

# Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

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## Discipleship: The Commission and the Vision

by Dan Trygg.

Matthew 28:18-20 - Key text on discipleship:

**“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”**  
NIV

There are four verbs in the English translation of verses 19 and 20a. In Greek, only one of them is a regular strong verbal form that stands by itself, **“make disciples”**. **This is the only direct command in the sentence.** The other verbal forms are participles that modify, or give clarification to, this main verb. Actually, our translation of even this verb is somewhat weak when compared to the original. Our “make disciples of all nations” could sound like we are to attempt to find a few individuals from each ethnic group or society to follow Jesus. Jesus’ thought here is much more direct, aggressive, and inclusive. Literally, He says “disciple all the nations”!! (There is no preposition “of” in the Greek.) No excuses here. No room to relax or compromise until the job is done (cf. I Cor. 15:34). The task requires much more than soliciting church members. **The verb “disciple”, or “make disciples of”, means to train and to make active followers of the Master.** This concept is clarified and made more specific by the accompanying participles, as we shall see.

Well, **how do we make disciples?** Jesus gave us clear instructions in this passage. **First, we do it by “going”**. The Greek word has two primary meanings: (1.) to go, proceed, travel, journey, leave; and (2.) to live, conduct one’s life. I personally think that Jesus deliberately chose this word and sentence structure to confront us with *both* meanings. The first concept is clear enough, and is restated by the “all nations” part of the verse. *If the scope of the gospel message is to reach the ends of the earth, then messengers must go to bring the good news there* (Rom. 10:14,15). Without question, that must be part of Jesus’ focus. We must reach out beyond ourselves to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). The other side of the coin, however, is equally as vital, and offers an important corrective to our American culture today. *We are to make disciples “as we are going about”, i.e., as we live out our lives by the way we conduct ourselves in our daily affairs.* In other words, discipling is not just “information transfer”. It is, rather, a way of living. We should always be making disciples wherever we are, and in whatever we are doing. We see this same idea of way-of-life training taught in the Old Testament in Deut. 6:4-9; 11:18-21. Now, however, instead of focussing on just training our own minds and those of our families, incarnational ministry should be affecting everyone we come in contact with. *Our words, actions, and disposition should be continually instructing and modeling the Christ-life to others.* Discipleship doesn’t happen only in segmented times or in certain “appropriate” places (like “church”), but in the nitty-gritty, warp and woof of everyday life.

The choice of Jesus’ language here is significant in another way, however. The Greek word is an aorist participle, which means that it has both the idea of action that happens at-a-point-in-time as well as the participial flavor of process, usually translated in literal English by the use of a gerund, i.e., a word ending with “-ing”. The best literal rendering of this word is “going” or, paraphrased, “proceeding from here”. In other words, *Jesus is setting in motion a task that will reach outward from this point.* This is a moment of new beginnings. This is a time of having gathered for instruction, like a huddle between plays in a football game, and then going back to play the game. “Going” from the huddle..hike the ball. “Going”..block the rushers. “Going”..go out for the long pass. *You can’t stay in the huddle if you want to win the game. You must get into the action.* Here, in Mt. 28, Jesus is saying, “Going ..make disciples”.

**The second aspect to "make disciples" is baptizing.** The word itself means “to immerse, plunge, or dip”, and refers to *immersion of the believer into water as a sign of his or her identification with Jesus.*

It represents symbolically what has happened spiritually, i.e., the dying and burial of the believer to the old life and a rising to new life in Jesus (Rom. 6:1-11), being cleansed from the sins of the past (Acts 2:38; 22:16). We do not believe that baptism in water is *necessary* for salvation (cf. I Cor. 1:17), but it *is* important for those who wish to be followers of Jesus. Why? Because Jesus our King desires us to be baptized into His name. By the way, that is what the Greek literally says, “baptizing them into the name”. It seems to signify our identification with and consecration to Jesus (cf. Acts 19:1-5).

**The third participle that modifies “make disciples” is the word “teaching”.** It is clear from Hebrews 5:12 that it was a NT expectation that a mark of maturity would be that we would be teaching others. Everyone is to be a teacher. *We are all to be about the business of instructing those who are willing to follow Jesus.* There is another verbal thought in this phrase, however, that clarifies and emphasizes the kind of teaching that is to be done in effective discipling. It is the infinitive “to obey”. In other words, *it is not enough to teach truth about Jesus, or what He said, or even what He told us to do. We have to be taught to obey, keep, pay attention to, and guard “all things whatsoever” Jesus commanded us.* Unfortunately, oftentimes the church has thought that teaching doctrine was enough. No! *We must be taught that obedience is the only way of discipling.* You can’t be following Jesus and walking in disobedience, any more than you can be in the light and in the darkness at the same time (I Jn. 1:5-7). We cannot pick and choose what, or how much, we wish to obey. *Jesus did not give us the option of partial commitment. To be a disciple means to follow Jesus in all areas of life.* To disciple others is to insist on the same standard, i.e., to hold one another to the highest (Heb. 12:15; Eph. 4:15).

It is important to see this commission in its total context. Before giving the command to “disciple all the nations”, **Jesus set the stage for this awesome task by telling the disciples that all authority in heaven and upon the earth had been given to Him.** The word “authority” in Greek includes both the idea of “legal right” as well as “effective power. Jesus was saying that the objective He was recruiting them to pursue was both within His right to attempt, and within His ability to perform. Like God’s word to Joshua in Josh. 1:1-9, Jesus has given us a territory to possess, and told us to go up and take it. And, in both cases **the commission is followed by the promise, “I will be with you”** (Josh. 1:5,9; Matt. 28:20), as the continued assurance that **God’s effective power will be with us as we face each new obstacle.** Jesus’ word of commission and promise extends beyond the lifetime of one man, or one generation. Literally, His word to His people is “*I am with you* all the days until the conclusion of the Age”.

In conclusion, what are the implications of this commission for *your* life? For your church?

**What is the objective?** To produce followers who will go the whole way with Jesus.

mathētēs = (noun) a disciple, follower

manthanō = (verb) to learn by experience, find out, discover

mathēteuō = (verb) to disciple someone; to make a disciple of someone

**Who is to be disciplined?** All the nations, everybody! Certainly, every Christian to be disciplined!

**Who is to disciple others?** Every Christian. It is our responsibility as believers to train others.

**What is the cost involved?** We must give up our agenda;

We must sacrifice to learn and be equipped to train;

and, We must take risks to disciple others.

**Where do we get the ability to do this?** The Holy Spirit (II Cor. 3:5,6).