

Jesus, we thank you for the privilege you've given to us to be Your disciples. Give us hearts to reach out to those who don't know you. Give us the passion to tell them about your love and forgiveness. Use this time that we spend together today to inspire and equip us to be your witnesses to the people we encounter. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20 is the most well-known biblical record of what is commonly referred to as "the Great Commission." But despite the significance of these and other verses that call Christians to "go and make disciples of all nations," a surprising proportion of churchgoing Christians in the U.S. are generally unaware of these famous words from Jesus. 51% of people who go to church say they are not familiar with the Great Commission.

That means we have a challenge in front of us today as we begin a three week series called "Great Commission Living." So let's begin with the Great Commission. Jesus told His Disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 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." (Matthew 28:18-20 NLT) This is the main thing, the #1 thing Jesus tells us to do. Great Commission Living means that we are called to be living witnesses for the Lord. That may require us to rethink what it means to be a Christian.

People's view of money has changed dramatically over the years. People used to pay for everything with cash. Now some restaurants don't want to bother with cash. Then people started using checks to have a record of all of their purchases. Checks have been replaced by credit and debit cards. I know a number of people who never carry cash. I usually don't have much if any cash in my wallet. The next great thing is auto pay, having payments automatically paid out of a checking or savings account. I pay almost all of my bills and even make my donations to the church that way. And now it is paying for things with your phone. There are all kinds of apps and services that will allow you make a payment or donation using your phone. We even have a QR code that you can use to make a donation to Peace. My parents who paid for everything with cash or checks would be lost in today's nearly cashless world.

If we can rethink our view of money, maybe we need to rethink what it means to be a Christian. Is being a Christian something I do or the person I am? There is a big difference. There are a lot of things that we do that can describe us, but not define us. You may coach your kid's team or belong to a service club or volunteer to help in a classroom or deliver meals on wheels or are a HART volunteer. Those are things that you do during designated parts of your day or week. If Christianity is only something that we do, then we can drop in for a worship service when we want to. We may even be tempted to check our faith at the coat rack on the way out and pick it

up the next time we come to church. We can read the Bible or pray on occasion. We may volunteer to help out at the church and give money to support the church in any of the ways we've already talked about. But we can also disconnect anytime we want. But going to church, reading the Bible on occasion, volunteering and giving don't make us a Christian. Jesus warns us, **"For apart from me you can do nothing."** (John 15:5 NLT)

On the other hand, if being a Christian is the person I am, that means that I have a new identity, a new purpose, a new direction in life. Being Christians means that we are children of God 24/7/365. We don't just do "Christian Like Things," we live the Christian life. We don't just drop in to volunteer when convenient; we follow the example of Jesus and live a life of service. Most importantly, we never check our Christianity at the door. We stay connected to the Lord all the time. Jesus said, **"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit."** (John 15:5 NLT) This doesn't mean that we are perfect Christians. That's impossible in this world. But we stay connected to the Lord, we rely on His love and forgiveness, we try with God's help to live in a way that gives glory to Him.

Jesus said this to His Disciples, **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** (Matthew 16:24) Jesus is calling us to embrace our new lives as His Disciples. A lot of times people think about taking up their cross as the burdens they have to carry through life. While Jesus does promise to help with the burdens and challenges of life, I don't think that is what He means when he talks about taking up our cross and following Him. There are two main things Jesus is telling us to be ready to do in this statement.

#1 is to be ready to die, or to suffer persecution or hatred, as a result of our Christian faith. Christians are certainly suffering for their faith, facing persecution and martyrdom in other parts of the world. We see a growing resentment and animosity towards Christians in our nation today. Are we ready to suffer because we are Christians?

#2 is carrying the cross of Christ into the world by sharing the love of Christ. If a majority of people who go to church don't know what the Great Commission is, think how many people today don't have a clue about Jesus Christ. They won't know about Him unless someone tells them. Our job is to carry Jesus with us into our schools, our work places, our neighborhoods, our social commitments, our world. One of the best ways that we do that is living out our faith.

Have you heard of the "Human Library?" The Human Library is designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue. The Human Library is a place where real people are on loan to readers, a place where difficult questions are expected, appreciated and answered. What would happen if people borrowed us? In a sense they do. If people know that we call ourselves Christians, then they just might be checking us out, trying to see what Christianity is all about.

One place people can check us out is in our work place. After all if we spend 40 or more hours a week around other people, they are going to get the chance to see how we live. They will be able to see if we actually try to put our faith into practice or if we leave our faith behind when we walk inside the workplace doors. Earlier this year the Barna Institute reported on a study of Christians in the work place. The good news is that a majority of Christians were committed to living out their faith where they worked.

Barna reports that *“working Christians say they hold to standards and virtues of professional integrity that represent the Church (Christian Faith) well. They are rooted in a conviction that Christians should act ethically (82%), speak the truth (74%) and demonstrate morality (72%). On an even more spiritual level, respondents say working Christians should make friends with non-Christians (66%), withstand temptation (59%) and do excellent work in an effort to bring glory to God (58%). Most believe people of faith should be guided by an attitude of humility (63%) and service (53%), while also looking out for others by speaking out against unfairness or injustice in the workplace (53%) and bringing grace and peace to others (48%).”* When we as Christians live this way, not hiding our faith from others, we can be a living witness for the Lord. This may open the door for us to help others and to tell them about the difference being a Christian makes in our lives.

Annie Johnson Flint wrote a poem, “The World’s Bible” that begins this way.

Christ has no hands but our hands To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet To lead men in His way;
He has no tongues but our tongues To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help To bring them to His side.

Being a Disciple of Jesus Christ is our new identity, an adventure from start to finish in which God’s grace and love always comes to us on their way to someone else. When God’s love and grace reaches others through us, that is a wonderful life.