

AN INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP:
"FOLLOW YOUR MISSION"
Matthew 28:16-20

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For centuries we have called it the Great Commission. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts all refer to it. Christians in the first century lived by it. Missionaries in the 20th century devoted their lives to it. Will Christians in the 21st century embrace it or ignore it?

That is my question today as we take into consideration the parting words of Jesus to believers. *"Go into all your worlds and make disciples intentionally."* That is my paraphrase of the Great Commission and therein lies the mission statement for every church and the marching orders of every Christian.

GO.

My missions professor in seminary spent most of his life as a missionary in India. I will never forget the passionate pleas of J.T. Seamonds for everyone to engage in Christian outreach. He liked to put it this way, "Some must go, some must let go, some must help go, but everybody needs to get going."

One of my all time favorite stories is about Larry Walters, a thirty-three-year old truck driver in California. For his entire life, Larry wanted to fly, to glide through the sky, but he never seemed to get the chance. So, Larry spent most afternoons sitting in his backyard on an old lawn chair.

The rest of the story has been recorded by newspapers and television. One afternoon, Larry hooked up 45 helium-filled, surplus, weather balloons to his old lawn chair. He tied a 6-pack of beer to one leg, some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to the other, put on a parachute, hung a CB radio to his belt, and sat down in his lawn chair with a BB gun in his lap so he could pop the balloons when he wanted to come down.

Larry thought he would go up about 200 feet. Instead, he shot up 11,000 feet, right through an approach corridor of the Los Angeles International Airport. When Larry finally shot out enough balloons to safely land, reporters immediately asked, "Were you scared?" "Wonderfully so," Larry replied. "What made you do this?" they asked. Larry said, "Sometimes you just can't sit there!"

INTO ALL WORLDS

Go! Go! Go into all your worlds! That is how I like to paraphrase it. Go into all your worlds. When Acts talked about the Great Commission, he said go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the outer most parts of the earth. John Wesley said, "I look upon all the world as my parish. By that I mean in whatever part I am, I judge it my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work that I know God has called me to do."

Some say why Brentwood? There are already too many churches on Franklin Road, and they cause traffic problems on Sunday morning. Some community leaders have declared publicly that they oppose any development of mega-churches in Brentwood.

I say, why not Brentwood? Material wealth is no indicator of spiritual health. People can be rich in things and poor in soul. After seven years in this community, let me assure you the spiritual need here is great.

This week we will send a check in the amount of \$218,000 to complete a building project in Tumbleweed, South Africa. Tumbleweed, which had no electricity a few months ago, will soon have a community center which will house a health clinic, a preschool, and a worship center. Why South Africa?

I say, in a small village that conducts more than 30 funerals a month from people dying of AIDS, and has an unemployment rate of more than 75%, and has not one church in town - why not South Africa?

This weekend we are interviewing potential directors for the South Nashville Neighborhood Revitalization Project. Why south Nashville? We are already feeding people there through a ministry called Elizabeth's Table. It is a neighborhood struggling to find its future. The neighborhood association, some concerned citizens, and our own District Superintendent have invited us.

In a neighborhood concerned with drugs and prostitution, school dropouts and a lack of adult literacy, in a neighborhood where the elderly would like to have a place to buy a loaf of bread, I say to you, why not south Nashville?

I could go on. This summer we will begin exploring a second campus in the Spring Hill area. Some of you are already asking why? In one of the fastest growing communities in America, I ask you why not?

For the past four years we have sponsored Loop Nashville, providing a weekly worship service for young singles in the region. From time to time people ask, why the Loop? The majority of the participants are not even members of our church! I say, why not reach out to the very age group that is most likely to drop out of church?

MAKE DISCIPLES INTENTIONALLY

The word "disciple" is not a familiar term in our society. We feel more comfortable talking about mentoring or coaching. Jesus calls us to make disciples!

Disciples are FOLLOWERS. Disciples are persons who have experienced the Living Lord and pledged to him their deepest devotion. Disciples are not people who have reached their destination; they are people who are discovering their direction, often one step at a time. An African folk song says it simple and well. "We are marching, we are marching, we are marching in the light of God." If you

get tired of marching, you can walk, dance and pray in the light of God. Are you a faithful follower of Jesus Christ?

Disciples are lifetime LEARNERS. My father only made it to the 4th grade in school, but he read the Bible every day. He used to say, "People rust out a lot quicker than they wear out." By that he meant people, like machinery, who just sit around doing nothing, have a shorter life span than those who go into action daily. The Bible says of Moses on his 120th birthday after forty years in the wilderness, "*...his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not been abated*" (Deut. 34:7).

Disciples are REPRESENTATIVES. They represent the ethics and values of Jesus in the marketplace. They are not political action groups, but prophetic promoters of justice and righteousness which have the power to reform a nation. Disciples are attuned to the voice of Jesus saying, "*Go and do likewise.*"

What a great time to be alive!

What a great purpose we have in living!

May God help us do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the places we can, to all the people we can, as long as we ever can. Amen!