

A Call to Help Fulfill the Great Commission

Purpose: To encourage the students to continue in fulfilling the Great Commission by involvement in building multiplying disciples.

Objectives: By the end of this lesson the student will

1. be able to explain why the focus of the Great Commission is on making disciples.
2. be able to explain why it is critical for the church to be involved in making disciples if the worldwide movement is going to succeed.
3. have a greater sense of the need to be involved in building disciples.

Key Verses: Matthew 28:19, 20

Note to instructor: You could begin the talk by talking about some of the wonderful things that are happening on campus, in your church, city or something else that would be familiar to the audience.

Share with the class why you're involved in this training. Perhaps share about what first got you involved in a training on evangelism and discipleship.

I. Introduction: Unprecedented Worldwide growth of the Church

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said that, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations." To the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:8 He said, "Behold, I have put before you a door that no one can shut."

We are certainly living in a time when the gospel is spreading throughout the world in an unprecedented way. The door is so wide open we can barely keep track of the growth. We are in the midst of the greatest spiritual harvest the church has ever known.

Note to instructor: The following church growth information may need to periodically be updated. Refer to the latest revisions of Operation World by Johnstone.

Latin America:

In Latin America the number of new believers has been doubling every ten years since 1960. In 1960 there were 7 million people there who had personally put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. By 1980 the number had grown to 21 million. The 1980's saw another 25 million added to that number and another 45 million at the end of 2000 for a total of 90 million believers.

In 1998, Campus Crusade's National Director for Nicaragua reported that 500 people **per day** were indicating decisions for Christ just through the *JESUS* film. When the Sandinistas threw him out of the country in the 1970's, about 3% of the population professed Christ as their Savior and Lord. Since the demise of the Sandinistas, Christianity has blossomed. Today, over 33% of the country has professed faith in Christ.

Africa:

In 1900 there were approximately 8 million Christians in Africa, by 1990 that number had swelled to 275 million, and by 2000 the number swelled to almost 396 million believers – over 2/3 of Africa’s population. That’s 121 million new believers added to the kingdom in the 1990’s!

Asia:

- ▶ In 1950 3% of the population of Asian was Christian; 1980 = 6%; 1996=12%.
- ▶ In 1980 there were 500 known believers in Nepal. By 1995 that number had swollen to 500,000! Today, there are over 2 million believers in Nepal. That’s 10% of Nepal’s population.
- ▶ Since 1980 1.3 million Thais have indicated decisions for Christ. In one year, Campus Crusade for Christ helped existing denominations plant 4,300 new churches in Thailand.
- ▶ In 1949 there were 1.5 million protestant believers in China. Today, there are estimated to be almost 65 million. Just through the ministry of Campus Crusade, 5000 Chinese are coming to Christ daily.
- ▶ The total Christian population of Asia has doubled between 1980 and 1996.

This is incomprehensible growth! To put it in perspective, let’s look at how it compares with the growth of the number of Christians in the western world, i.e., North America, Europe, and Australia.

Note to Instructor: You’ll need about 18 people to make this work at a ration of one person equals 30 million evangelical believers. If you have less than 18, then you can double the 1/30 ration to 1/60, then you’ll only need 9 people. You’ll also need to half the numbers in the chart. You can have someone half stand up for odd numbers. It doesn’t need to be exact.

To do this, simply say, “In 1960 there were 60 million evangelical believers in the west and 30 million in the non-west. If we have one person represent 30 million believers, then we would have two people in the West and one in the non-West.” Have two people stand representing the West and one stand representing the non-West. In 1975 it would have been even – Have one more stand in the non-West. Continue until you reach 2000.

Evangelical Believers Worldwide (☺ = 30 million)

	1960	1975	1985	1990	1995	2000
West	☺ ☺	☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺ ☺
Non-West	☺	☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

In 1960, 2/3 of the world’s Christians lived in the West. Now, 2/3 live in non-western countries. There has been a complete shift of the numerical center of Christianity.

II. The Purpose of the Harvest

We are living in the greatest spiritual harvest the church has ever experienced. Though there is much to rejoice over, this however, is only the beginning of our labors. A bountiful harvest is only the beginning of the process. We do not grow grain simply to fill our silos or to come up with a calculation of the gross tonnage of seed that has been harvested. We do that, but the purpose of a harvest is bread to fill hungry stomachs.

Some years ago, the United States sent millions of tons of wheat to Russia because the Russian people would soon starve without it. What was most amazing about this was that the Russian wheat harvest that year had been the most bountiful ever. In fact, it was more than enough to feed every Russian and have plenty left over for exporting. So why were they in danger of starving? The transportation infrastructure had so deteriorated that they couldn't get the grain to market. The record crop was rotting in the fields.

We are in grave danger of the same tragedy, spiritually. It is simply not enough to plant seeds and harvest a crop of people – to count indicated decisions for Christ. We must see that crop turned into Christ's disciples.

III. The Great Commission

Read Matthew 28:18-20. In the Greek, the only verb in this passage is the command to “make disciples.” The other three verbs, “go,” “baptize,” and “teach,” are actually participles describing what needs to be done to fulfill the command. They carry the weight of a command only because of their relationship to the main verb – make disciples. In other words, it is better written, “As you are going, make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.”

In Matthew 10:25, Jesus says a disciple is one who is becoming like his teacher. The goal of the Great Commission is not converts, but **disciples** – those who are becoming like their Savior.

In the Greek, the emphasis is not on going. It assumes that we are going. Rather the whole emphasis is on making disciples. How do we make disciples? There are two parts to the process, baptizing and teaching to obey. Baptizing is related to evangelism. In those days, shortly after conversion, one was baptized to outwardly show his decision to trust Christ. But the process did not end there.

Many today have confused the Great Commission with evangelism. The Great Commission is not primarily an evangelistic commission, but a parenting one. Conversion, like childbirth, is only the first step in the process of developing mature adults. We need to birth babies or we can't make adults. The same is true spiritually. We need to see people come to Christ, but that is not the end. We are to teach them to obey all that Christ commanded us. That's what parents do. They teach their children to obey. The second part of the process is not about education (instructing the mind), but about maturation (teaching to obey).

If we view the Great Commission as an evangelistic commission and we look at those numbers mentioned earlier, our response is one of joy and expectation because the job is near to being done. And in many ways we should, just as we do at the birth of a child.

If however our perspective of the Great Commission is a parenting one, when we look at these numbers we see a whole different thing. While we rejoice over the birth of so many new believers, we also ask, “Who’s going to parent, disciple, and lead them all to maturity?” If we are not doing that, we are not fulfilling the Great Commission.

IV. The Need for Trained Leaders

Operation World is like a Christian encyclopedia of the world. It is a wonderful guide to prayer for fulfilling the Great Commission. Every country of the world is listed. History and demographics are given, along with specific prayer requests. It does not take long before one begins to see a consistently recurring prayer request for non-Western countries. Here is a sample of requests from around the world:

Argentina: Leadership for the church has now become the critical bottleneck for more growth.

Angola: The dearth of trained leadership is becoming the most critical problem for limiting church growth and leadership.

India: Training of Christian leaders is of crucial importance. One of the biggest factors limiting the growth of the church and causing reversions to Hinduism in rural areas is a lack of teaching.

Ukraine: Virtually no pastors in evangelical churches have had any training at all.

Let’s look at some numbers again, this time in relation to spiritual parenting needs:

Worldwide, the average size of a congregation of believers is about 100. During the decade of the 1990’s, 45 million new believers were added to the kingdom in Latin America. If there is one pastor per 100 people, 450 thousand new pastors were needed there. Add to that the 1.2 million new pastors needed to shepherd the 120 million new believers in Africa, and 700 thousand new pastors needed to shepherd 70 million new believers in Asia. There is an immediate need for over 2 million new pastors! Moreover, in the average church of 100, there are 2-3 elders. That adds an additional 4-6 million new leaders needed bringing the total needed for pastors and elders to 6-8 million! Add to those 2 million house-church leaders who have little or no training, and the need becomes astronomically large.

Where will these leaders come from? In any one year, the most that is being trained for leadership worldwide is about 50 thousand. There is a desperate need for trained leaders for the Church if we are to fulfill the Great Commission. We know that our adversary, the Devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, looking for those whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). From the world of nature we know the easiest ones to devour are the young, the infirm and the old. If we don’t develop leadership – people who can parent the burgeoning church – these hundreds of millions of new believers will surely end up as the prophets Ezekiel and Hosea foresaw, “...scattered for

lack of a shepherd, and...food for every beast of the field” (Ezekiel 34:5). “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...so a people without understanding are ruined” (Hosea 4:6, 14).

Operation World concludes that “there is a worldwide lack of men and women truly called of God and deeply taught in the Scriptures to lead the churches. Those who accurately and effectively expound the Scriptures are few, especially in areas where the churches are growing rapidly. May all leaders be an example to their flocks in holy living, evangelism and missionary concern for the world.”

V. What Can You do to Help Fulfill the Great Commission?

Don't be seduced by the numbers game. The Great Commission is primarily about making disciples. To make disciples we must do evangelism, but evangelism alone is not the Great Commission. Take seriously the need to communicate the Gospel “as you are going” throughout life, but don't let it end there.

Don't be seduced by the lie that only evangelists are fulfilling the Great Commission. Making disciples is a group effort. All the gifts are needed to fulfill it. Fan the flame of the gift of God in you.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”
Romans 12:6-8

Use your gifts to serve as God has given you the faith to do so. As we do so, the body of Christ, locally and globally, is built up and matured.

Second, grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Learn His Word as if your life depended upon it – it does! Practice what you learn and **pass it on** to others. Be like Ezra who committed himself to learn the Word, practice the Word and teach the Word. Make learning, teaching and imparting His Word a primary thing in your life. Pursue it as hidden treasure (Proverbs 2:1-5).

Do what you can to help develop indigenous leadership biblically and ministerially. Pray for them regularly. Give to their development. Give to the people who are developing them, not just to evangelistic projects. Campus Crusade for Christ has a project called “Two of a Kind” in which people can support overseas indigenous staff. For more information about this, call (407) 826-2838. Consider going overseas to train. Work on materials and systems here that can be used overseas.

Dr. Ralph Winter, one of the chief statesman in modern missions says this, “We need to take them all something vital, basic, and Biblical lest the entire global Christian family slide into heresy.”

VI. Close

In the 14th century, the bubonic plague swept across Europe. Some villages lost $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of their people. Over $\frac{1}{4}$ of Europe's population, nearly 25 million people, died. Not understanding bacterial infection, they had no idea how to stop it. Interestingly enough, there were some villages scattered throughout Europe that were completely unaffected by the plague. Being a Christian people, the survivors reasoned that these villages were left untouched because they had made a pact with Satan. To purify the land, they descended upon these villages unawares and completely wiped many of them out.

What they didn't know was that they didn't need to understand biology to have protected themselves. Rather, all they needed to understand was the Scripture. The villages they had wiped out were Jewish. The reason they were unaffected by the plague was obedience to a simple command in Deuteronomy. They were sanitary. The plague is spread by fleas that have bitten infected rats. Because of Jewish sanitary laws, rats were kept to a minimum in their villages. Thus, they missed the plague. The irony of the situation is that all Christian villages could have also avoided the plague if only their spiritual leaders knew the Word and had taught it to them.

Lest the same kind of thing happen spiritually to the multitudes of new believers, we need to work intentionally and effectively at making disciples to fulfill the Great Commission. As they mature in Christ through obedience to His Word, they will be protected from the physical, social and spiritual plagues that scourge mankind.

Note to instructor: Break the class into small groups and think through their work or school and their neighborhood. Ask, "How can you help to fulfill the Great Commission there?"

Take some time and think about the situation in which God has placed you. Think about your working place or school. Are there others there that need to be discipled? How can you use the gifts that God has given you right there? How about in your neighborhood? What can you do to reach others and then disciple them? How can you help the cause of Christ to grow? Is there anything God would have you do to help fulfill the Great Commission overseas? Perhaps He would have you to give financially, go short-term, or go long-term. Be prepared to discuss your responses to these questions when you come to class.

Note to instructor: You could say, "As you've read in the notes, millions of converts worldwide are being added to the church. But there is a grave shortage of leaders to "make disciples" of the new converts. What would God have you do? He has entrusted much to you."

Have them discuss the questions at the end of section VI and the Discussion Questions.

In the last 10 minutes of class, ask some to share their thoughts on the notes they read, or what response to God they have made (or will make) because of what was in the notes. Ask, "How has this session affected you?" Then close in a prayer of commitment to Christ and the Great Commission.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the focus of the Great Commission on “making disciples?”

2. Why is it critical for the church to be involved in making disciples in order for the worldwide movement to succeed?