

It's Not Optional

Matthew 28:16-20

It used to be that when you bought a car, you had a choice of options you could have installed. Sometimes the cars came with those options, so you had to pay more for them. And I remember when the options were simple: air conditioning, tinted windows, white walled tires—you know, very basic things. My first car had none of those things, so I could get it as cheaply as possible. It didn't even have floor mats. But now the options are much more involved and expensive.

In more expensive cars, the options are much more elaborate, as you would expect. For example, the Hyundai Equus features a mini-refrigerator that fits between the two rear seats. The Ferrari 612 offers colored seatbelts as an option for nearly a thousand bucks. An “entry level” Rolls-Royce now offers a Teflon-lined, full-sized golf umbrella that fits inside the car door, so your chauffeur will always have one at his fingertips. Listen to this one: In that same Rolls-Royce, for around \$12,000, you can get 1,600 tiny fiber-optic lights embedded in the fabric above your head. And if you're in the market for a new Porsche, you can add up to \$100,000 in options before you drive it off the lot.

Options. We like having them, even if we're not buying an outrageously expensive luxury car. It's about having choices. We like going to a restaurant where there are plenty of options. We like looking to see what's on television, because we like options. An option offense in college football can make the game more exciting.

But now think about living for Jesus. Imagine that you are just one of a small group of people who have assembled on a mountain. A Man stands before you, and He gives you a command: “Go, and make disciples of all nations.” But this Authoritative Figure doesn't give you a run-down of all the gleaming options.

Because there aren't any.

The Scripture we've just read has been called “The Great Commission.” But in actual practice many Christians act as though it were “The Great Suggestion.” We have a command as Christians, and that command is to “Go, and make disciples.” It is a command, and there are no options—because for the Christian, witnessing and making disciples is not optional.

Ray Ortlund is Lead Pastor of Immanuel Church of Nashville, Tennessee. He once wrote about a breakfast meeting he had with two other Christian men. One of the men spoke up and said, “You know, the thing that bothers me about people in the church is that they think that what they do, how they live, whether or not they are faithful, whether they witness, whether they are obedient, whether they surrender, is all optional! They want to live as they please and then have heaven and eternity.” Then he said, “It isn’t optional! We are disciples of Jesus Christ!” (*Intersections with Christ at the Crossroads of Life*, Word, 1979, p. 86)

Even though we act as though it were, sharing Christ with others is not optional.

Why not? We have so many other options in life available to us today: what we will eat, and when; with whom we associate and when; the programs we will watch on television, if any; the books we read; the places we go. Why isn’t telling others about Jesus an option as well?

1 Because God’s purpose is that we spread the good news of Christ.

Once Jesus spoke with His disciples about living a life pleasing to God. He said to them, “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:14). But then to clarify that, Jesus went on to say, “*A city set on a hill cannot be hid.*” Imagine someone trying to hide a city, when that city was built on the only hill for miles around. What an impossible task!

What Jesus was trying to emphasize to His disciples was that because they were the light of the world, their light would cause the people of the world to recognize them as followers of Jesus Christ. That fact could not be denied. They were the light of the world, and that was not optional!

Jesus went on to say to His disciples that men do not light a lamp and then put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, so that it may give light to all who are in the house. In our day, it would be like turning on a lamp and then putting it in a closet and shutting the door. We don’t do that, do we? At least not normally. The purpose of lighting a lamp is to receive light, and Jesus said that the most natural thing to do is to place that lighted lamp where it will do the most good.

God’s purpose in lighting up our lives with the glorious Gospel is not so that we may hide that light under a basket, or shut it up in a closet, but so that we might spread the good news of that Gospel. It’s not optional!

A man once registered at the desk of a small town hotel, and announced that he was a traveling salesman. The clerk behind the desk told him where he could find a rolling cart for his baggage. The salesman replied, "I don't have any." The clerk asked, "You don't? I thought you said you were one of those traveling salesmen."

The man said, "Yes, I am." The clerk asked, "Well, what do you sell?" The salesman pulled himself up to full height and said, "I sell a study course in personal magnetism and will power. I guess you could say that I sell brains." The clerk scratched his head and then remarked, "Well, sir, you are the first salesman I've ever seen who doesn't carry any samples."

Christian, are you carrying samples of your life in Christ? Or is your light hid under a basket or shut up in a closet?

John 7:38 reads, "*He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'*" Imagine you are standing on the cool banks of a rushing river, and you can look across and see the other shore. You can see some of the debris in the water as it rushes past you. You can put out your hand and feel the current. But where does the rushing river go? It has to go somewhere!

The Mighty Mississippi goes to the Gulf of Mexico. The Hudson River goes to the Upper New York Bay and eventually to the Atlantic Ocean. A river has to go somewhere.

The rivers of living water that flow from our daily walk with Christ are meant to ***go somewhere!*** That is the purpose, and the purpose is not optional.

The pipes that carry the water to and from your house are there for a purpose. That purpose is not optional.

The electrical lines that carry electricity are stretched across our town for a purpose, and that purpose is not optional.

The rivers of living water that rush from your being as a Christ-follower are there for a purpose, and that purpose is not optional! That purpose is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, when God chose someone, He chose them for service. To Abraham, God said, "*I will make you a blessing, and you will be a blessing to all nations.*"

The nation of Israel was chosen to be God's people, not because they were better than anyone else, but so that they might spread the truth that there is one God, and that He can be known. And God's purpose is that we, too, spread the good news of God's love and mercy and grace made available to us through Jesus Christ!

2 **Because God's command is that we make disciples for Christ.** The phrase "make disciples" is an imperative—it's a command. Jesus, in those verses, was giving His disciples a command. The command was to "*go, therefore, and make disciples.*"

Now, it is true that in what we call The Great Commission Jesus also said that we are to baptize people and teach them to follow Him, and ***certainly*** that is part of His command. But before all that, Jesus said to "go" and as we go, to "make disciples."

Who is a disciple? What does the word mean? We know who the 12 disciples were, but why were those men called "disciples"? The original word literally means "a learner," and it refers to someone who follows a particular teaching. A disciple was not only a learner, but also followed and lived by what he learned. So they are often spoken of as imitators of their teachers. The twelve disciples were called "disciples" because they followed and imitated Jesus.

You and I, in making disciples for Christ, are seeking to win men and women and boys and girls, to not only ***learn*** what Jesus taught, but also to ***obey*** what Jesus taught. That's what Jesus meant in His commission to the disciples when He said, "*...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...*"

That command was given to all of the eleven remaining disciples, not just to a few of them. It was given to outspoken Peter. It was given to faithful John. It was given to the soul-winner Andrew. It was given to the former tax-collector Matthew. It was given to the disciples who worshipped him on that mountain, as well as to those who doubted. And it is a command given to every single member of Christ's Body, the church. We are just as responsible for carrying out that Commission as were the original disciples. It is not optional.

But notice three additional things about this command. ***First, this command from God to make disciples is possible!*** Never has God given us a command which was impossible for us to obey. He makes it possible for us to do what He asks us to do. Now Jesus knew that the disciples would never go into the world and make

disciples simply because He commanded them to. He knew that they had to be **empowered**.

That's why He said, "...and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." That is why the first chapter of Acts records that Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And just before Jesus ascended to the throne of the Father, Jesus said to His disciples, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus makes it possible for us to obey His command to make disciples of the nations—starting with our neighbors right next door. Because of the Holy Spirit, making disciples can be done!

Second, this command from God to make disciples is practical! The life of Christ is a practical life. It's not a life merely of pie-in-the-sky and religious ideals that have no meaning. Those who claim the Christian way of life is not practical have never truly practiced it.

What is practical about making disciples? It is the highest expression of personal obedience to the command of Christ. It is the best way to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in your life. It is the straightest road to happiness and joy in Christ. Witnessing to others of the love of Christ will bring the sturdiest and most enduring growth to your character as a Christian. It will bring the most joy to your heart. Winning souls for Christ will bring you the richest compensation for the hardship and sorrow that inevitably comes into each of our lives.

Third, this command from God to make disciples has priority! That is, it has priority in the life of every child of God who seeks to obey Christ. This command had priority, and you can see that in the fact that it was the last thing Jesus said to His disciples. Had you thought about that?

And the eleven disciples made this command the top priority as they put Jesus first in their lives.

Does the Commission to make disciples have priority in your life? Suppose someone was to offer you a thousand dollars for every soul you were to win to Christ? Would you try to win more people to Christ than you do right now? Is it possible that you and I would attempt to do for love of money what we are not doing now out of our love for Christ?

If you are employed by someone, you are expected to give that job priority, at least while you are there on the job. Supposed you worked hard one week, but the second week you had only a lukewarm attitude, and the third week you were utterly indifferent? How long would your employer stand for that? How long would you put up with that if you were the employer? Probably not very long. But isn't that the kind of service we give to God in this matter of making disciples?

This command had priority in the lives of the disciples, and it should have the same priority in your life and mine. Anything less is sin.

*Ten little Christians came to church all the time;
One fell out with the preacher, and then there were nine.
Nine little Christians stayed up late;
One overslept on Sunday, and then there were eight.
Eight little Christians were on their way to heaven;
One took the low road, and then there were seven.
Seven little Christians chirped like little chicks;
One didn't like the singing, and then there were six.
Six little Christians seemed very much alive;
One took a vacation, and then there were five.
Five little Christians pulled toward heaven's shore;
One took a rest, and then there were four.
Four little Christians were busy as a bee;
One got his feelings hurt, and then there were three.
Three little Christians discussed what they should do;
One couldn't have his way, and then there were two.*

*Two little Christians went out and won one more;
Those two plus two, brought it back to four.
Four little Christians worked early and late;
Each brought another one, and then there were eight.
Eight little Christians, if they doubled as before,
In just seven Sundays, would have one thousand and twenty-four.
In this little jingle, there is a lesson true.
Do you belong to the "building" or the "wrecking" crew?*

It's not optional!