



What is a Disciple?

J.T. English – August 12, 2018

So good to be here with you today. My name is J.T. English. I am one of the pastors here on staff. I oversee The Village Church Institute, our classes, training program, and all those things, but I am excited to preach today. We're going to be taking a second look at the Great Commission, which we looked at last week, but taking a second look at it today. If you have a Bible (if you don't have one there is one in the seat in front of you), we're going to be in Matthew 28:16-20.

As you're turning there, a lot of you know this, some of you don't, but I do want to give you a brief update on my family. I was able to preach in June and gave a story of kind of what's going on in my family's life. So many of you have been kind enough to reach out and pray, I thought it would be appropriate to give you another update.

In May, we found a tumor in my wife's leg, kind of in her hip. Originally we had a diagnosis of cancer. It was just devastating. We lived for a few weeks believing it was cancer, considering treatments. They did a biopsy. They still thought it was cancer. Sent it to an expert, and he said, "Actually, I don't think it's cancer." Which is incredible news. Praise the Lord that this is not originally what we thought it was. Right?

At the same time, we're still walking through. It's been a really challenging season. I think I can safely say one of the most challenging seasons of our lives together. She is still in a lot of pain, and it's kind of a day-to-day process of just seeking the Lord. The Lord's Prayer, "**Give us this day our daily bread.**" It's been a very intimate reality for us. We're not living tomorrow today. We're living today today. Just trusting the Lord to be gracious to us today.

This is an emotional service for me as she is here. She is in this service and hasn't been here in months. Yes, so grateful she is here. The most important thing I can tell you is thank you. The Lord draws near to his people through his people most often. That has been our story here, that the Lord has been nearer.

In the midst of our brokenness and hurt and pain and fear, and it's often been because your faces have walked through our door or you've called or you've texted or whatever it's been. Or you just prayed for us, and maybe you don't even know us. The Lord has drawn near to us here. What I want to tell you is thank you.

Macy and I have said over and over and over again, we could not imagine being anywhere else because The Village Church is our family. This is a church that knows how to suffer well and walks through suffering well with people. I came here to be a minister and try to minister the gospel to you, but I've been a recipient of the gospel, and my family has been a recipient of your generosity and grace. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. I want to invite you to continue to pray for us.

We don't have another scan until October, so we're continuing to walk through, just kind of a slow treatment process, totally trusting on the Lord, believing he is doing something beautiful in the midst of us so we might be more conformed to his image as a result of this trial. Thank you for praying for us. I would invite you to continue to. That's the update.

Let's jump into Matthew 28:16-20. Like I said, we're taking a second look. Last week, Trevor Joy preached a wonderful sermon asking us to consider what it looks like to participate into the Great Commission. An invitation to this adventure to be on mission with Jesus. Today, I want to try to answer a really simply question for us.

It's a question that often goes unanswered, but it's the first question we should ask when we look at a text like this. That question is: *What is a disciple?* What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What is Jesus talking about when he says make disciples? That's the question I want to try and answer today. Let's look at Matthew 28:16-20.

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

What is discipleship? What is Jesus asking us to do? As he speaks these last words to his disciples, what is he telling us to do as we go make disciples? You see, often this text is used to command us to do other things other than make disciples. Like go, teach, or baptize, but in the original language, those aren't the commands.

The only command in this text is to make disciples. *Go* is not a command. *Teach* is not a command. *Baptize* is not a command. In the original language, the only command is *make disciples*. It could be translated like this: As you're going, make disciples. As you're teaching, make disciples. As you're baptizing, make disciples. The emphasis, the pinnacle of this passage, is on discipleship.

Often discipleship is misunderstood. People will think, "If I could just know more of the Bible. Or if I could just get my sin patterns more controlled. Or if I could just..." fill in the blank, that's what discipleship looks like. How does Jesus define discipleship? The term *discipleship* is used 269 times in the New Testament. The word *Christian* is only used three times.

It would be pretty easy for us to define what a *Christian* is, as least subculturally in American evangelicalism, but can we define, the way Jesus would, *discipleship*? I think, based upon this text, Jesus would say there are three things that are true for disciples. *Disciples have been adopted by God, disciples are being formed by God, and disciples are empowered by God for life and mission.*

What does it look like to have been adopted by God? Look back at the text, verse 19: "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...**" Baptism. If you were here last week, you got to see incredible testimonies of our brothers and sisters who entered the waters of baptisms.

They got to share testimonies with us of dying to self and now being alive to Christ. That they were one person, but they are now somebody else, so they have received a new identity. That they were once orphans in the world, separated from God because of their sinfulness, their wickedness, their rebellion, and their sin patterns. They had rejected God.

The Bible is very clear that Genesis, chapter 3, has affected all of humanity, that all of us before God are sinners. Another term we don't often talk a lot about is the Bible would describe us as orphans, without a father, fatherless in the world, lonely, desperate, and seeking to make an identity for ourselves by ourselves. To be baptized in this text, though, literally means to be reidentified with the Father, to be given a new identity, to be possessed by God.

You see, this is harder for us to understand, perhaps, in the twenty-first century, but in the world of the Bible, one's identity and vocation are tied up with what their name is and who their father is. This might make sense why often James and John are called the sons of Zebedee, because that was their identity. Or Joshua would be called the son of Nun. Right?

Who your father was, had everything to do with who you identified with. They even say this about Jesus, "Isn't that Jesus, the son of Joseph?" Because your identity was wrapped up with who your father was and what your name was. We understand this a little bit in our culture.

I'm not sure if you saw, but there was an interview LeBron James did this week. The full interview is going to be released in a few more weeks. I think either at the end of this week or next. He was doing an interview about, of course, the new team he is on, his sons, his family, and all that's going on his life. One of the things he was talking about was his sons.

I'm not sure if you know this, but there is a great deal of expectations placed upon the best basketball players in the world's sons, right? That they might be the best basketball players in the world also. Actually, some sports writers and agents are saying his sons have the chance to be as good, if not better, than he is. They are 14 years old.

Could you imagine those expectations? To have the expectation of this being your father and that identity placed upon you? One of the things LeBron said in the interview I found fascinating is not only is that expectation placed upon his son because of who his father is, LeBron actually named his son, LeBron James, Jr. He said in the interview, "I regret naming my son after me." I understand that.

I understand why he might regret that, because he was unintentionally placing unrealistic expectations on his son, expectations his son is not asking for, his son is not wanting, maybe, to be true of him. Maybe he doesn't even want to be a basketball player, but he is going to go through life with an identity and expectations placed upon him because of who his father was and because of what his name is.

Some of you might not know this about me, but my name is John Thomas English, III. My wife said to me she first decided she wanted to marry me because of my name. I was like, "That's kind of offensive. Don't you like me?" Apparently, she found my name more attractive than me. That's just the way life goes sometimes.

I'm John Thomas English, III, and have this identity of who I am wrapped up in who my grandfather was, Colonel John Thomas English, and who my dad is, John Thomas English, Jr. For my entire life, I've had this set of expectations set for me of what it is meant to be an English.

I actually wrestled with whether I should name my son after my father and my grandfather or not (I didn't want to name him after me). So Thomas, my son, is actually John Thomas English, IV. At some point, he is going to understand that part of who I am, my name, is wrapped up in this identity, this family I come from, who my father is, and what my name is.

I have a friend who is the third. He and his dad had a really wonderful relationship. He and his dad eventually kind of had some heated disagreements and saw the world in different ways. His dad came to him once and he said, "I wish I hadn't given you my name." Could you imagine the pain that would cause? "You don't resemble and embody what this family is about. I regret giving you my identity."

I want you to look back at the text. What does Jesus say a disciple is? A disciple is somebody who has been baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What is Jesus saying? "Go into all the nations, find the orphans of the world, the sinners who are lost, needy, desperate, broken, separated from God, finding their identity in other things, and tell them they have a Father in heaven who loves them, who sent his Son to die for them so they might receive forgiveness of sins and is ready to indwell and empower them with the Holy Spirit. Tell the orphans I want to adopt them, they can come home."

What's different about this Father than that father who said, "I wish I hadn't given you my name," is this Father is entirely ready to identify with the orphans. He says, "Give them my name." An immovable name. Here is what Jesus is saying. "The orphans who find their identity in what they do, what they have, their greatness accomplishments, their worst accomplishments, their best moment or their worst moment, tell those orphans that through baptism, through adoption, through conversion, they can become sons and daughters, and I will give them my identity. They're no longer going to be known as an orphan. They'll be known as a son or a daughter."

You see, LeBron expresses some hesitation to name his son after him. I expressed some hesitation, and my friend's father expressed not only hesitation, but regret and doubt. God has no hesitation in adopting you as a son or daughter. "Baptize them in my name. Give them a new identity." He freely

and fully extends his name to you through the forgiveness of sins. Disciples have received adoption and are given a new name, the name of God.

Something that's not in my notes... This one is free, so this could go wheels off. Something I'm passionate about here, too... Matt always jokes with me that I'm passionate about the Trinity. I'm like, "Yes, because I love God." Because that *is* God. Often in discipleship programs, we're told that Trinitarianism is reserved for the elite. Let's leave that at the end, let's put it in the appendix of our theology books, but what does Jesus say?

Trinitarianism is Discipleship 101. "Baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," because there is no other God through whom we can receive fellowship and forgiveness of sins. This triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, gives you a new name, gives you a new identity, invites you into a new family as adopted sons and daughters. The first mark of a disciple is an orphan who has been adopted by God and is now a son or a daughter because they have been given a new name.

Disciples aren't just adopted by God, though, they are also formed by God. We wouldn't just come into a new family, but would begin to resemble and look like the family, to resemble the characteristics of our Father, who is in heaven. That's why Jesus says in verse 20, "We don't just baptize them, we also teach them." He tells his disciples, "**...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**"

We need to do some real talk for a second. I believe one of the greatest challenges we face today as a church, whether this is The Village Church, whether we're talking about the contemporary church as a whole, or the universal church across all nations, is we have put forward methods of ministry and a philosophy of ministry that believes discipleship ends with conversion. We have removed the concept of learning, striving, imitation, growth, and development from our understanding of what a disciple is.

But evangelism without discipleship is cheap grace. Any kind of evangelism that only preaches justification by faith, but not sanctification and grace is not only a small gospel; it's a false gospel. Evangelism without discipleship is cheap grace. It tells us that conversion is the touchdown. Friends, conversion is not the touchdown; it's the kickoff. It's the beginning of the game. Being adopted into the family is not the end of life; it's the beginning of life.

It's not enough just for us to be adopted into God's family, but as children of God now, we now pursue maturity into adulthood, looking more and more like Christ. Jesus says, "**...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**" Up until this point in the gospel, the only teacher Matthew refers to is whom? Who is the teacher? Jesus. He says, "Now that I am leaving, now that I am going to our Father in heaven, you're the teachers." You go teach all nations...what? What are they teaching? All that Jesus commanded.

One of the greatest scandals of the contemporary church, though, is the scandal of Bible illiteracy. For the most part, the evangelical church does not have a firsthand knowledge of the Bible text. I call this *discipleship by proxy*. I have participated in this. It's really easy to think I know a lot about the Bible, if I'm around somebody who does.

Friends, I want to be honest with you, that's a great threat of The Village Church, because we have one of the *best* preachers of a generation, but you cannot rely upon Matt to do discipleship for you. You have to be as familiar with your Bible as Matt is...or as Trevor or Jared or Jen or me or your Home Group leader or your Home Group coach. You are required to have a firsthand knowledge of the Bible. Why? Because it tells you that you are required and invited into teaching about Jesus. How can you teach what you don't know?

Study after study has come out that suggests evangelicals have never been less familiar with our Bibles or the claims of Christianity than we are today. In fact, a study in 2016 suggested non-Christians...secularists, pagans, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses...are more familiar with the claims of the Bible than evangelicals are. They know more about what you and I believe than we do, in other words, is what this study suggests. In other words, we confess that the Bible is our authority, but we practice that we are our own authority.

Let me tell you a little bit about my story. Some of you know parts of this. When I first came to faith in college, I was sitting down... It's still so ironic to me this how God saved me. I was sitting down, eating a Whopper in the student center. A sophomore, who was just one year older me, sat down with me and he handed *The Four Spiritual Laws* to me. He said, "I'm supposed to read this with you" like with the most unconvincing tone in the history of the world. I was just like, "Okay."

We start reading *The Four Spiritual Laws*. We read it in about four minutes. It wasn't like he was explaining these things to me. We just were flipping the pages. He's like, "God loves you, has a wonderful plan for your life, you're a sinner and separated from God, Jesus died to forgive you of

your sins, you can have eternal life in heaven. Do you want to believe?" It's like, "Absolutely! This is the best news ever! This is true? This is real? I can have eternal life in God?" Which goes to show it's not our methods that convert people, but God converts people. Can I get an amen?

Don't be afraid about sharing the gospel. It's not up to you anyway. It's up to the Holy Spirit to show people the beauty of Jesus Christ. But then I began to have this really weird experience in my relationship with the church and with ministries. I had been a Christian for five minutes. I was a brand new, baby Christian, and I thought it would be a really good idea for me to know my Bible. "I've never read this before. I supposedly believe these things, so I should probably get to know what I say I believe."

I began going to churches and ministries and getting involved in things like Home Groups or Bible studies. I was just blown away that a lot of my friends who had been walking with the Lord for 5, 10, 15, 20 years, sometimes longer, were in the same stage of spiritual infancy I was weeks into my walk with Christ and many of them were sometimes decades into their walks with Christ.

Hear me, I'm not trying to bring guilt or condemnation or shame upon them. They hadn't been disciplined. They hadn't had anybody show them the way. They had simply been adopted into God's family, but were never told, "It's now time for you to pursue maturity and growth and eventually become an *adult* Christian to bring up other children and disciples in the faith."

A lot of us were left languishing. "How do we grow? Who is going to teach us?" I didn't even want to go into ministry at this point. I just wanted to know my Bible. I'll never forget, I was told by somebody (I was dating Macy at the time), "Oh, you're dating Macy? Well, you need to lead her in the Word." I was like, "Okay. Let's study Hebrews." We just jumped in. I had no idea what I was doing. God was gracious and merciful to meet us there, but I didn't have anybody to show me the way.

I went to my pastor, and I said, "I'm thinking about ministry. I'm thinking about...like, I feel called to ministry, kind of, but more than anything, I just want to know Jesus more. I want to be intimately connected with him. I want to pursue a relationship with God. What should I do?" Do you know what his answer was? "Go to seminary." I said, "What's that?" I had no idea there was this evangelical subculture of colleges and seminaries and parachurch ministries. I just knew there were churches.

One thing that's interesting about my story is it's kind of like a fish getting placed in the fish bowl without realizing what the surrounding is. I thought to myself, "Isn't that your job? Aren't you supposed to teach me the Bible? Aren't you a pastor? Don't you run a church?" Again, I wasn't trying to bring any guilt or condemnation or shame upon him. I just was flabbergasted we were pursuing models of ministry that weren't discipling people.

We were just gathering and gathering and gathering, and none of us were growing. We were a bunch of spiritual adolescents and spiritual infants stuck in the same place for years and decades and decades. I had to move my family across the country twice to go to seminary. One for a master's degree and one for a PhD. Friends, let me tell you this, I know some of you think I'm smart. I did not go to seminary to be a scholar. I had to go to seminary simply to become a disciple, because the church was not teaching me. I did not have anybody to shape me and to form me and disciple me.

I want you to hear this. Firsthand knowledge of the biblical text... Not knowledge through me or through Matt or through your Home Group leader or through one of your Bible study teachers. You, having a firsthand knowledge of the biblical text, is an absolute necessity of every disciple of Jesus. Period. It is Discipleship Spiritual Formation 101. Start somewhere.

I know it feels incredibly intimidating, but this is where God reveals himself. This is where we come to meet Jesus. This isn't where we come just to be intellectual and smart. It's where we come to have fellowship with God. I think one of the reasons, at least as I have this conversation with people, many people are afraid to pursue a knowledge of the Scriptures or a knowledge of God, is because they have been told pursuing a knowledge of Scripture or a knowledge of the Bible and knowledge of God will actually result in a decreased relationship with God.

I'm sure many of you have struggled with this yourselves. You've been told this, "If you go to seminary, you might lose your faith." Or "If you go to that Bible study (or read that book or whatever it might be), you actually might grow cold-hearted and distant and far from God." We've been told there is a character exactly like that in the Scriptures, the Pharisees, right? We've been told the more the Pharisees knew their Bibles, the further away they grew from Jesus.

Why don't we just pursue a relationship with Jesus? Why do we have to grow in an intimate knowledge of Jesus through the Scriptures? We think the Pharisees knew their Bible so well that they were aware of every jot and tittle, and they had memorized huge portions of it, but they had

become hard-hearted and cold towards God. Let me tell you, the exact opposite is true of the Pharisees.

Jesus never once condemns the Pharisees for knowing the Scriptures. He always condemns them for their ignorance of the Scriptures. A Pharisee is not a Bible scholar. A Pharisee is a missionary who is missional about their own desires, about their own understandings of Scriptures, their misunderstandings of Scriptures. A Pharisee is more like a zealous missionary for their own cause, not a Bible student. A Pharisee is someone who doesn't know their Bible very well and is passionate about it.

You should not be afraid of studying the Scriptures. The Scriptures are for life. Jesus condemned the Pharisees by saying, "You search the Scriptures to find life, but they testify of me." It wasn't that they were reading the Scriptures; it's they were coming to the wrong understanding and weren't seeing Christ in the text.

My experience as a pastor is I have a passion for Bible literacy because nobody taught me. I'm passionate about this because there wasn't anybody around to train me...not to be a pastor, not to be a scholar, but to be a disciple. One of the things that keeps me up at night as a pastor is the biblical and theological illiteracy that plagues us.

Here's one of the things I just really want to make sure you get. The studies we talked about like Ligonier and Lifeway, the studies I just referenced... It's so easy for us because of the preachers we have or because of the teachers we have to think we are somehow not implicated by those studies. "That's the church down the road," or, "That's the other pastor. Our church is theologically oriented and biblically literate."

Friends, we have so much room for growth here. Opportunity to grow in our knowledge of God. If we punt and kick the can down the street, we will miss out on what God has for us, growing in our knowledge from God, moving from spiritual infancy and adolescence into adulthood.

I'm going to move away from my Bible because this is me just pontificating on one thing real quick. Being a pastor now and a professor at a seminary, my experience is the theological and biblical illiteracy is true for both men and for women, broadly. My experience as a pastor and a professor would also suggest that nine times out of ten, women are more theologically and biblically literate

than men. That includes at the graduate level, the doctoral level, includes all the way down to our Bible classes and forums, the training program we teach.

Nine times out of ten, women are more interested in studying the Scriptures than men. They are more interested in getting the text right than men. I've wondered for the longest time why that is the case. Is it that they're smarter? And all the women in the room said, "Amen." That's right. It's not, though. God has gifted both genders equally to seek him and to flourish in him and to know him.

It's not that one gender should know him better or worse. I've come to the realization one of the reasons women are more interested in being excellent Bible study leaders or excellent theologians is because if they want to pursue discipleship or if they want to pursue leadership in the church, they always have to be at the top of their game. Always. If men want to pursue discipleship or leadership in the church, all we have to do is...what? Just show up.

Friends, that's not okay. Right now, the current context of The Village Church, women are embodying and modeling the way of biblical and theological literacy in a way I desire for the men to embody as well. The last thing I want to do is reverse the model. It shouldn't be nine out of ten times the men are doing better than the women.

Friends, we should be a community of brothers and sisters who are poring over the pages of Scripture together, learning from each other, desiring to see men and women flourish as they come to a greater knowledge of God in the Scriptures. We have an awesome opportunity in front of that to be the case, but we have to grasp after it. We have to be the ones who change the narrative and change the story.

I love these quotes from D.L. Moody, who says, "I never saw a fruit-bearing Christian who was not a student of the Bible," and, "So few grow, because so few study." If you want to grow in your relationship with God, you have to be, without any equivocation, a student of the Bible. There is simply no other way to grow in your relationship with Christ and to grow in your knowledge of Scriptures.

I want to be abundantly clear, as Jesus says in verse 20, "**...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**" This teaching is not just informational, it's transformational. He does not

just want the disciples to know more things; he wants them to grow in their obedience. Teach them to obey. Teach them to observe.

Another great scandal of evangelicalism today is the Great Commission has been divorced from the Great Commandment. The Great Commission, "Go...make disciples of all nations," has been divorced from the Great Commandment where Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is love your neighbor as yourself."

Great Commission work can never be divorced from Great Commandment obedience. If we're simply telling people they can have forgiveness of sins without growing in holiness, without growing in righteousness, without growing in obedience and embodying the way of Jesus Christ, again we're not just giving a half gospel, we're giving a false gospel.

Jesus says to make a disciple, adopt them into the kingdom and teach them to obey. Of course, friends, not perfect obedience. None of us will ever reach that this side of glory, but growth in obedience, a desire and a delight in things that are holy. A desire and a delight to be more like Christ.

A.W. Tozer describes the situation this way. He says, "...the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as long as we want to! ...salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred Scriptures." In other words, the gospel is not justification by faith only. It's also sanctification by faith.

The gospel is justification by faith only that also doesn't grow us in holiness is no gospel at all. Another way to say it is, "Converts find Jesus to be useful. Disciples find Jesus to be beautiful." Do you want to follow him? Do you just want access to his benefits? Or do you want access to him? Is he useful to you? Or is he beautiful to you? Those who are growing in holiness are finding Jesus to be lovely and beautiful and worthy of everything.

If the Great Commission is not informed by the Great Commandment, it ceases to be the Great Commission and becomes the great omission. We're telling people a false gospel. Paul says it this way... He says the goal of his ministry is (Colossians 1:28), "**Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**"

God's will for your life, if you've been adopted as a son or a daughter, is to grow you in maturity. I'm not talking about some kind of a perfect curve of growing. That's true for somebody else in here; that has certainly not been my experience. Growth often looks really hectic, right? Up and down, backwards and forwards.

I'm not talking about growing in perfect obedience, I'm talking about being more intimately connected with Jesus. Are you more connected with Jesus today than you were yesterday? Through your failures, through your faults, through your doubts. Do you want to be more connected to him tomorrow? That's what Jesus is talking about here. Obeying all that Jesus commands.

The current crisis of discipleship has told people they can know Jesus as Savior without knowing him as Lord and they can be justified without being sanctified. Not only is that an incomplete gospel, it's no gospel at all. The good news is we who were once orphans, separated from God because of our sin, can be adopted, given a new name, invited into the family of God, called son by God, called daughter by God, and we would grow towards maturity and eventually glorification in Christ. The first move of discipleship is orphan to child, but the second move of discipleship is infancy to maturity.

I don't know about you, but as I was preparing this text and now giving it, this feels really challenging. Can I get an amen? This is hard. This is challenging and difficult. We all are aware of the aspects of our life that don't look as much like Jesus as we wish they did. We're all intimately aware of our own ignorance of the Scriptures or things we think we should know but we don't. We're all aware of our imperfections and our faults and our doubts.

Friends, our confidence is not in ourself. Our confidence is in God and his presence with us. Disciples have been adopted, they're growing towards adulthood by being formed by God, but what is the fuel for this? Jesus tells us in verse 20. He says, "**...behold, I am with you always....**" I am with you always.

Look back up at verse 17. What's the kind of disciple Jesus gives this Great Commission to? "**And when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted.**" Jesus is giving this Great Commission, this work of taking the gospel to all nations, not to perfect theologians, not to perfect pastors and great preachers, not to the spiritual elite who have it more together. He is giving it to a ragtag group of people who, after the resurrection, still have doubts. Think about that.

They're looking at a resurrected man, and it says, "Some worshipped and some doubted." They were doubting their own abilities. Perhaps doubting the truthfulness, perhaps doubting whether or not they would live or die or whether they were competent or incompetent. Jesus says, "I can use a community just like that, imperfect people who are willing to give their lives for the sake of this mission."

Worshipful doubters are the people Jesus is going to use to accomplish his Great Commission. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in God. Jesus gives us two truths we can take as we seek to live out the Great Commission. He says, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**" "This mission will not fail," in other words. "I am the King of glory. I am accomplishing my mission, and I desire to use you."

Then he tells them at the end of verse 20, no matter what, no matter your doubts, no matter your fears, no matter your inadequacies, where you still need to grow, where you're intimately aware of where your life doesn't look like Jesus still or where you're intimately aware of your ignorance of the Scriptures or wish you knew more theology or wish you loved your neighbor better...

Whatever it might be, Jesus says, "You're the kind of person I'm going to use, and I'm not going anywhere. I will be with you to the end of the age." It's the presence of King Jesus that enables our Great Commission obedience. It's not our skills. It's not our talents. We're not left to our own devices. Jesus says, "I will be the one accomplishing this in your midst."

I love that the beginning of Matthew's gospel says, "Call him Immanuel, God with us." At the very end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "That's exactly who I am, and that's not stopping any time soon. I will be with my church through everything, through seasons of darkness and suffering, through seasons of delight and joy in abundance. Whether they're reaping or sowing, I am with them."

One thing I want to make sure that is abundantly clear as we wrap up is growth in the Christian life is not fueled by guilt. It's not fueled by shame. It's fueled by the presence of Christ. If the Holy Spirit has brought conviction today, do not run towards guilt or shame. Run to the presence of Christ. The Holy Spirit's job, his work, is to show us our hearts, to convict us of sin, whether it be a sin of omission or a sin of commission.

Then his job is not to have you run towards guilt and shame or inadequacy and feelings of inadequacy, but rather to point you to the presence of Christ in your life. If you're feeling a sense of

"Man, this is really hard and challenging," good! That's the Holy Spirit convicting you. Ask the presence of Christ to invade that part of your life. Ask him to transform and change you.

As we wrap up, I just have two questions for you that I want you to consider. The first is this: *Where are you on a regular basis where you've been given influence?* For some of us, that's our homes with little kids. Maybe it's a relationship with a spouse or a group of friends. Perhaps it's a place of work. Where are you going to find yourself *this week* where you have some level of influence, authority, say so, buy in, whatever it might, relational capital. That is where you're supposed to be living out the Great Commission.

Certainly, do we want to be sending people to the unreached? Yes. We need to send church planters and missionaries and pastors to the darkest parts of the region, but we don't want to forsake our neighbors to go to the nations. The quickest way for the gospel to go to the nations is if all of us go to our neighbors. This week, consider where are you? Where has the Lord given you an opportunity to bring the gospel to bear around your friends, your family members, your kids, your parents, whatever it might be, your place of work?

As you're going, go proclaim the good news that there is forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ. Orphans can be adopted by a father, be given a new identity and seek life in Christ as God desires to grow them. The fastest way to the nations is to our neighbors. Who embodies this perfectly for us? Jesus. When Jesus wanted to bring the gospel, he went to a dusty town of Nazareth. Jesus went to the nations by going to one neighborhood. That's true for us, too. The incarnation is beautifully local. If the Great Commission feels overwhelming, a task for the spiritual elite, I want it to feel tangible for you. Where are you going to be this week where you can have an influence for Christ?

The second question is: *Are you stagnating or growing?* How long have you been walking with Christ? Weeks, months, years, decades for many of us? Do you feel like you've continued a process of growth or do you feel like there has been some stagnation and kind of a slowdown? Is your life plagued by a kind of spiritual adolescence? Or are you growing into maturity in Christ?

There are two ways at The Village where we really desire to help people grow in their relationship with Christ. The first we talk about regularly is Home Groups. We believe being involved in gospel-centered community is absolutely an essential element of discipleship. Whether it's a Home Group or another group of friends who are pursuing Christ together, it doesn't matter so much to us.

We just want you to be involved in gospel-centered community, studying the Scriptures together, seeking to mortify sin and to live a new life in Christ. If you're not in gospel-centered community, I would just encourage you that's a great pathway to start pursuing growth and not stagnation in Christ.

Another opportunity is to get involved in one of our men's or women's Bible studies. I'm blown away at the current feedback for the men's and women's Bible studies. The women have over a thousand people registered, and the men have about 200 people registered. Just for a little data point for an earlier point in the sermon. We're doing a book of the Bible I'm sure, and again this is not to guilt or shame, we're doing 1 and 2 Samuel first semester and second semester. I imagine many of us haven't read 1 or 2 Samuel. That's okay. You shouldn't feel guilt or shame over that.

What an awesome opportunity to get to know a huge part of your Bible and the story of what God has done in the world. I'd invite you to, perhaps it's with a Home Group or with friends, jump into one of those classes and become a disciple through studying Scripture together in community. Those classes start in September.

Here is what I'd like to do. I want to remind you of just a few brief things as we wrap up. First, if you are a spiritual orphan, you can be adopted by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, receiving a new identity and forgiveness of sins freely and fully forgiven. Come home. We want you to be a part of this family.

You are wanted here and welcome. You don't have to strive after another identity. You can simply be a brother or sister with us. We want you here. If you are a son or a daughter, have been adopted by God, and you're wanting to grow, I would ask that you would just pursue either one of these avenues we've laid out here or others. Jesus wants you to be a teacher of his gospel so we can teach the nations to obey the way of Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, in your grace and mercy, you have seen fit to bring us into Christ. This glorious gospel of good news that there is forgiveness of sin, that there is hope in Christ. I pray you would find The Village Church, all of our members at The Village Church, to be a place where spiritual orphans are coming home to find their home in you, to find their identity shaped by you, to be given a new name, a new story, and a new past, present, and future.

I also pray for those of us who have been walking with Christ for a while. I ask you would never allow us to grow bored in the Christian life or to stagnate in the Christian life, but would you, by whatever means necessary, grow us into Christ. We desire more of him. We want to look more like him tomorrow than we do today and more today than we did yesterday. We know this is only possible if you do it, so we ask that you would. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

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