

“Gospel Shifting From God-less Drifting”

Hebrews 2:5-9

June 10, 2018

INTRO: Let me ask you a question as we begin...

Have you ever struggled with paying attention?

If so, what have you found to be your best remedy?

For us... today's title says it all...

CONTEXT:

A. Remember Leviticus...

- i. BE holy! for the LORD your God is holy!
- ii. ...a love letter vs. a list of legalistic laws...
- iii. A love letter to restore His rebellious people

B. Remember Hebrews 1-2:4

- i. God spoke & still speaks through His Word (1:1)

➤ VIDEO: Speak LORD!

- ii. Jesus is BEST & above EVERYTHING! (1:4-14)
- iii. See Jesus' Word, Will, Way & WARNING! (2:1-4)
 - 1. We must listen much more carefully (2:1a)
 - 2. Lest we drift from the truth and love (2:1b)
 - 3. There's no excuse! (2:2-4)

C. Remember Titus (from last week)

- a. **Ch. 1 = *BE Real – Truth***

- i. Real Lovers of God
- ii. Real Leaders for God
- iii. Real Liars... fighting against God

b. **Ch. 2 = *BE Righteous - Love***

- i. Definitions
- ii. Discipleship
- iii. Declaration

c. **Ch. 3 = *BE Ready - Warfare***

- i. **Reminding** ...today!
- ii. Reinforcing ...next week...
- iii. Remembering ...next week...

T/S: Now we're going to pick up with Hebrews 2:5-9 (building on the holiness foundation of Leviticus, and with the discipleship emphasis of the Gospel(s) & timelessness of Titus!

Today we'll cover the "Reminding" of "Shifting from Drifting" and next week we'll close out ch.2 with the "Reinforcing" & "Remembering"

PREVIEW: Gospel-REMINDING includes:

- A. God's *Providential Plan*
- B. God's *Psalm 8 Perspective*
- C. God's *Purposed People*
- D. OUR *Perplexing/Paradoxical Problem*
- E. THE *Prince of Peace*

I. God's Providential Plan

5 *For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.*

~ God's **Plan**

~ God's **Providence**

~ God's **People's Proclamation**

- *"For"* = linking the purpose that is to follow with the particulars that were explained previously
- *"it was not to the angels"* = clearly a continuation of the contrast between Christ & the angels is both here and forthcoming...
- *"God subjected the world to come"* = the millennial reign (and eternal heaven thereafter)
 - *"God subjected"* = **God has a PLAN!**
- *"of which we are speaking"* = the whole point of this Scripture passage is to testify & clarify
 - God has spoken continuously & consistently
 - God's plan is known by God's people!
 - God's plan is obeyed by God's people
 - *"of which we are speaking"* =
 - **KNOWING** God's plan
 - **PROCLAIMING** God's plan
 - **PREACHING** God's plan
 - **OBEYING** God's plan
 - **BE-ing** God's plan!

II. God's Psalm 8 Perspective

6 *It has been testified somewhere*, (that “somewhere” is Psalm 8)... *“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?”*

~ *See God's PASSION for His people...
We should share His passion!*

➤ **VIDEO:** *“Edward's Testimony”*

- **NOTE:** this begins a QUOTE of **Psalm 8:4-6**
- *“it has been testified somewhere” = God has said!*
- *“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?” =*
 - Here's 1 of the Bible's glorious portraits of God's amazing grace & miraculous mercies
 - We're created/commissioned for a purpose
 - We are to love AND live with BOTH a vertical AND horizontal... BOTH an internal AND a missional PASSION for faithfully following, totally surrendering... walking, working, and worshipping in a way that brings glory & honor to our Christ & King!
 - **We are wretches... blessed with royalty!**
 - We are the ants & the mosquitos at the Lord's eternal picnic... and yet He loves & cares for us.....

III. God's Purposed-People

7 *You made...him/humanity for a little while lower than the angels; **You have crowned him/humanity** with glory and honor, **8a** putting everything in subjection under his/humanity's feet."*

Genesis 1:26-28 (NASB)

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and **let them rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and **over all the earth**, and **over every creeping thing** that creeps on the earth." / God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. / **God blessed them**; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful** and **multiply**, and **fill the earth**, and **subdue it**; and **rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and **over every living thing** that moves on the earth."*

by

L. Michael Morales

"...the Great Commission begins before humanity's fall away from communion with God. On the sixth day, man was commissioned by God to fill and subdue the earth, and to rule over the creatures (Gen. 1:27). Accordingly, one might justly define the Great Commission as "ruling and subduing" the earth & its creatures...

The Great Commission bestowed upon Adam entailed that his kingship would be in the service of his priestly office, namely, that he would “rule and subdue” for the sake of gathering all creation to the Creator’s footstool in worship. *The Sabbath consummation was the heart and goal of the sixth day’s commission.*

IV. OUR Perplexing Problem

8b *Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.*

- This passage is explaining our human & worldwide, fallen condition
 - *Humanity didn’t just “fall” into sin... we’re still actively FREE-FALLING into sin* - JDP

- Read **Genesis 3:1-15!**
 - See the **Faith-less** (as they “drift away”)
 - See the **Fall**
 - *Satan is the serpent (and still is!)*
 - *The Devil is in the deceptive doubts!*
 - *“Did God really say...?”*
 - *They stopped listening to the Lord*
 - *They started listening to the Liar*
 - *Learn from their loss & their lesson!!!*

- See the **Fix!**
 - Jesus will CRUSH the serpent's head!
 - **He will take the venom & give victory!**

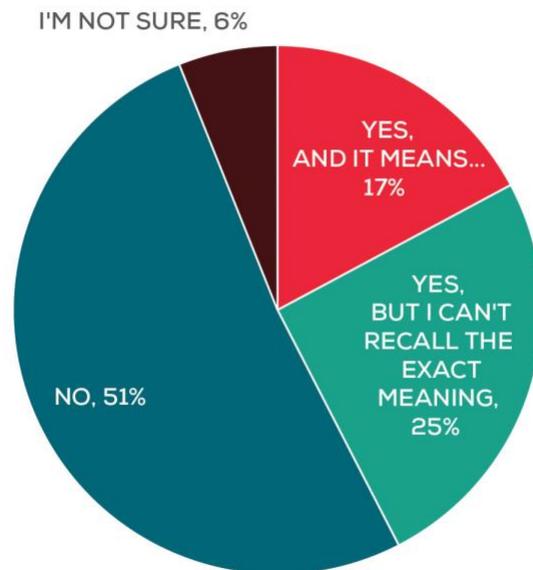
***The 1st Adam plunged humanity into sin & death...
but the 2nd Adam (Jesus the Christ) plunged
into death... for sinful humanity! - JDP***

VIDEO: [“Comfortable Christians”](#)

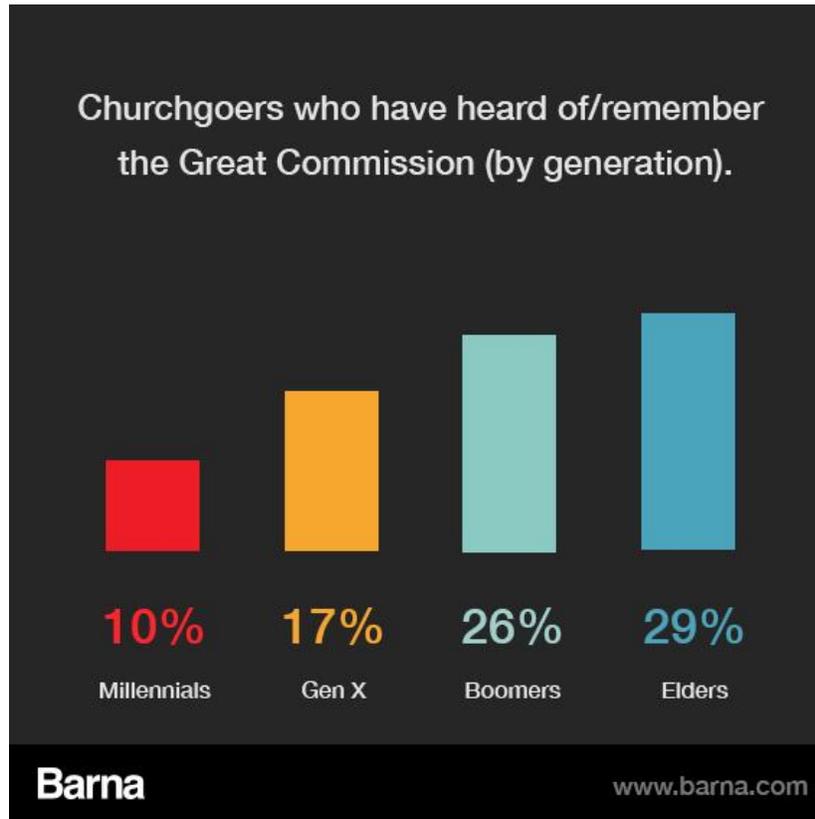
- 2-3 billion people & 40% PG's = unreached
- Approx. 3,400 UUPG's still exist globally
- Between 350 UUPG's in N. America!

CHURCHGOERS: HAVE YOU HEARD OF
THE GREAT COMMISSION?

Barna



A low view of Christ leads to a diminished Great Commission focus...



Moreover, (*poorly disciplined*), untaught believers are ill equipped to face trials, untrained to recognize false teachings, and unprepared to teach others. They quickly become easy prey for an enemy who seeks to devour them **(1 Pet 5:8)**. - **Lawless**

Even so...

➤ This passage is saying: **God has a plan!**

- Moreover, not only does God have a plan... *while it seems broken now, not to worry... the One who is sovereign is also the One solution!*

Trust the bookend truths of Matthew's gospel: the virgin-born redeemer named "God with us" (1:27) will be with us to the end (28:20)!

V. THE Prince-of-Peace!

⁹ *But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

- **This verse IS The GOSPEL!**

- *"we see Him" =*

- **Do "YOU" see Him?**

- Who is the "we?"
- What does seeing Him lead to?
- Where do we/you "see Him?"
- When do we/you "see Him?"
- Why do we "see Him?"
- How do we "see Him?"

- See the **12 Distinctives of Gospel Reinforcement**
 - His **INCARNATION** (for a little while... lower)
 - His **NAME** (above all... His name is Jesus!)
 - His **DIETY** (“crowned” & fulfilling God’s plan!)
 - His **GLORY** (unique GOD-man... both/and)
 - His **HONOR** (worth, integrity, distinction...)
 - His **SUFFERING** (...His humiliation/passion)
 - His **DEATH** (...and then His resurrection)
 - His **INTENTIONALITY** (“so that”)
 - His **GRACE** (...unmerited favor by definition)
 - His **LOVE** (“He might taste death for...” YOU)
 - His **SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT**
 - **HIS GOSPEL!**

- Look at **Acts 1:8-10** for a lesson on “seeing Him”
 - v.8 = His mandate & mission (& last words)
 - v.9 = His Messianic miracle (ascension)
 - v.10 = His messengers & message (GO obey!)

- To “see Him” is to **praise & obey Him!**

VIDEO: [“Life Defined – Praise Him!”](#)

Amen & AMEN!

PRAISE Him... by BE-ing His!!!

Close:

- *Go BE Acts 1:8*
- *BE lovers of God & lovers of people*
- *BE Acts 2*
- *BE Ephesians 2... 4... 6*
- *BE Romans 1:16... 17... 18... ch. 3... ch.8...*
- *BE Jude 3... 4... 5*
- *BE the Beatitudes*
- *BE the Fruit of the Spirit*
- *BE the light of the world*
- *BE a minister of reconciliation*
- *BE an ambassador of Christ*
- *BE the aroma of Christ*
- *BE fisher of men*
- *BE a cross-carrying disciple*
- *BE 2nd Timothy 2:1-6*
- *BE Matthew 28:18-20*
- *BE John 14:15 & 20:21*
- *BE Titus 2:15*

So... you see friends...

*the way to start Gospel-shifting away from
God-less drifting is to **BE** urged & reminded to
Work, Worship, & Witness as you
Learn, Live, & Love like Christ!*

ALL for His glory & ALL by His grace...

Amen & Amen!

Let's PRAY

RESEARCH notes:

Part TWO

A. PERFECT PATERNAL PRINCE of PEACE

Look for Old Testament QUOTES from:

- *Psalm 22:22 = the Son is gathered in the Church*
- *Isaiah 8:17 = the Son trusts the Father*
- *Isaiah 8:18 = the Church can come before the Father because it is united with/in Christ*

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

B. PURIFIER & PURIFIED

¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,

**** QUOTE from Psalm 22*

12 saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

**** QUOTE from Isaiah 8:17 & 8:18*

13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

C. POWER

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

➤ It is by virtue of Christ's death on our behalf that we are freed from the fear of death.
HCSB Study Bible.

15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

D. PRIEST

16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

➤ the Son became a man and suffered death so that He could serve as a **faithful high priest** in service to God. The only person who can serve as a mediator between God and man is the One who is both God and man. It is by reason of His faithfulness as a man who was **tested** and **suffered** that He could make **propitiation** for the **sins of the people**. Not only did He suffer divine retribution on our behalf, but He is able to help us because He is **like his brothers** in every way except sin.
HCSB Study Bible.

➤ Jesus is described as “High Priest” throughout Hebrews:

- Hebrews 3:1
- Hebrews 4:14-5:10
- Hebrews 6:19-20
- Hebrews 7:11ff – 10:18
- Hebrews 13:8-13

E. PROMISE

18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

➤ **Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV)**

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as

we are--yet was without sin.

¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

teleioo

Greek Pronunciation [teh lay AH oh]

HCSB Translation perfect

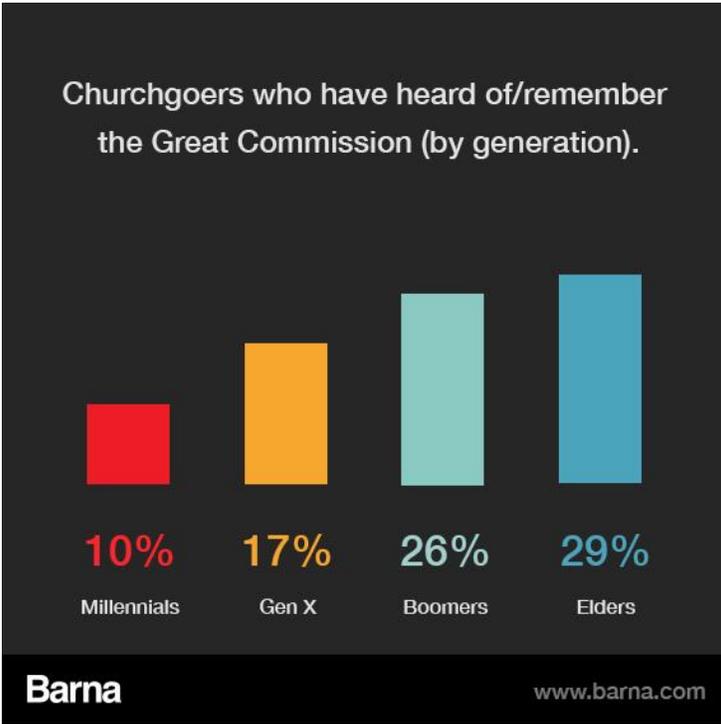
Uses in Hebrews 9

Uses in the NT 23

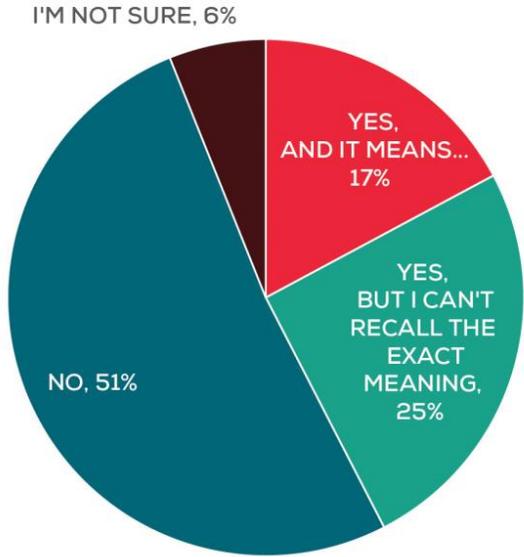
Focus passage [Hebrews 2:10](#)

The verb *teleioo* (*perfect*) has several meanings in the NT. In certain texts, *teleioo* sometimes means *to complete, finish, or accomplish* in the sense of fulfilling a task by bringing it to a desired end. In this sense, Jesus was sent *to finish* the works of His Father ([Jn 4:34](#)), a task He faithfully *completed* ([Jn 17:4](#)). Paul, in his speech to the Ephesian elders, expressed a desire *to accomplish* the ministry he had received from God ([Ac 20:24](#)). In other texts, *teleioo* speaks of *bringing something to an end or perfecting something*. In this sense, *teleioo* refers to the process or action of overcoming an imperfect or incomplete state with a more *perfect* or *complete* one. By virtue of His earthly sufferings, Jesus *has been perfected* (*qualified, brought to His goal*) to minister as high priest forever ([Heb 2:10](#); [5:9](#); [7:28](#)). Abraham's faith *was perfected* by means of his works ([Jms 2:22](#)). The old covenant law could never *perfect* the worshipers who continually offered sacrifices ([Heb 7:19](#); [10:1](#)).

Churchgoers who have heard of/remember the Great Commission (by generation).



CHURCHGOERS: HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE GREAT COMMISSION?



The Great Commission in the Old Testament

by *L. Michael Morales*

Properly conceived as grounded in God’s own kingship, **the Great Commission begins before humanity’s fall away from communion with God. On the sixth day, man was commissioned by God to fill and subdue the earth, and to rule over the creatures (Gen. 1:27). Accordingly, one might justly define the Great Commission as “ruling and subduing” the earth and its creatures**—an understanding we will need to unpack.

To be sure, **the phrase “ruling and subduing” has deeply negative connotations in our modern world, filled as it is with memories of horrific tyranny and the abuse of power. Nevertheless, we should note that this commission was given before the descent into sin and misery, precisely within the context of man in union with God—that is, given to man as bearer of the image of God (v. 26), created both to fellowship with God and to mediate the blessed reign of God over all the earth.**

The theology here is twofold.

- 1. First, Adam is to gather up all creation into the seventh-day praise and adoration of God—that is what it means to “rule and subdue.” He is charged to set apart (“sanctify”) creation increasingly until the whole earth is holy, filled with the abiding glory of God.**
- 2. Second, there is no blessing to be enjoyed, be it ever so marginal, that does not derive from the reign of God—that is the joy of what it means to “be subdued,” especially so after the expulsion from life with God. For this reason, we gladly teach our children that Christ executes the office of a king “in subduing us to himself” (WSC Q&A 26).**

The Great Commission bestowed upon Adam entailed that his kingship would be in the service of his priestly office, namely, that he would “rule and subdue” for the sake of gathering all creation to the Creator’s footstool in worship.

The Sabbath consummation was the heart and goal of the sixth day’s commission.

Once we understand the Great Commission as a function of kingship, we are in a better place to assess this agenda throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

God's reign is universal, and from the beginning, His plan of salvation aimed at all the families of the earth, never overlooking the fact that He "shall inherit all the nations" ([Ps. 82:8](#)).

Here, the role of Genesis 1–11 as a prologue to Israel's narrative cannot be overemphasized, for Israel's own identity and sacred calling springs from this universal context and is ever determined by it. **After the nations are scattered into exile from the tower of Babel, God calls Abram in Genesis 12, promising that through him "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (v. 3). This promise is later reiterated to**

Abraham: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice" ([Gen. 22:18](#); see [18:18](#)). **It is then vouchsafed to Isaac (26:4), and then onward to Jacob as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel (28:14).**

Coupled with this promise is the undercurrent of kingship.

Abram had been promised that "kings will come from you" (17:6), and a genealogy is followed that will blossom forth into the line of David.

Eventually, through Israel, a king would arise to gather the nations back into the presence of God.

Israel, moreover, was brought into covenant fellowship with God at Sinai in order to live as a priestly kingdom and

holy nation (Ex. 19:6)—that is, to be a light unto the Gentiles.

The parallel defining attributes priestly and holy must be understood in the sense of being set apart unto the Lord God for the sake of the nations; Israel was to be a mediator between God and the nations.

This sacred calling had much more to do with being subdued than with subduing other peoples. Israel needed to be consecrated and sanctified—transformed into the servant of God for the sake of the world—to glorify God before the nations. Psalm 67, one of many psalms calling the Gentiles to praise God, declares plainly that Israel had received mercy and even the priestly blessing so that God’s way would be known on earth, and so that His salvation would encompass the nations.

Through Israel’s early period, however, “there was no king in Israel,” which meant “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). In other words, **without one to incarnate God’s reign, Israel would persistently**

fall away into apostasy. Israel needed to be subdued before it could be a light unto the Gentiles.

Upon the installation of David as king of Israel, the Great Commission became a divine charge to a human king once more.

Psalm 2, likely used during Israel's coronation ceremony, is instructive on this point. In the midst of the raging nations, the Lord declares, "As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill" (v. 6). The king then professes the divine decree:

"The LORD said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession' " (vv. 7–8). The phrase *my son* draws us once again to Adam and to another facet of the theology of the Great Commission.

In a unique sense, Adam may be called the "first-born" son of God (begotten and made). Luke's genealogy of the Messiah, for example, brings us back to Seth as "the son of Adam" then on to Adam as "the son of God" (Luke 3:38; see Gen. 5:1–3).

As God's "first-born," then, Adam's inheritance was as wide as his

commission: the whole earth—for "the cattle on a thousand hills" and "the world and its fullness" are his (Ps. 50:10, 12). **Adam possessed, in other words, the inherent right to rule and subdue all the earth on his Father's behalf and for the sake of his Father's glory.**

As redemptive history progresses, Israel then becomes, as it were, God's second "firstborn" son. To be noted here, **the Lord was quite particular as to the words Moses was to speak at his opening confrontation with Pharaoh: "Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is my son, my firstborn. So I say to you, let my son go that he may worship me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn' "** (Ex. 4:22–23; see Hos. 11:1).

The final sign from God, celebrated annually at Passover, would drive that original revelation deep into the heart of Pharaoh. Returning now to Psalm 2, David, as head of Israel and by divine promise (2 Sam. 7:14), could be considered God's son in a special sense, as he had evidently received the mantle of Adam as a function of his office.

By his anointing, David inherited Adam's role as "son of God" and king of the earth. "I will make him my firstborn," God says, "the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:26–27).

It is important to understand that *only as the anointed king did David receive the promise to rule and subdue the nations.* David's commission was to spread the will and reign of God over the earth—his "enemies" were not merely political or personal, but the enemies of God, kings who had set themselves against the Lord and His anointed. In reality, however, the goal of subduing Israel would prove quite enough.

Worse still, it was Israel's kings themselves who led God's sheep astray into perverse rebellion and heinous idolatry. The exile was inevitable.

Yet, remarkably, within the context of Israel's apostasy, God promised to raise up a Davidic Servant who would not only lead the tribes of Jacob through a new exodus but who would also be given "as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" ([Isa. 49:6](#)).

This same Servant, we go on to read, would suffer God's judgment in bearing the sins of many, that as an exalted priest he might "sprinkle many nations" ([Isa. 52:13–53:12](#); see [1 Peter 1:1–2](#)).

Having atoned for the sins of his people, this coming Messiah—the last Adam, the seed of Abraham, the true Israel, the greater David, the Suffering Servant, the Son of God—would ascend on high to reign from the heavenly Mount Zion, from the right hand of God the Father.

Matthew 28, then, is but the embrace of the inheritance promised in Psalm 2. Yet this kingship is in the service of a priestly office, to usher us into God's presence through the veil of torn flesh and shed blood. Through His outpoured Spirit, Jesus reigns to subdue and summon all creation to the adoration of His Father ([1 Cor. 15:24–28](#)), subduing us day by day ever more deeply that we might learn how to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

“To All the Nations”

The Great Commission Passages in the Gospels and Acts

By Chuck Lawless

The words of Charles Spurgeon often cause me to halt whatever
T

I am doing think seriously about my responsibility, and repent of
my apathy. Seldom are the words as gripping, though, as these
words spoken to his Pastor’s College Annual Conference in

1874:

I plead this day for those who cannot plead for themselves, namely, the great outlying masses of the heathen world. Our existing pulpits are

tolerably well supplied, but we need men who will build on new foundations. Who will do this? Are we, as a company of faithful men, clear in our consciences about the heathen? Millions have never heard the Name of Jesus. Hundreds of millions have seen a missionary only once in their lives, and know nothing of our King. Shall we let them perish? Can we go to our beds and sleep, while China, India, Japan, and other nations are being damned?

This masterful nineteenth-century English preacher was a wordsmith like few others, especially when speaking about the Great Commission. **Spurgeon stated these words almost 150 years ago, but they remain relevant and challenging today.** **Rarely has the church seen the opportunity we have today to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.**

If Spurgeon’s words grip us, however, those words pale when compared to the words of the Lord Jesus. When he speaks, our response should be humble gratitude and unquestioned obedience simply because he is the Son of God. It was he, the one in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9), who uttered the mandate that is the focus of this article—the command commonly known as the “Great Commission” (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:6-8).

Spoken at least four times from the lips of Jesus, the Great Commission clearly matters to God.

The primary purpose of this article is to review Jesus' varied expressions of the Great Commission in the Gospels and Acts, focusing on the authority of Christ, the command to make disciples, the primacy of proclamation, and the empowerment of the disciples. A secondary goal is to offer suggestions for local church leaders who seek to lead Great Commission churches.

The authority of Christ

Both the repetition and the location of the Great Commission passages imply seriousness and significance behind the commission.

All four of the Gospels include some type of statement of sending, going, or proclaiming near the end, suggesting a climactic purpose behind the textual positioning.

Acts 1:8 differs, of course, but that text serves more as a rough outline and theme verse of Luke's second volume than it does a climax. That difference notwithstanding, **it is undeniable that near the end of his ministry, and at the beginning of the church's mission, Christ called believers to take the gospel to the nations.**

The best known and most quoted expression of the Great Commission is [Matthew 28:16-20](#):

*But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*⁴

More than one writer has noted that these central verses of Matthew's Gospel summarize his central themes, including the authority of Christ, the universality of the gospel, the necessity of discipleship, the significance of worship and faith, and the power of the abiding presence of Christ.⁵ More specifically, the one who is the fulfillment of the covenants and prophecies of the Old Testament now is the center of a message to be carried to the ends of the earth.

In this Matthean passage, the one who spoke the commission is the one who had been given "all authority" (28:18) to do so. The authority of Christ is not a new theme in this Gospel (see, e.g., Ma 7:29; 10:1, 7-8; 11:27; 22:43-44; 24:35). His power to defeat the devil (4:1-11), to teach like no other (7:28-29), to calm nature (8:23-27), to forgive sin (9:1-8), and to heal the sick (9:27-31) had already been established. In what is likely a reference to the Son of Man imagery of Daniel 7:13-14, he is now the

resurrected one before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Phil 2:9-11). The Father has now granted him authority over all of heaven and earth.⁶ He had, and has, “the divine right, as ruler over all, to give all Christians their marching orders.”⁷

A similar sense of authority, albeit described differently, is depicted in John’s Great Commission text. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is the one with authority to send the disciples, even as the Father had sent him (John 20:21, cf. 17:18). Jesus came to earth to fulfill the Father’s purpose—a purpose tied inextricably to the message of atonement that the disciples carry to the nations. The world needs to hear that the Son is also the Savior:

Jesus saw a close identification between himself and his Father. He spoke regularly of the Father’s having sent him. He and the Father are one, and so the work that the Son did was also the work of the Father. Jesus came for the purpose of giving his life as a ransom, a means of liberating those people who were enslaved to sin. He offered himself as a substitute for them.⁸

Moreover, he who had been the one sent is now the sender. Andreas Köstenberger, in his study on the “sending” motif of John’s gospel, concludes that Jesus as the sent one was to bring glory and honor to the sender, do the sender’s will by working his works and speaking his words, witness to the sender and represent him accurately, and know the sender intimately by living in relationship with him and following his example.⁹

Now, Jesus is the one sending, and the disciple’s “relationship to *their* sender, Jesus, is to reflect *Jesus*’ relationship with *his* sender, the Father.”¹⁰

The Word who became flesh (John 1:1-14) has the authority to require as much. In the words of Christopher Wright, “the identity and the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, is the cosmic indicative on which the mission imperative stands authorized.”¹¹ That is, **we do the Great Commission because the living Son of God demands that we do so.**

Properly teaching this foundational truth would likely change the commitment of most local churches to the Great Commission. Perhaps believers are less obedient to the Great Commission because they do not fully recognize the nature of the one who gave the command. If Christ is perceived as less than the Son of God before whom all will be judged (2 Cor 5:10), his words lose their force; **a low Christology leads to a diminished Great Commission focus.** On the other hand, truly knowing the majesty and power of the Son should lead to a deep desire to proclaim his name—and consequently, an uncompromised obedience to his Matthew 28 command.

The Command to Make Disciples

Matthew records that the risen Jesus met with his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, thus continuing the theme of mountaintop events in Matthew's gospel (14:23; 15:29; 17:1; 24:3; 26:30).

Jesus' mandate to them was clear: "go and make disciples of all nations." The imperative—the command—in the text is “make disciples” rather than “go.” “Go” is better translated as the participial phrase, “As you are going” or “having gone,”

suggesting that **the disciples were to make disciples wherever they were, in any context and with any people.**

That is not to say, however, that “go” loses its imperatival force or international focus in this case. D. A. Carson's analysis is helpful here. Not only does a participle used in this fashion often function as a command, but “in a context that demands that this ministry extend to ‘all nations,’ it is difficult to believe that ‘go’ has lost all imperatival force.”¹² In Wright's words, “they [the disciples] will have to go to the nations as a necessary condition of obeying the primary command” to make disciples.¹³

That is, **the disciples are not to wait for non-believers to come to them; rather, they are to take the initiative to evangelize. Such evangelism models the heart of God, whose Son came to his own, became flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:11, 14). He who died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8)**

demands that his followers take that good news to the ends of the earth. Through that ministry, believers from the corners of the globe will enter the kingdom (Ma 8:11).

“And Make Disciples”

The task is not finished with evangelizing, however. **“Make disciples” is an equally nonnegotiable element of the Great Commission.**

Indeed, the process includes leading a non-believer to trust in Christ and repent from sin, followed by directing that new Christian in the lifelong task of walking with Christ in obedience. The former is marked by baptism, and the later is accomplished through teaching & equipping (28:19). New Testament scholar Robert Plummer describes this responsibility of the church as follows:

The apostles must bring persons to the point where they knowingly and publicly align themselves with Jesus Christ by declaring their faith through baptism (Ma 28:19). This baptism is in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”—implying that the one being baptized has come to know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is, the convert is not one unwillingly immersed, but one who has entered into conscious relationship with the triune God.

The apostles are to teach the converts everything that Jesus has commanded (Matt 28:20). If the young converts are to become mature disciples, they must continue to be schooled in the

apostles' teaching— enabled by Christ's indwelling Spirit to love God and love neighbor (Matt 22:37-40).¹⁴

The goal is that those who follow Christ will live like Christ and lead others to do the same.

Believers are to be “learners commanded to produce more learners.”¹⁵

Hence, a process of making disciples that ends with only the conversion of the evangelized is incomplete at best, disobedient at worst. In fact, the results of this omission can be disastrous. Untaught believers are ill equipped to face trials, untrained to recognize false teachings, and unprepared to teach others. They quickly become easy prey for an enemy who seeks to devour them (1 Pet 5:8).

Here, the contemporary church faces at least three issues. First, **most local churches are doing neither evangelism nor discipleship strategically.** For example, an increasingly lower number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist churches at least implies that we are neither evangelizing nor raising up believers committed to evangelism.¹⁶ **Carrying out**

both components of the Great Commission is biblically required, but doing both begins with doing at least one of the two. The inherent struggle with balancing evangelism and discipleship is non-existent if neither is occurring in the first place.

Second, where evangelizing *is* taking place, **follow-up discipleship is often neglected**. Baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit may be occurring, but **teaching to follow all that Jesus commanded somehow gets lost in the process**.

The result is now multi-generational spiritual weakness: un-discipled believers are serving as leaders in our churches, and they are doing little to disciple the newest believers.

Great Commission obedience is seldom found in believers who should be eating the meat of God's word, but who are still feeding on the milk (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3, Heb 5:12).

Third, young **pastors seeking to correct this problem must be aware of the danger of emphasizing discipleship to the neglect of evangelism**. Clearly, the problem must be addressed, but *teaching and training alone produce a classroom more than a New Testament church*.

Genuine discipleship turns out believers committed to doing everything Jesus commanded—including evangelism.

The Call to the “Nations”

Jesus’ disciples heard this command on the mountain: they were to make disciples of “all the nations” (*panta ta ethnē*). Luke’s Gospel (24:47) also employs the same phrase, where Jesus challenged his disciples to proclaim the word to all the nations. Though not using the term “nations,” *Mark’s call to “go into all the world” (16:15) echoes a similar mandate.*

Scholars have understood the term “nations” here in at least two ways.¹⁷ Some understand the term as referring only to Gentiles, an interpretation likely built on a belief that God had ultimately rejected the Jews who had first rejected him. Others view “nations” as “peoples” or “ethnic groups.” Gentiles and Jews alike would have thus been included in this call. The gospel would be for all the world, not only the lost sheep of Israel (Ma 10:6).

The latter interpretation best captures the intent of Matthew 28, the concluding chapter in a book that shows God’s concern for the world. God’s love for Israel is evident throughout this book (9:36; 10:5-6; 15:24). In fact, the Gospel of Matthew is about God’s fulfilling his covenant with Abraham; the blessings through the patriarch would come to all families of the earth (Gen 12:3) through Jesus. At the same time, Matthew’s Gospel illustrates God’s concern for non-Jews, including magistrates (2:1-12), a Roman centurion (8:5-13), and a Syro-Pheonician woman (15:22-28). Included in the genealogy of Jesus were at least two women—Rahab and Ruth—who were Gentiles (1:5).

Jesus' Great Commission words in Matthew 28 could thus be viewed, argues Wright, as "a christological mutation of the original Abrahamic commission—'Go ... and be a blessing ... and all nations of the earth will be blessed through you.'"¹⁸

Additionally, as John Piper has so thoroughly shown, the best interpretation of *panta ta ethnē* is "all the people groups" rather than "Gentile individuals" or "countries."¹⁹ Piper's argument is based on word study and biblical teachings. Regarding the former, he points out that the singular form of *ethnos* in the New Testament always means people group or nation, and the phrase *panta ta ethnē* more often refers to people groups or is ambiguous in meaning than to Gentile individuals. Regarding the later, Piper concludes that the Old Testament promise to Abraham to bless the nations (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4)—later referred to in the New Testament (e.g., Gal 3:6-8)—forms the basis for a people group focus in the church's mission. **Piper's arguments are not limited to these noted, but all of his arguments lead to this conclusion: "In all likelihood, Jesus did not send his apostles out with a general mission merely to win as many individuals as they could but rather to reach all the peoples of the world and thus to gather the 'sons of God' who are scattered."**²⁰

One should not deduce, however, that group conversion must be the only goal of the church. **Group conversions can happen, particularly in tribal settings, but the text itself does not demand that. Both Craig Blomberg and**

Hal Freeman have pointed out that a shift from the neuter word *ethnē* (“nations”) to the masculine pronoun *autous* (“them”) in verse 19 indicates that “them” refers to individuals rather than nations.²¹

The mandate, then, is to make disciples of individuals from all people groups of the world.

Luke’s Gospel (24:47) and Acts (1:8) describe this task geographically, with the church beginning its work in Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth.

There the gospel would first be proclaimed in Jewish territory, but would be followed by ever-broadening proclamation to the peoples of the world. The starting point of

Jerusalem reflects not only a Lukan emphasis on the Holy City, but also “the reversal of the missionary movement from centripetal [in the Old Testament] to centrifugal, as indicated in Acts 1:8.”²²

The church would now take the initiative to go to the nations, as evidenced in this reminder of the Great Commission texts:

(1) Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of *all the nations*.”

(2) Mark 16:15, “Go into *all the world* and preach the gospel *to all creation*.”

(3) Luke 24:45, “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to *all the nations*.”

(4) Acts 1:8, “...and even to *the remotest part of the earth*.”

Southern Baptists who are aware of the International Mission Board’s work will recognize the people group approach in the current EMBRACE emphasis. International Mission Board president Tom Elli has challenged all SBC churches to embrace one of 3,800 unengaged, unreached people groups. These people groups are less than 2 percent reached with the gospel, and no one is known to be currently engaging them with an intentional church planting strategy.²³ **The goal—to get the gospel to all individuals in all people groups who have not heard—reflects the New Testament emphasis on reaching people groups.**

Emphasizing people groups is not limited to international fields, however. Current research reveals that 584 unengaged, unreached people groups are also

represented in North America.²⁴ Given that most will be found in urban settings—where more than 80 percent of the population of North America now reside—the opportunities for touching the globe while serving Christ on this continent abound.²⁵

Such an emphasis may well be a starting point for turning a church toward the Great Commission. In my almost 15 years as a church consultant, I have seen two significant issues that stand in the way of a church's growth—a lack of outward focus, and a failure to plan strategically. **Though they would not be inclined to admit it, many churches focus only on meeting internal needs, with little regard for the non-believing world around them. In addition, many operate with no long-term vision or strategy, choosing instead to function on a Sunday-to-Sunday basis. An intentional commitment to engage a specific people group will demand improvements in both areas.**

The Centrality of Proclamation

The Gospel of Luke ends with this challenging directive:

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be

proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:44-49).

Surprising two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus taught them about himself revealed in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms; that is, he taught them that the Old Testament is itself a book about him. As one writer has summarized, “The Old Testament— they would see now with the new light cast upon it—showed the necessity of an *atoning* Redeemer, from the *sin* which it everywhere reveals, and of a *dying* Redeemer, from the *death* which it proclaims as the consequence.”²⁶

He who opened their eyes to him (Luke 24:31) also opened their minds (24:45) to understand the Scriptures he explained (or “opened”) to them (24:32). Jesus led them to understand (1) that the Old Testament speaks of his suffering and resurrection (e.g., Ps 22; Isa 53) and, (2) to see his story in those writings. He likely taught them that the message of calling the nations to him is a clarion call in that same testament (e.g., Ps 67; Isa 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; Acts 26:22–23).

Proclaiming Repentance and Forgiveness

Luke 24:47 best states the author’s understanding of the Great Commission: “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” The reader will likely recognize that Luke’s expression is similar to the debatable passage in Mark (“preach

the gospel to all creation”) and to the thematic verse of Acts 1:8 (“you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem ... and to the ends of the earth”). Though not directly addressing the Lukan passage, William Hendrickson’s understanding of John 17:18 and 20:21 ties the Johannine Great Commission text to Luke as well:

The two comparisons [between the Father’s sending the Son, and the Son’s sending the disciples] blend into one idea, which is this: just as the Father has sent Jesus into the world *with a message*, so also Jesus has sent the disciples into the world *with a message*.²⁷

Without question, proclamation—that is, verbally speaking the message—is essential to doing the Great Commission. That should not be surprising, if indeed one believes Romans 10:14—*“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?”* Apart from hearing the gospel, no person in any people group of the world can be saved; thus, proclaiming the word is imperative. **As Piper has rightly noted, “The frontline of missions is the preaching of the Word of God, the gospel.”²⁸**

This gospel is a gospel of suffering and death—the death of the Son of God who had to die and

rise again to fulfill Scripture and to bring redemption to a lost world.

His death was the means by which forgiveness of sins would be offered, and repentance would be a necessary step in gaining that pardon.

*Through preaching this gospel, Jesus' disciples would "announce the news that will divide for eternity the forgiven from the unforgiven."*²⁹

Some would find forgiveness through faith and repentance; others would remain unforgiven in rebellion (John 20:23). In a first-century world that was haunted by unresolved guilt over wrong, the forgiveness Jesus offered was surely a welcomed answer to some.³⁰

At the same time, this combination of repentance and forgiveness—common in the Luke/ Acts volumes (see Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31; 8:22)—undoubtedly shows that **forgiveness does not come apart from repentance.**

The disciples were to echo John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2; Mark 1:4) and Jesus himself (Matt 4:17) in demanding repentance even as they proclaimed forgiveness.

The contemporary church that has been so reticent to demand repentance would be wise to take note of this mandate again. Preaching without a call to repent is not Great Commission preaching.

The disciples were also “witnesses” (here and in Acts 1:8 understood to be those who had seen the events described and could testify to them), and their witness added credibility to their message. In the sermonic words of the preacher Warren Wiersbe, the disciples were to be “both preachers (heralds of a message) and witnesses (sharers of an experience) of what the Lord had done for them and said to them.”³¹ This they are to do in the power and authority of his name, and this they did throughout the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:10, 12, 17-18, 30; 5:28, 40; 8:12, 16; 9:27- 28; 10:43, 48; 16:18; 19:5). In the name of Jesus, people would be saved and disciples made.

At least two challenges for the local church come to mind. First, church leaders must honestly consider how clearly and recurrently we proclaim the good news of Jesus.

In some cases, messages address needs but not our greatest need: the need for a forgiving Savior. In other cases, preaching is so dominated by what we stand against that the lost world never fully hears the good

news. Neither sermon is a Great Commission sermon; the former never gets to the real problem, and the latter never gets to the answer.

Second, young preachers increasingly interested in social justice and New Testament social ministry (and rightly so) must **remember that it is the word of the cross that is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor 1:18)**. We older leaders who wrongly backed away from social ministry for fear of losing our evangelistic focus have much to learn from the younger generation here—but all of us must fight to keep primary the proclamation of the gospel. Much more common than a return to gospel-centered preaching is a subtle slide away from it.

The Empowerment of the Disciples

Most striking in the Great Commission texts covered in this article are the surrounding accounts of the disciple's behavior and thinking. In Matthew's Gospel, at least the eleven remaining disciples (and perhaps more of his followers) gathered at the mountain Jesus had designated (28:16). When they saw him, some worshipped him and some were doubtful (28:17). Scholars differ about the number of followers present, and not all commentators agree on the nature of the doubt in the crowd. Nevertheless, it is possible that some of the eleven worshipped the risen Christ, while others "were less sure how to react."³² Some simply struggled to accept the resurrection.

Mark's account, while disputed, still reflects a similar teaching of the remaining Gospels: the disciples were slow to learn.

Indeed, Mark indicates that some did not believe Mary's report about the resurrection (16:11), and some refused to believe the two disciples to whom Jesus appeared while they were walking (16:12-13). Disbelief in a resurrection might seem sensible, but Jesus reproached the eleven "for their unbelief and hardness of heart" (16:14). In the very next verse, though, he calls these same men to preach the gospel to all creation!

Luke's Great Commission passage is also preceded by stories of disciples who struggled to believe the resurrection (24:13-27, 36-39). The account in John 20 is sandwiched by descriptions of disciples who hid for fear of the Jews (20:19) and one disciple—Thomas—who was unwilling to believe the resurrection without seeing Jesus (20:24-25). These were, it would seem, not the best men to trust with the responsibility of the Great Commission.

Even the book of Acts reveals a group of men who did not fully comprehend yet. The doubts of the veracity of the resurrection are not apparent, but these same disciples were seemingly more focused on the nationalized kingdom of Israel than on God's kingdom (Acts 1:6). One can only surmise that their contemplations about their own potential roles in the kingdom distracted them from the work at hand—world evangelization.

Nevertheless, **these unworthy and doubting disciples were still the same men that Jesus had called out to be fishers of men (Mark 1:17). They remained the center of his plan to spread the gospel. That sovereign choice was a grace-filled and love-saturated one:**

This little group of ordinary men were to go to all the nations of the earth and turn their hearers into disciples of

Jesus like themselves! They were having a hard time believing in Him even though they had been with Him for three years and had lived through all the extraordinary events of His ministry and, in particular, of these past few weeks with His death and resurrection. Yet this little group who were so slow to believe were to convert the nations of the earth!³³

The task, however, would not be easy. The cost of doing the commission would be high for these disciples. Persecution would always hang in the air. Rejection, imprisonment, and death would not be uncommon. In fact, this call to make disciples of all nations was “truly a staggering proposition that would verge on the ridiculous were it not for the accompanying authority and promise of the risen Christ, who gives the commission.”³⁴ **Jesus knew all of this, though, and he recurrently promised the disciples the power needed to be faithful even unto death.**

Presence and Power

Hence, the promise of Jesus at the end of Matthew, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20), was much more than a perfunctory closing to a call statement. It was an announcement of victory even in the midst of persecution.

In all of these dangerous situations, the disciples would need to trust the bookend truths of Matthew’s gospel: the virgin-born redeemer named “God with us” (1:27) would be with them to

the end (28:20). Indeed, “Every disciple who has gone out in the strength of this promise can testify that it has always proven true. From highest mountain to deepest valley, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, not one of his disciples has he ever forsaken!”³⁵

The Lukan account is even more arresting. Jesus called his disciples to proclaim the message to all the nations, promised to empower them by sending the Spirit, and then ordered them to wait in Jerusalem until they were “clothed with power from on high” (24:49). No steps would be taken, no decisions would be made, and no ministries would launch out apart from the power of God’s Spirit. With God’s Spirit, though, these same weak disciples would play a role in taking the gospel to the center of the Roman Empire.

The Great Commission account in John’s Gospel begins with Jesus’ announcing “peace be with you” to a group of frightened disciples (20:19). Their having apparently not fully recognized him, he showed them his pierced hands and side and then announced “peace” to them a second time. This repetition was surely not coincidental. Rather, this double greeting, likely based on the Hebrew tradition of “shalom,” was a reminder that the one who commissioned them knew their heart. He who had purchased peace for them through the cross recognized their fears and anxiety. He was nonetheless about to send them out into the world—but not alone.

Rather, he “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (20:22). Interpretations of this act differ. Whether the action was a foreshadowing of coming Pentecost or a marker for the conversion of the disciples, it seems clear that the action

symbolized empowerment for ministry. Not only does this understanding of John's Great Commission passage square with the other passages studied in this article, but it also ties the action most clearly to the disciple's stated ministry (John 20:23). Only in the power of the Spirit could the disciples pronounce forgiveness or judgment on others.

A brief review of this section is in order here. **The men mandated first to carry out the Great Commission were often self-centered. They doubted. They were jealous of others at times. They allowed fear to grip them. They fled. And still, Jesus gave them the responsibility to get the gospel to all people. He did so not because he believed they could get the task done; instead, he did it because he knew what the Spirit could do through them. Luke's second volume would thus undeniably show that the promised Spirit empowered the church as they proclaimed the good news (Acts 1:8; 2:4).**³⁹

This truth ought to serve as both encouragement and warning for the contemporary church. We should rejoice that God can use anyone in the task of the Great Commission. He who chose the disciples has also chosen us, in spite of who we are. This profound reality reminds us that none of us is given permission to ignore the Great Commission. We

have no excuse not to do it if God has sent his Spirit to get the job done.

The danger is that we will program and strategize the Great Commission until we are relying on our plans and know-how more than on God.

Programs are important. Strategy matters. Training is imperative. Plans help guard against an enemy who schemes against us (Eph 6:11). But plans and programs apart from power will not reach the people groups of the world.

The breath of God must blow across our efforts if we want to make a Great Commission difference.

Conclusion

The numbers are staggering. According to the Joshua Project, 2.8 billion people make up the unreached people groups of the world.³⁶ More than 41 percent of the world's people groups remain unreached.³⁷ We have already seen

*that 3,800 people groups are unengaged and unreached. In North America, a 2010 Barna study concluded that approximately 100 million Americans had not attended any church activities within the previous six months.*³⁸

Can believers make a genuine difference in this darkness?

We can indeed, for we do this work in God's power and under God's promise.⁴⁰ **Charles Spurgeon**, whose sermon of missionary challenge began this article, is the best one to conclude this article with a resounding word of hope:

*I think that no true-hearted Christian will ever give up any enterprise which God has laid upon him, because he fears for its ultimate success. "Difficult," said Napoleon, "is not a French word." "Doubtful," is not a Christian word. We are sure to succeed; the gospel must conquer. It is possible for heaven and earth to pass away, but it is not possible for God's Word to fail; and therefore, it is utterly impossible that any nation, or kindred, or tongue should, to the end, withstand the attacks of love, and the invasion of the armies of King Jesus.*⁴¹

God will, in fact, draw to himself a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue (Rev 5:9; 7:9). Armed with that truth, let us press on with the task.

ENDNOTES ¹Charles Spurgeon, “Forward!” in *An All-Round Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 55-56. ²Included in these texts is Mark 16:15. is discussion inevitably raises the question of the original ending of Mark’s Gospel. See *Perspectives on the Ending of the Gospel of Mark: Four Views*, (ed. David Allen Black; Nashville: B&H, 2008). e space limitations of this article prohibit tackling this complicated issue sufficiently. For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to include Mark 16:15 because it generally reflects the remaining unquestioned texts. ³John Polhill, *Acts* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 87. ⁴Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references in the article are from the New American Standard

Version. ⁵Craig Blomberg, *Ma hew* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 429; Ian Campbell, *Opening up Matthew* (Leominster: Day One, 2008), 176-78.

⁶D. A. Carson, *Ma hew 13-28* (Expositor’s Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 594. Carson argues that the authority granted here was not an increase in authority, but rather an enlargement of the spheres of authority.

⁷A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 44.

⁸Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (ed. L. Arnold Hustad; 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 260.

⁹Andreas J. Köstenberger, *e Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel’s Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 191, 108.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 192. ¹¹Christopher J. H. Wright, *e Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL:

InterVarsity, 2006), 60. ¹²F. E. Gaebelin, D. A Carson, et al., eds., *Matthew,*

Mark, Luke (Expositor’s Bible Commentary; Grand

Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 595. ¹³Wright, *Mission of God*, 35. ¹⁴Robert L. Plummer, “ e Great Commission in the

New Testament,” *e Southern Baptist Journal of e- ology* 9 (2005): 4. Plummer also points out that the command was to teach *all that Jesus commanded*— thus including the Great Commission itself. If the students of the disciples were themselves to do the commission, the argument that the Ma hew 28:18- 20 was intended for only the disciples has little credibility.

¹⁵S. K. Weber, *Matthew* (Holman New Testament Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 485.

¹⁶Lee Warner, “Southern Baptist Baptisms at Lowest in Decades” [cited 12 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/southern-baptist-baptisms-at-lowest-in-decades-51060/>.

¹⁷Blomberg, *Ma hew*, 431. ¹⁸Wright, *Mission of God*, 213. ¹⁹John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: e Supremacy of*

God in Missions (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 210-11. ²⁰*Ibid.*, 211. ²¹Blomberg, *Ma hew*, 432; Hal Freeman, “ e Great

Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Ma hew 28:16-20,” *e Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1 (1997): 18.

²²Craig O and Stephen J. Strauss, with Timothy Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 38.

²³Alan James, “Southern Baptists Commit to ‘Embrace’ the Unengaged, Unreached” [cited 12 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.imb.org/main/news/details.asp?LanguageID=1709&StoryID=9749>.

²⁴Erich Bridges, “NAMB & IMB Partnership to Transcend National, Geographic Borders” [cited 12 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.namb.net/nambblog1.aspx?id=8590116839&blogid=8589939695>.

²⁵See, for example, “Send Cities” [cited 12 July 2011].

Online: <http://www.namb.net/send-cities/>. ²⁶H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *e Pulpit Commentary*:

St Luke (vol. 2; Bellingham, WA: Logos), 276. ²⁷William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Expo- sition of the Gospel According to John* (New Testament

Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 361. ²⁸Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 84.

²⁹Plummer, “The Great Commission in the New Testament,” 7. ³⁰Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (rev.

ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 39. ³¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on*

the New Testament (Wheaton: Victor, 1997), 206. ³²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 430. ³³Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton:

Crossway, 2001), 16. ³⁴O and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 37. ³⁵F. H. Paschall and H. H. Hobbs, *The Teacher’s Bible*

Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1972), 615.

³⁶“Global Peoples Summary” [cited 12 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.joshuaproject.net/>.

³⁷*Ibid.* ³⁸Barna Group, “Millions of Unchurched Adults Are

Christians Hurt by Churches But Can Be Healed of the Pain” [cited 12 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/362-millions-of-unchurched-adults-are-christians-hurt-by-churches-but-can-be-healed-of-the-pain>.

³⁹cf. Acts 2:17-18; 4:8; 4:31; 5:32; 6:10; 8:29; 8:39; 9:31; 10:19; 10:44; 11:12; 13:2; 13:4.

⁴⁰Plummer notes that the Luke 24:47 Great Commission passage is a prediction best understood as “repentance and forgiveness of sins *will be preached* in his name to all nations.” Polhill concludes likewise about the Great Commission call in Acts 1:8, saying, “Jesus promised the disciples two things: power and witness. The future tense here has an imperatival sense: ‘you *will* [must] receive power’; ‘you *will* be my witnesses.’” In that light Plummer concludes, “In proclaiming the gospel, we know we are busy with a winning and important task.”

Great Commission in the New Testament,” 6; Polhill,

Acts, 86. ⁴¹Charles Spurgeon, “The Missionaries’ Charge and

Charta” [cited 12 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols7-9/chs383.pdf>.

Wait, What's That? The Science Behind Why Your Mind Keeps Wandering

If you're experiencing an attention deficit, you're far from alone.

BY DRAKE BAER

Try this: Count your exhalations—1, 2, 3—all the way to 10. See if you can get to 10 without thinking about lunch or laundry or deadlines or dates.

Unless you've [trained your attention](#), it'll probably start to wander—which, new research into the brain suggests, begins at a physical level.

“Your neurons can fire for a while with the energy they have in them, but not for long: After a dozen seconds, each needs more energy,” research psychologist [Peter Killeen](#) tells *Fast Company*.

Everybody has a little ADHD.

After those first dozen seconds, ever-hungry neurons order up stored-up energy. If they don't get the glucose or lactate they need—two of their favorite fuels—they'll fire more slowly.

If your brain doesn't have enough energy available, you'll have a worse shot at keeping track of those breaths. You'll experience a **deficit** in your **attention**.

Which is fitting, given that Killeen's insights spring from his studies in attention deficit disorder. According to his and his colleagues' [research](#), people with and without ADHD have attentional behavior that's different in degree, not in kind.

It's a spectrum, similar to how [hetero- and homo-sexuality](#) or [introversion or extroversion lie along gradients](#).

In this way, everybody has at least a little ADHD.

It's sort of like your brain is a super-excited third-grade classroom: The star student—that is, whatever you're trying to focus on—will get most of your attention.

“You put anybody on one of these kid's tests (for ADHD) and everybody's performance gets worse over time (on a given task),” he explains. “We're better able to pull up the neuroenergy and they're not.”

THE WAY IT WORKS

The technical name for Killeen and his colleagues' framework is the [Neuroenergetic Theory](#).

If we grossly simplify the process, it looks like this:

- After 12 seconds of effort, your neurons are running on empty.
- They first look to glial cells for lactate, a readily used sugar.
- If glial cells can't find lactate, they look for glycogen, which they store up at night and later convert to energy.

If your neurons can't find lactate or glycogen, they get exhausted—enabling other parts of your brain to call for attention. It's sort of like your brain is a super-excited third-grade classroom: The star student—that is, whatever you're trying to focus on—will get most of your attention. And if the star student got enough to eat and enough rest, it can be called on periodically throughout the day. If not, other excitable parts of your brain will get your attention. Then your mind will start to wander.

HOW TO WORK WITH THE WANDERING

If you've ever tried mindfulness meditation—and you have by now, given our opening paragraph—this news won't be entirely surprising. Our minds tend to wander (and a wandering mind can be dangerous—like if you're contemplating your way in a moving car. The key, as Killeen explains, is to cooperate with mental movements.

One of the first keys, he says, is to recognize that you have a finite attentional window—and structure your workflow to be congruent with that capacity. This speaks to how we’ve talked about how work is a series of sprints—and to be our most productive and most creative, we need to unplug throughout our workdays.

“A lot of successful ADHD people and successful people in general recognize that, ‘I can’t pay attention to this any longer or do it at that rate,’ he says. ‘I’ll switch to this other task right now and get a fresh start. Then I’ll get back to this as soon as I’ve given my brain a rest.’”

But doing nothing isn’t the only option. As banker-neurologist John Coates notes in *the Hour Between Dog And Wolf*, other research has shown that [switching tasks](#) can defray your mental fatigue.

Additionally, Killeen notes, you can look at the same problem in a different way: if you’re attacking a problem, try flanking it with an analogy. What if the problem were a painting? A cloud? What associations can you make? That free association, as we’ve learned from Stanford professor Tina Seelig, is [a catalyst of innovation](#).

BUT A WANDERING ATTENTION CAN BE A GOOD THING, TOO.

You can use the wandering to your advantage. How? If you have a creative profession—creator, artist, scientist, entrepreneur—and a creative environment, you can leverage the wandering.

Say you’re toiling away at a logical task and start to get worn down. Instead of toughing it out, step away and start thinking in nontraditional ways: What if the problem were a chipmunk? What if it were a cloud? Let your mind wander and analogize, Killeen says—so long as you’re not walking down the sidewalk and about to step in front of a car.

“It’s a way of being creative,” he says. “It’s a way of giving the linear programming, engineering, hard-core good stuff of the brain a break.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Drake Baer was a contributing writer at Fast Company, where he covered work culture. He's the co-author of *Everything Connects*, a book about how intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational psychology shape innovation.