ago in that culture of Israel might not be the same way it would happen today.

Times have changed. And for that reason, methods and programs will change. They're always conditioned by the situation.

But principles are going to be unchanging. And if we can locate the principle, then we have something to guide us no matter what our circumstances, wherever we are. And that's what I want us to look at this morning.

Some principles that can be guidelines. We'll still have to work out the applications, the methods, depending upon our culture. But the principles are going to give us guidelines that we can all follow.

And the place to begin is where we first meet Jesus. And I call it the principle of incarnation or identification. Now, in your book, and I'm glad you have received that book.

If you did not pick up one, we'll certainly get one this morning. And incidentally, this is the edition that has the larger type, that little pocket edition. I can't even read it.

You have to have a magnifying glass. This one you can actually read. And it has a study guide at the back that was prepared by Dr. Roy Fish at Southwestern Baptist Seminary.

But you won't find this principle in the book, because when I wrote the book, I thought this was so obvious I didn't even need to mention it, because every page of the book builds on this foundation. The principle of Jesus coming to identify with us, becoming one with us in our circumstances, even accepting our identity in his own body. And so the Bible tells us he humbled himself.

He renounced right to himself and took the form of a servant. Now, that's foundational. And unless that's understood, everything else I say today would be missing the mark.

So you can add this to the principles of the book, even though it's written all through the book. But this is how we identify with people. We become a servant.

We bear their sorrows, like Jesus bore ours. We enter into their circumstances. And we're willing to do whatever it takes to show them the love of God.

And as he went about, he ministered to people where he saw them hurting. Heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, delivered those who were possessed of demons. And he was continually teaching and preaching the gospel.

He was responding to the people's needs. And it's not surprising for that reason that multitudes were attracted to him. Have you noticed the crowds that are usually standing around? He doesn't seem to have to go out and beg people to hear him.

The word's gotten out, here's somebody that ministers to us where we hurt. He cares. At least they regarded him as a prophet.

Now, it's true, prophets are usually in trouble with the establishment and the hierarchy because they don't round the corners. The prophet just tells it like it is. Thus saith the Lord.

I hope that people have that sense when they're around you that you don't compromise the truth, that you just tell it like it is. Jesus was known as one who would always be on the side of justice and what was right. The people were drawn to him.

And as he looked out, though in compassion, he could see that they were scattered like sheep that had lost their way. Because they didn't have someone like a shepherd who could lead them. If you've ever been around sheep, you can understand how realistic that is.

Sheep are very nice creatures when they're taken care of, when they're well, but they're always getting sick. We had some sheep once on our little farm down in Texas. But you soon learn that sheep need

someone to lead them.

You don't drive sheep. You can drive cattle. You can drive goats.

Did you know that? You're going to learn something today. But when you start to drive sheep, they tend to scatter. You just get out in front and they know your voice.

They know if you care, they'll follow you. And the multitudes did not have people like that, that they could follow. Jesus was doing all he could, but he accepted a limitation when he became one with us in his body.

How could he then reach the multitudes? Only as people could catch his vision and enter into his same lifestyle and begin to multiply his concern. And that's why he told them to pray to the Lord of the harvest, as we mentioned last night, that God would raise up men and women who would have that characteristic of care for the sheep and who knew the way of the Lord. And if that is what people can see in you, you'll never lack opportunity to make some disciples.

Don't you respond to people who see that you care when you serve them, when you minister to them, where you recognize where they're hurting, when you do in a very practical way, something that expresses your love. I say that's foundational to renounce your own rights, to take the place of those who are needing help. To lower yourself to the level where you can dirty your hands in ministering to them.

Show them that you care. That's the criteria. That you begin to build a lifestyle of compassion that reaches out to the world.

Now, I say that's very obvious. I'm not going to labor it, but just keep that in mind as you read this master plan of evangelism. But out of that ministry to people that are hurting, as a servant, the second principle comes into focus.

I call it selection. Look for those who really want to learn. They're the disciples.

And you can see this emerge very early in the ministry of Christ, in that first chapter of John. He goes over to the other side of the Jordan and joins the revival movement under the Baptist. People are attracted there from all over the country.

We're told from Judea, Samaria, Galilee, as far north as Sidon and Tyre. It's the greatest religious awakening Israel has known in over 400 years. Not a bad place to begin a ministry where people are already seeking help.

And it was there that Jesus was baptized by the prophet. It was there that he was identified as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. And I think, unto this moment, this was the most significant statement yet made in the history of redemption, because it was tantamount of saying embodied in Christ were the dreams and the hopes of Israel throughout centuries.

This had been expressed on the altar as the sacrifices were offered. And that blood bore witness to the covenant. And it was an assurance that God would bring them into his land of promise.

Those offerings, of course, were never completely finished because they always pointed to the perfect sacrifice, which only God could make at Calvary. But now what had been foreshadowed for thousands of years has been focused upon the Lamb that God has sent to be that sacrifice who will take away the sin of the world. Look at him.

He's standing in your midst. Don't you think you would have been excited? Can you imagine what feeling that would invoke in your heart if you had been looking for one that would be your Redeemer? Why, if Jesus will just seize this opportunity, acknowledge this, he can immediately gather the following of the Baptist because he's willing to decrease in order that Jesus could increase. If he needs more assistance, all he has to do is to exercise his supernatural power.

If he pleases, he could raise the dead. He could gather an army. He could sweep down upon Rome and take the world by storm.

Why doesn't he do it? That's the kind of Messiah most people were looking for. Someone who would deliver them from any difficulty, from any suffering. Have you lived long enough to realize that's the kind of Messiah most people in the world are still looking for? Do you remember what Jesus did? You can read it for yourself there in the Gospel.

He walked away. And so far as we know, never again was he actively identified with that great movement of the Baptist. It caused consternation in the mind of John.

He had to send later a delegation to inquire if Jesus could actually be the Christ. Obviously, he's chosen a different course. You had seen these great mass movements before, all through the Old Testament, and we're grateful for them because they would rally the people to the altar and there would be confession and repentance and restoration, and then God would bring his blessing of deliverance.

But those movements were short-lived. They never seemed to perpetuate themselves. There was never really leadership developed to carry on.

And so all through the Old Testament, you have this cycle up and down, up and down, but they can't seem to carry forward that spirit of revival. The New Testament opens now with the revival being led by the greatest of all the prophets, but you have one who is the perfect Son of God who can lead this movement, and then he walks away. But as he leaves, two of John's followers notice him go.

It must have been a little more sensitive to that announcement. They recognize your fulfillment of prophecy, and they start to follow him, and Jesus sees them out of the corner of his eye, and he turns and asks, say, who are you following? And you can hear them stutter, Master, where do you live? Well, that's a good question in light of what you've already heard. Wouldn't you want to know more? How does Jesus respond? You remember? Come on home with me.

Come and see. That's the way he begins his evangelism before he ever preached a sermon or worked a miracle. Don't you see what he's doing? He's gathering the few men who want to become disciples, have a desire to learn.

Those are the ones you look for. One of them is so overjoyed he can hardly wait to tell his brother, and so Andrew brings Peter to Jesus. The next day we read Jesus found Philip, and Philip couldn't keep the good news to himself.

Thank God for these new converts. They haven't learned all the rules yet. They just go and tell everybody they found the Savior.

Isn't that wonderful? If you don't have a stream of new converts coming into the church continually, you'll go dead in a few months. It's these new Christians that are full of excitement and enthusiasm. Thank God.

We don't have the call of all of these first disciples. We have Matthew at the seat of custom. It's generally believed, though, within a few months, certainly less than a year, he gathered around him what came to be called the apostles.

Now the ministry is still continuing, and others are believing, and there's soon so many, it's difficult to really manage the whole group, and so he selects 12 especially to be with him. But even there, Peter, James, and John have a closer relationship. Do you see a principle? But you look at this group and you wonder, what is so outstanding about them? Take the 12, for example.

Would you have chosen them? None of them on the surface seem to have the credentials that we look for in our ministerial committees. None of them are college graduates. What do you make of that? None of them are members of the Levitical priesthood.

Can you imagine? He circumvented what appeared to be the most natural place to find religiously oriented people. They're just businessmen. One of them is even a tax collector.

Some of them are fishermen. Just people like you and me, people that you have in your churches that you rub shoulders with every day. It's not that he has anything against the priest.

Priests don't misunderstand. I'm a member of the cloth. But it humbles me to realize he passed over my kind when he selected the first disciples.

Maybe we were so busy carrying on the program back at the church, we didn't really have time. But it does make us realize God has people out there that he's putting this desire to learn in their heart. You look for them.

And likely they'll be people just like Jesus found who grew up in the same area in Galilee where he was raised. The only one outside of that needed area seems to be Iscariot, Judas. They seem to be close to his same age and the inner group were his same sex.

Thankfully, there were other women that followed. And it turned out in the end, they were a little more spiritual than the men. At the cross, all but John ran away.

Thank God for the women. They stood beside him. But their proprietors here we recognize.

But a principle is what I want you to notice. Look for those that have a desire to learn. And they will be there.

You've been praying for God to raise them up, haven't you? You really been praying? Then keep your eyes open. God's going to answer your prayer. And they're the people that will come out of where you live, beginning in your own household and then with a roommate or a neighbor or someone you work beside.

You might call them your peer group. I think of a fellow down in Texas in my home country that was arrested for horse stealing. And he was asked by the sheriff if he wanted to be tried by the judge or by a jury of his peers.

The man looked confused. He said, peers, who's that? They explained, well, that's somebody just like you. Oh, he said, I'll take the judge.

I don't want to be tried by a bunch of horse thieves. Now, if you'll look around, you'll see your crowd. Where you're already known, where hopefully you have some respect.

And it's likely in that area of your immediate influence, you'll have your greatest opportunity to change the course of history. Selection. But how are you going to develop this potential? Brings me to the third principle of association.

You simply stay together as much as you can. Nothing new here. In fact, these principles that I'm talking about are so basic.

When this is all over today, you may go home and say, well, I spent a day at the church, but I didn't learn anything new. These principles are ingrained into the structure of the universe. Unfortunately, because they are so obvious, sometimes we overlook them.

And here is the way we learn by being together. It's the principle of the family. It was God's idea in the beginning.

He said, it's not good for a man to be alone. And so he created two, a man and a woman. He performed the first marriage ceremony himself in the garden.

And he ordained that out of that relationship, there would be the procreation of the human race. In fact, that's really where you see the beginning of the Great Commission, because he commanded them to go and populate the earth, be fruitful and fill the earth. See, God's plan to gather a people to show his glory to the ends of the earth has been his purpose in creation.

And it's going to come very naturally as you bear children in the family, and they in turn will begin to multiply. And it's in that family relationship that you have your greatest education. That's where your values are going to be learned.

Now, you may get away from them later, but very likely you'll still come back to many of those values you learned as a child. Some of you say, well, that's all right for others, but I came out of a dysfunctional family. And I suspect that a good majority of us have in one way or another.

And so we have to often learn from negative experiences. But if you can learn from failure, haven't you discovered there's no end to what you can learn. But the object lesson of the Great Commission is the family in which you've already lived.

That's why anybody on earth can understand what it means to make disciples. How was it when you were growing up? You see the influence of your parents and your brothers and sisters or friends. You say, well, I didn't have it.

Then are you making up for it in your family now? It's the principle of being together. And for the better part of three years, those disciples were with Jesus. And indeed, in that context, they could see lived out before their eyes, the meaning of the Great Commission.

And the application, I think, is very obvious to us. We've got to be together. And the more natural the relationship, the better.

Just having dinner together, going to a ball game, going shopping, having a round of golf. Who would ever want to play golf unless they knew they were under the mandate of God? Well, now, some of you laugh,

but why would you want to do anything unless you knew it was fulfilling the Great Commission? You see, if that's your objective, you can have not just fun and some recreation, you can really make disciples on a golf course. Can you imagine? What a beautiful way to relax and be natural and answer questions and develop some relationships that go deeper.

This is what puts excitement into living. Nothing is peripheral. It's all part of the plan to change the world.

And everybody can do it where you are because you see it is just a lifestyle. Now, I think it gives structure to put a little organization into it. And if you need to get together, you may want to set an appointment to have breakfast or go to a meeting together.

Don't ever go by yourself. If you can help it, take someone with you. You haven't lost any time that way.

You just multiplied your time. And that's why I like to travel with someone. It's a wonderful way for me to not just have good fellowship, but to cause my time to be more fruitful.

And to give a little more structure, sometimes you may get a few together in a little group for Bible study or prayer. I have a group like that when I'm teaching that we meet six o'clock on Tuesday morning. We get together around the coffee cup.

We fellowship for a little while. And I ask them how they're coming along in their discipline because all of us have agreed to keep a discipline of obedience. We share and recite a verse of scripture.

And then before it's over, I'll lead a little Bible study. We get down on our knees and pray for one another. One of our disciplines is to pray for each other in the group every day.

Good to know at least you have a dozen people praying for you every day. But it sometimes is very helpful to have something structured like that that you can depend on. And we need meetings like this in the church with seminars and great fellowship gatherings in a stadium, in a crusade.

All of this is helpful, but the most basic ingredient of disciple making is in that personal relationship. Just during the day, one on one, one on two, just a little nucleus meeting together like a family. The reason that we continue to grow is because of this fourth principle of consecration.

Jesus expected obedience. He didn't ask them to recite a creed. He simply said, follow me.

Faith was always a commitment of life. There were just an intellectual assent to what was true. Faith was the way you committed to live your life.

It was the way, of course, you always continued to learn. There was never any foreclosure on progress. You were always moving on.

Didn't matter so much what you knew in the beginning. If you were committed to follow Jesus in time, you would learn everything he wanted to teach you. And I believe that's going to continue on in heaven.

Thank God. A lot of my questions will be answered then when I have a better teacher. But this principle of obedience is the way you keep learning, and it was written into the commission to teach or to obey everything that had been taught.

And this is going to lead us into deeper dimensions of growth. We'll come to understand deeper applications of the cross. Even that old self-centered nature, that bitterness, resentment, the unforgiving spirit, that self-concern always for our own rights.

We just call it basically carnality or a fleshly attitude. You know, that's going to rise up different ways. And when you see it, you got to bring it to the cross and die to it and confess it.

God's able to deal with that. You're always going to be confronting new challenges, new areas of your life that need to be brought in conformity to your Lord. That's the beauty of it.

He's not through with us yet. He's always leading us on. And you want to follow him because you love him.

You see, that's the motivation. It's not obedience. It's not a sense of duty.

It's love. And he that has my commandments and keeps them, Jesus said, is the one who loves me. You remember as those disciples met with Jesus there at the lakeside in Galilee after the resurrection? It's recorded in the 21st chapter of John.

And they'd been fishing. Jesus told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat, and they caught a big catch of fish. And John said, well, that's the voice of Jesus.

When Peter recognized who it was, then he dived in and swam ashore, left the others to pull in the nets. But when they all got on shore, Jesus invited them over to join him for breakfast. He had a fire already kindled.

And when they had eaten, Jesus turned and asked the big fisherman, Simon, do you love me? Oh, yes. He said, I love you. Well, then take care of my sheep.

And the second time he said, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Yes, Lord, I love you. Then take care of my sheep. Then a third time he said, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And now the Bible says Peter was grieved that Jesus would ask him the third time.

Don't you imagine that reminded him of how earlier three times he had denied his Lord? And now Peter said, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Now, Peter couldn't appeal to his good record, but he could appeal to his Lord's understanding.

You see, he knows all about it. He knows when we love him. I remember when my son was just past his fourth birthday, and it was about this time of the year, I was in the backyard cleaning up my garden.

He looked out the back door and saw me working. It occurred to him I was thirsty. It was a hot day.

So he pulled up a chair to the kitchen sink, found a dirty glass, filled it full of hot water out of the faucet. The next thing I knew, I heard my name called. I turned around.

Jimmy was walking across the garden holding up that dirty glass of hot water. And he said, Daddy, I thought you was thirsty. I brought you a drink.

And there's a big smile that stretched all the way across his face. Now you might say, couldn't he do better than that? That's not cold water. That's not even pure water.

But when you looked at his face, you'd have to say that was pure love. He was doing the best he knew to please his daddy. Say, when Jesus looks at you and asks that question, what can you say? You see, it's not finally the question of duty.

It's the question, do you love me? That's the great commandment. To love God with all your mind and soul and strength, to love your neighbor as yourself, that fulfills everything written in this book. And it's out of the great commandment that we have the great commission.

And when you truly love like that, making disciples becomes for you the joy and rejoicing of your soul. It's the way you are expressing your love, your worship. Father, give us a heart to love you.

Oh, truly to love you. For you are worthy. There's no one else, no one else who loved us unto death.

And we embrace you this morning in the wonder of it all, that even while we were sinners, Jesus, you died for us. Yes. Oh, for a heart that can know that kind of love.

I pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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