

## BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

### 3

## SENT TO BE A BLESSING

Matthew 28:16–20

By Mary Youtz

*“People get very puzzled by the claim that Jesus is already ruling the world, until they see what is in fact being said. The claim is not that the world is already completely as Jesus intends it to be. The claim is that He is working to take it from where it was—under the rule not only of death but of corruption, greed and every kind of wickedness—and to bring it, by slow means and quick, under the rule of his life-giving love. And how is he doing this? Here is the shock: **through us, his followers**. The project only goes forward insofar as Jesus’ agents, the people he has commissioned, are taking it forward. . . . those who believe in Jesus, who are witnesses to his resurrection, are given the responsibility to go and make real in the world the authority which he already has.”*

Tom Wright

*“The workplace is [part of] God’s strategic plan for reaching the lost. God has trained and deployed Christians in an environment where they can naturally talk and flow in their professions at all levels of society.... [This is] an opportunity to infiltrate society with the gospel.*

*The workplace is our mission field. It’s where God has placed us to witness to the lost. God has put you where you are to bring blessing to those around you. Our ministry is right before us [at work].”*

Craig Heselton

## AIM OF STUDY

- To understand what Jesus' final command (the Great Commission) means and to discover practical ways we can apply it in our daily lives.

## KEY VERSES

“So the eleven disciples went off to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had instructed them to go. There they saw him, and worshipped him, though some hesitated. Jesus came towards them and addressed them. ‘All authority in heaven and on earth’, he said, ‘has been given to me! So you must go and make all the nations into disciples. Baptize them in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit. Teach them to observe everything I have commanded you. And look: I am with you, every single day, to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:16–20  
Tom Wright's Translation  
*Matthew for Everyone*

## PREPARATION

The authors suggest you read over the notes on “How to Teach the Bible in Small Group” and “Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion” in Vineyard Church of Columbus' *Small Group Leadership Training Manual* if you feel your inductive study skills are rusty. Then, before you read over the Scripture text, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read through the passage keeping an open heart and ear to the Lord. Finally, read through the Bible study below.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. **Therefore, use this Bible study as a framework for the discussion you lead in your small group meeting. This means, you will need to**

- Go over the questions and **choose** which ones you want to emphasize and which you will eliminate since your time is limited.
- Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (\*). Rather than leaving all of these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture's truths and applying them to their own lives.
- Pace yourself. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could **summarize** some of the passage and then go to the final questions.
- Select **one application question** you will use with your group at the end. The question may have more than one part, but the vital Biblical truth you want to encourage your group to put into practice should be the focus of your final question.
- Feel free to suggest that your group **continue** a discussion at the next meeting or at another informal get together. You want to leave time for worship, listening to God, and prayer ministry, so don't feel you must cover every nugget of truth in a passage or allow each group member to share a mini-sermon on every question!

- Also, you may want to create your own introduction by using a personal example or current event that illustrates the point of the study. Your introduction and any background material shared should help lead the group members' thoughts from the present moment into the text.

The authors are providing these questions and accompanying material for the leaders' benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to supply resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously, we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for further study.

The application questions at the end of the study are designed to help both the group and each member look for practical ways to expand the Kingdom of God in their daily lives. Many groups may wish to spend more time discussing this area than going over the details of the text. The central idea of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) should not take long to understand. However, the specifics of how to apply it will vary for each group and individual, so reserve adequate time for the closing application discussion.

## **PREPARATION RECOMMENDATION**

All leaders need to bring to the small group meeting resources listing opportunities to participate in or partner with the missions work of our church. If you already support or engage in missions work endorsed by our church, then you or someone in your group should bring current news from your missionary, along with a map, a list of prayer requests, information on how to support them financially, etc. If your group has not yet “adopted” some type of mission work, bring a list of our church's short and long-term mission projects as well as ways to participate in them. You may find this information in a current issue of *The Mix*, our magazine, or on our website. For more specific details, contact the Administrative Assistant of the Missions Ministry.

We strongly recommend that the leader “assign” the following application question to the group the week prior to using this study. The group members can look for specific answers during their quiet times before gathering the next week. This could result in a more interesting and informative discussion. Also, it may be more fruitful in the long run since people are more likely to remember material that they have discovered themselves.

**\*What are some of the commands that Jesus has given us to obey?**

## **OPENER**

Over 2000 years ago, Jesus came teaching and preaching “the good news of the kingdom” (Matthew 5:23). He also healed the sick and cast out demons, which gave evidence of God's power and authority to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated the reality and superiority of God's kingdom, as opposed to Satan's kingdom of darkness. He called a small group of men to follow Him. They traveled with Him, observed

Him, imitated Him, and were corrected by Him. In about three years, He had trained them to carry on His mission. After His death and resurrection, He directed them to wait for the empowering of the Holy Spirit, who would be with them and enable them to do His works and even more (Acts 1:4–8; John 14:9–26). Since that time, Jesus’ followers have been involved in various ways in obeying His command to make disciples of all nations.

**Describe people that you know of who are expanding the kingdom of God. What are they doing that is effective?**

This question is designed to allow the group to share about people they know personally, famous people, or ministries that they believe to be effective in sharing their faith and expanding Christian influence. Their responses will help the leader understand what ideas people have about the task Jesus has given us, and correct any misconceptions during the study.

Examples of group responses might include:

- People from our church involved in fruitful ministry.
- People leading ministries with world-wide impact such as Billy Graham—worldwide evangelistic crusades; Franklin Graham—worldwide relief ministry; Joni Eareckson Tada—worldwide ministry for people with disabilities, etc.
- The Salvation Army—worldwide evangelization and human aid ministry.
- Nurses Christian Fellowship—American branch of a worldwide ministry to nursing students and nurses, etc.
- Mercy Ministries, which was started as a home for troubled teen girls and young unwed mothers. It also helps place the babies up for adoption.
- Cops for Christ, which is a ministry that reaches out to policemen. Policemen in the ministry staff a table that hands out literature and Bibles and serves free coffee and donuts after roll call for duty.
- Wycliffe Bible Translators, which sends out missionaries to people groups who have no version of the Bible in their native tongue. Field staff record and create a written language before they translate the Bible into those languages. Wycliffe missionaries also evangelize these people groups.

***Pray that each person in your group will see that they are given the job of expanding the Kingdom of God in their daily lives and specific actions they can take to accomplish this.***

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

***This is background material for leaders. You may decide what to share with your group.***

Matthew was a Jew who collected taxes for the Roman government, which occupied Israel at that time (Matthew 9:9–13). Because the tax collectors worked for Rome and often demanded both high taxes and a surplus for personal gain, these men were viewed as traitors by fellow Jews and considered “sinners” by the Pharisees (Matthew 9:10–11). When Jesus called Matthew to become a disciple, Matthew left his secular job and threw a banquet where Jesus dined with him and his “sinful” friends. Matthew wrote his account of Jesus’ life with a distinctively Jewish flavor. He continually stressed the fulfillment of the

kingdom of God; quoted over sixty Old Testament passages; often avoided using the name of God as reverent Jews would (e.g. “kingdom of heaven”; “Son of Man”); explained the true meaning of the Law; and often referred to the Messiah. Matthew was concerned with the theme of discipleship and addressed issues that might assist first century churches such as leadership, church discipline, and the end times. He wrote to strengthen the Jewish believers in Christ as well as to evangelize Jews and Gentiles alike. His final paragraphs, which describe Jesus’ powerful commission to make disciples of all nations, have impacted the Church for nearly 2000 years.

The Matthew 28 narrative started with the beginning of the day Jesus was resurrected. Mary Magdalene and another Mary visited His tomb and were the first to learn of His rising from an angel. They were also the first to see the resurrected Jesus. They delivered a message to His disciples to go to Galilee where they would see the risen Jesus themselves. Later in the chapter, the chief priests and elders made up a story and bribed the Roman soldiers to tell people that the disciples stole Jesus’ body. This was an attempt to explain away the reality of the resurrection.

Matthew’s account is brief. Parallel passages in Luke 24:1–13, 30–48 and John 20:19–30 provide more information about the day’s events. The Great Commission serves as a conclusion to the Gospel and gives us an account of the final meeting between Jesus and His disciples. It is important for the group to see that the physical resurrection of Jesus has changed things in heaven and on earth. “This event had changed the world forever. It announced, not as a theory but as a fact, that God’s **kingdom** had come, that the **son of man** had been vindicated after his suffering, and that there was dawning not just another day, another week in the history of Israel and the world, but the start of God’s new age that would continue until the nations had been brought into obedience” (Wright, p. 200). Jesus has been given all authority in both heaven and earth. The result is His commissioning the disciples to a new work in a new age (Wright, p. 199). Jesus’ universal Lordship now demands a universal mission (France, p. 413). Other Bible passages show that God’s plan has always been to unite all people to Himself (Ephesians 1:9; Genesis 12:1–3; Psalm 67; Daniel 7:13–14).

#### **STUDY THE PASSAGE: Matthew 28:16–20**

##### **1. Would someone read the passage aloud for us?**

**How did the remaining disciples react to Jesus (v. 17)? How did Jesus respond to them (v. 18)?**

The phrase “some hesitated” shows that it took some disciples longer to believe than others. You can remind the group of Thomas’ experience (John 20:24–28). The Greek verb used here, *distazo*, suggests a state of uncertainty and hesitation and its only other use is in Matthew 14:31. It does not show a settled unbelief (France, p. 412). Also note that others who saw the resurrected Jesus did not recognize Him, such as those on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Point out that Jesus was willing to accommodate those whose faith was weak, and therefore took longer to

believe in Him. In another example of patience and accommodation, Jesus came to the disciples who were in hiding and spoke to them (John 20:19–20).

**\*How does Jesus' reaction to the disciples encourage you to expand the Kingdom of God during your day (for example, by sharing your faith)?**

Jesus' willingness to understand and accept His disciples' doubt should encourage us at our current levels of faith. Our willingness to step out of our comfort zone may rise and fall according to the circumstances of the moment and our previous experiences. We may get discouraged if we do not quickly see the results of our influence on and prayers for others. We might have to risk rejection or breaking social taboos (such as, "don't talk about politics and religion") to share our beliefs with others. Even praying for others in a small group setting or at the end of the Vineyard services can seem intimidating at first.

**2. What has been given to Jesus (v. 18)? How does this impact us?**

The Greek word used for "authority" here is *exousia*. It means "the power of rule or government," the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others (*Vine's Expository*, p. 45). A common example used to explain this concept is that of policemen who direct traffic. Policemen do not have the physical power to stop traffic, but most people obey them because all of the laws and the rest of the police department stand behind them. Jesus now possesses all authority in heaven and earth. This is the reason His disciples are able to overcome opposition and do the commanded tasks.

The verb "to give," translated "has been given" in the NIV, is in the ingressive aorist tense. This indicates that the prophecies about the Messiah have now been fulfilled (Jeremias, cited in France, p. 413). Also note that other Bible passages (Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 8:1) refer to Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father. This image refers to Jesus in the favored position to the right of the throne of Almighty God.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil at the beginning of His ministry, He refused to bow down and worship Satan as a means to receiving "all the kingdoms of this world and their splendor" (Matthew 4:8–10). Now, after living obediently, suffering rejection, and humbly dying a painful death, the resurrected Jesus has much more than anything Satan could have offered—"all authority in heaven and earth" (France, p. 413).

**3. List the tasks that Jesus tells His disciples to finish in verses 19–20.**

Depending on the translation used, the answers should be: make disciples, baptize the new believers, and teach them to observe the commands of Jesus. Point out that the command is to include all people (v. 19; Luke 24:47). Notice that there is a personal commitment included in making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. Compare these verses to Acts 1:8, noting the repetition of the word "you."

Baptizing and teaching are participles that are dependent on the main verb “make disciples;” they further specify what is involved in discipleship (France, p. 414). Note that Jesus did not make baptism optional for His followers, although baptism was not necessary for the thief on the cross to receive salvation (Luke 23:32–33, 39–43). The Bible teaches that baptism signifies dying to the old life and sharing in Jesus’ new life. Try not to let too much of the discussion revolve around theological implications of baptism. People who need to be baptized or want to find out more can attend our church’s baptism class and read the article on baptism in *The New Bible Dictionary* and *Systematic Theology* listed in the bibliography. The singular word “name” shows the unity of the three persons of the Trinity.

At this point, Jesus transfers primary responsibility for the teaching role to His disciples. Of course, the Holy Spirit will teach and guide the disciples when Jesus is no longer bodily present with them (John 14:25–26, 16:12–15). Help the group see that this directive requires teaching specific commands Jesus gave during His earthly ministry. “To ‘make disciples’ is not complete unless it leads them to a life of observing Jesus’ commands” (France, p. 415).

**4. What are some of these teachings that Jesus has commanded us to observe? You will have to go outside this passage to give examples.**

If you assigned the question in “Preparation Recommendation,” ask group members for their responses to the question. It will be necessary to use Scripture verses outside Matthew 28 to answer this question. We have listed a few to help you in preparation or to keep track of what your group discusses.

- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)
  - Settle disputes quickly (Matthew 5:23–26)
  - Jesus expanded the meaning of the Ten Commandments to include the thought life (Matthew 5:21–22 and 27–28)
  - Love our enemies (Matthew 5:38–47)
  - Forgiveness of those who wrong us (Matthew 6:14–15 and 18:21–35)
  - How not to pray and how to pray (Matthew 6:6–13 and 7:8–11)
  - Proper priorities in life (Matthew 6:19–21, 33)
  - Warning against worry (Matthew 6:25–32)
  - Warning against judging others (Matthew 7:1–5)
  - The golden rule for how to treat others (Matthew 7:12)
- Jesus commissioning the disciples includes feed the poor, heal the sick, cast out demons, and preach the message of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:1–15)
- Imitating Jesus’ self-denial (Matthew 16:24–27)
- Forgiveness (Matthew 18)
- Stewardship (Matthew 19:16–30, 25:14–30)
- Mercy (Matthew 25:31–46).

**\*Think over the past week and how you spent your time. Which of your activities contributed to the tasks Jesus gave His followers to carry out?**

You might want folks to make a list of the main things they did and look over it without reading each one aloud. Many verses in Scripture mention practical steps, habits, and attitudes that help us grow to be more like Jesus. These verses can give us specific guidelines to evaluate how we are growing in our faith and applying it to various areas of our lives. So, people's responses to this question may range from Scripture memory or private prayer, to teaching a children's church class, discipling a younger believer or praying for a roommate or co-worker, to serving at a food pantry or visiting a shut in. Remind people to make sure there is balance between getting closer to God and reaching out to others in His Name. Hopefully, some group members will have something to share about how God used them during the week that will encourage others, such as divine appointments or praying for others. You may also want to ask people on their own to pray about and examine further their time usage and how God may wish to expand their daily influence on others.

**5. What promise did Jesus make to His disciples (v. 20)?**

He will always be with us—ALWAYS. His empowering presence enables us to perform the tasks He has given us to do. Similarly, God promised to be with His people as they entered the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 31:6, echoed in Hebrews 13:5). In the Old Testament, the presence of God often came to or upon people before they were called into His service (Moses, Exodus 3:12; Joshua, Joshua 1:1–9; Samuel, 1 Samuel 3:10–21; David, 1 Samuel 16:1–13; etc.)

**\*What are some ways the presence of the Holy Spirit helps us fulfill the jobs Jesus gave us?**

The Holy Spirit who dwells in us initiates and energizes effective ministry. We cooperate with Him as we submit to His guidance and ask for His power (Philippians 2:12–13; Galatians 3:1–3; Ephesians 5:8–9, 15–18). It is important that your group members understand this so that they do not leave with a “works mentality” or with unnecessary guilt about their perceived effectiveness or lack of it. He also gifts us to build up other believers and to do the works of ministry Kingdom of God (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1–16; 1 Peter 4:10–11). Encourage people to share times when the Holy Spirit helped them see whom to pray for, how to pray, gave them the courage to share their faith, etc. Possible answers include the Holy Spirit preparing people's hearts to be open to the gospel, giving words of knowledge, leading us to divine appointments, and prompting our minds with suggestions of words to say when sharing our faith.

For those who want to study further on their own, suggest these passages that provide examples of how the Holy Spirit guides us into ministry:

- Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well (John 4:1–42).
- The Spirit's directions given to Paul's team about where to minister (Acts 16:6–1).

- Peter’s meeting and healing the blind beggar (Acts 3).
- Philip’s meeting and witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39).

## APPLICATION

**\*If you were to write the Great Commission as your job description, how would you put it into your own words?**

As a leader, prepare your “job description” in advance, if you are going to use this question.

**\*The Great Commission is our “job description” as Christians. However, it is a broad command that we can apply in many different situations and with various groups or individuals. At the beginning of our study, we mentioned some individuals or groups who were advancing the Kingdom of God.**

**Now it’s our opportunity to join with others in our church who are implementing the Great Commission. As I read through a descriptive list, think about which of these ministries you would like our group to participate in.**

This question is designed to help the group see more specific avenues to fulfill Jesus’ command. Just as we tend to focus our efforts on work that is suited to our abilities and personalities, certain ministries aim for specific areas to apply the Great Commission. This is a partial list of how some of our church members are reaching out. Leaders should have a current copy of handouts from the various ministries in our congregation to refer to so that you can update the information below. Some of the ministry opportunities appear in *The Mix*, our monthly magazine, or on our website. See Preparation Recommendation at the beginning of this study.

1. The Fruit of the Vine, part of Vineyard Church of Columbus, which operates in many arenas, including a food pantry, a free medical clinic, outreaches to the homeless, visits to nursing homes and prisons, etc. See the list of group and individual opportunities to serve displayed in information racks in the church lobby. Find out about their partnership with Vineyard churches overseas and ministry trips.
2. Project Compassion, which offers opportunities to meet AIDS patients’ spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. Find out about their overseas ministry efforts, too.
3. International Friendships, Inc., which offers a variety of opportunities to serve and build relationships with international students here in our community.
4. Alpha, which provides opportunities to serve or meet people who are interested in learning about Christianity in a non-threatening environment.
5. Short-term missions trips such as ones to Brazil, China, Mexico, Ontario, Tanzania, and Zambia.
6. Supporting missionaries sent from our home church through prayer, financial gifts, and practical help.

**\*Which ministry could we partner with in the next few weeks to assist in fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission?**

Ask the group to select a ministry from the church and pray for it at each meeting as well as make arrangements to give hands on support to it.

**\*What are some ways we can help fulfill the Great Commission today?**

This question is more general than the two above it. It could include a wide range of actions since people's gifts differ and many contributions that are not obvious are needed in God's kingdom. More visible ways would include preaching, evangelism, teaching, leading worship, and praying for the sick. Less noticeable contributions would include intercession, donating time, skills, and money, offering practical help such as hosting or setting up chairs, organizing events, and providing help with visual and audio equipment. Ministry outside regular church meetings could range from visiting people in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, or homeless gathering places, to assisting with activities offered through a food pantry.

Also discuss some of the places the group members are on a daily, weekly, or otherwise regular basis, and people they have developed (or could develop) relationships with. Common examples would include extended family, co-workers, neighbors, civic associations, and social clubs. Help the group think of ways the above activities could be applied in these situations. For example, Jesus' followers could pray for divine appointments at their jobs, or ask a family member to attend church with them. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." This general prayer can become more specific by praying that God's kingdom would come to people and places where God has now placed us.

**WRAPPING IT UP**

The Great Commission is our job description as Christians. How we apply it will change as our lives change. This week, let's actively look for ways to expand the Kingdom of God in our daily lives and as a small group. The Great Commission is not just for people who are missionaries or evangelists; it's for all of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ.

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