

Principle #13

The Great Commission

our spiritual job description



Principles of Discipleship

Two of the things that we human beings are always interested in are: 1) a famous person's last words, and 2) our purpose here on earth. We look for wisdom and guidance in the parting thoughts of someone we admire; and we are often in search of just the right "job description" that will tell us what to do with our lives.

Jesus provided both for us in His final commands. With (finally!) the full attention of His disciples, He instructed them about their role as His representatives on earth. We would do well to study and internalize those words, for they apply just as much to us as to their 1st-century hearers.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- Matthew 28:16-20

Main Passage: Matthew 28:16-20

The main emphasis here is to "make _____"
(The word "go" is not really a command, as though we have to go to faraway places to fulfill this command; it could be translated "as you are going" or "as you go".
Jesus assumes that we are "going" - what He wants us to do while we are going about our lives is - "make disciples"



What are the two aspects of that process?

- ◆
- ◆

What is the point of including verse 17?
What do you think was the nature of the disciples' doubt?

What two things does He say to encourage them (verses 18 and 20)?

The main emphasis in this verse is on the command to "make disciples" (the rest of the verb forms are participles, though they function like imperatives). To disciple a person to Christ is to bring that person to accept Christ as his or her teacher. Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus' teaching (Matthew 12:46-50).

- NIV Bible
Commentary

Examine these other 2 passages where Jesus gives some final “marching orders.”

◆ **John 20:19-23**

What does Jesus say in this passage to encourage the disciples (19,21, 26)?
(How would you translate that into today's jargon?)

How does He describe their mission? What does verse 23 mean?

◆ **Acts 1:1-8**

In Luke's account here in Acts, what does he add to what Matthew and John have already said?

Summary: Putting it all together

How are the disciples generally portrayed in each of these accounts? How is that significant to us (ie, how are we like them)?

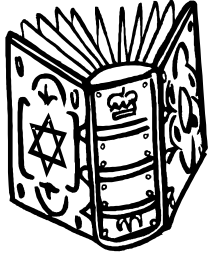
- *Matthew 28*
- *John 20*
- *Acts 1*

What did Jesus feel was most important to convey?

Combining all of these passages, write out in your own words what you think Jesus is telling you He wants you to do:



Jesus' Job Description



It is very common to think of Matthew 28 as the Great Commission, and rightly so. However, there is a very significant passage of Scripture that is often overlooked in this discussion of what we as Christians are to be doing with our lives. In fact, when Jesus visited his own home town of Nazareth and was asked to speak that day in the synagogue, he chose this passage (or it might have been the reading for the day - either way, God orchestrated it!). He stood and began to read. When he claimed to be fulfilling the prophecy at that very moment, the townspeople became upset and actually tried to kill him - not a very happy ending to what should have been a pleasant homecoming! Although this was originally a Messianic prophecy, this "job description" applies to us today as Jesus' followers. In essence, it is really just another way of stating the "Great Commission". Read the passage and note what you see.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor."

Isaiah 61:1-3

- ◆ Where is this passage found in the New Testament - i.e., what Gospel records Jesus quoting it? (Hint: use your Bible's cross-references.)
- ◆ Does Jesus quote all of it? If not, why not?
- ◆ What is the crucial reminder for any ministry of ours, found right at the beginning of this passage?
- ◆ What happens if we forget this, and try to change people through our own cleverness, strength or wisdom? Have you ever done that?
- ◆ How does this passage portray people? Does this give you insight into what is going on inside of people, despite what the outside might look like?
- ◆ How does Isaiah 53:3 relate to this passage?
- ◆ How does the passage end? Who gets the credit? Why is that so appropriate?

from The Race by John White



Now let us look at the kind of people we are to be as we evangelize. The essence of witness is just plain honesty. We are salt, whether we feel like it or not. We are not told to act like salt but *to be* what we *are*. We are light. God has done a work in our lives. We don't have to *try* to shine. We need simply to let the light that God put there shine out.

To let my light shine demands no more than honesty. It demands honesty before unbelievers. Witnessing is not putting on a Christian front so as to convince prospective customers. Witnessing is being honest, that is, being true to what God has made me in my speech and in my day-to-day behavior.

Such honesty will demand that we talk about Christ to unbelievers with whom we converse. The fact that we have in the past had to create openings to talk about spiritual things proves that subconsciously we have been avoiding the openings that are continually being presented to us.

Now if we are partially honest (total honesty is rare and difficult) in a conversation with an unbeliever, we will find it extremely difficult to avoid talking about Christian things. Do you say it is difficult to witness? I maintain that, with a little honesty, it is impossible not to witness.

Honesty will demand admitting that we don't know everything. Salesmen are never supposed to be stumped for answers. But we are not called to be salesmen but to be witnesses, that is, to be open about what we know and have experienced.

Are you waiting until you have all the answers before you start to witness? Don't. By all means think through answers to problems, but don't postpone witnessing until you have them all. Be prepared to say you don't know. No one will be surprised. God does not depend on the debating powers of Christians.

Some years ago some Moody Bible Institute students had an evangelistic meeting at the University of Chicago. So intellectual an institution as the University of Chicago had to be intimidating! During a discussion period following their presentation a number of difficult questions were asked. The Moody students had the good sense to admit they couldn't answer some of them.

Their honesty was an integral part of their witness.

And it accomplished its purpose. A University of Chicago faculty member publicly expressed interest in hearing more. He said that for the first time he had met Christians who admitted they didn't know everything.

This, he said, far from lessening his confidence in them, had in fact awakened it.

Honesty will also demand the acknowledgement of failure. Failure is bad, but deceit about failure is worse. The end never justifies the means.

I do not mean that honesty means giving way to all our worst instincts. But I do contend that to admit to anger is better than to pretend that we are not angry. I also contend that to admit to failure in our Christian life, far from being prejudicial to testimony, may even be part of it. Our honesty, of itself, is a witness. It takes spiritual grace and courage to admit failure. Only those who are not concerned about themselves and their public Image but about their Lord will be able to do it.

But do not sin and failure put Christ to open shame? Yes, indeed they do. But the shame is not removed by covering sin so much as by dealing with it. And clearly we cannot begin to deal with it until we are honest about it with ourselves and, when necessary, with others.

Don't wait until you are perfect to witness. Witnessing involves being honest all the time - now. Never cover up your weakness to witness. What the world is waiting to see is not a perfect Christian but the miracle of grace working in a weak, imperfect Christian.

Many Christians today have a tragic misconception of the importance of the role they play in the conversions of others. We should plead, not because our pleading saves, but because we can't help but plead. We are being true to what the Holy Spirit is doing within us. It is the Holy Spirit who is the real midwife to a newborn soul.

I believe that in modern evangelism, both public and personal, we all too often sell our birthright for a mess of pottage. We think we have harnessed the Holy Ghost when all we have harnessed is cheap psychology. We are not presenting a Person but promoting a symbol. We have been called to the glory and honor of being witnesses to the Lord of history and the redeemer of our race, and we fuss about with our silly techniques for "getting decisions."

It is time we quit our blasphemous fooling. It is time to let our light so shine before people that they glorify our Father who is in heaven.

SCRIPTURE

Which verses significantly impacted you and why?



ARTICLE

What did you personally glean from this article?



PRINCIPLE

Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:



LIFE APPLICATION

- 1. Do you think witnessing is primarily something you do or something you are? Explain.*
- 2. What's your biggest hang-up or fear when it comes to sharing your faith?*
- 3. Who did the best job of sharing their faith with you?*

