



The Call to Multiply

Summary and Goal

Jesus called His followers to make disciples who multiply disciples.

Main Passages

Matthew 28:18-20

Session Outline

1. Go (Matt. 28:18-19a)
2. Baptize and Teach (Matt. 28:19b-20a)
3. To the End of the Age (Matt. 28:20b)

Theological Theme

God's plan for the spread of the gospel and expansion of the Kingdom is through disciples multiplying disciples.

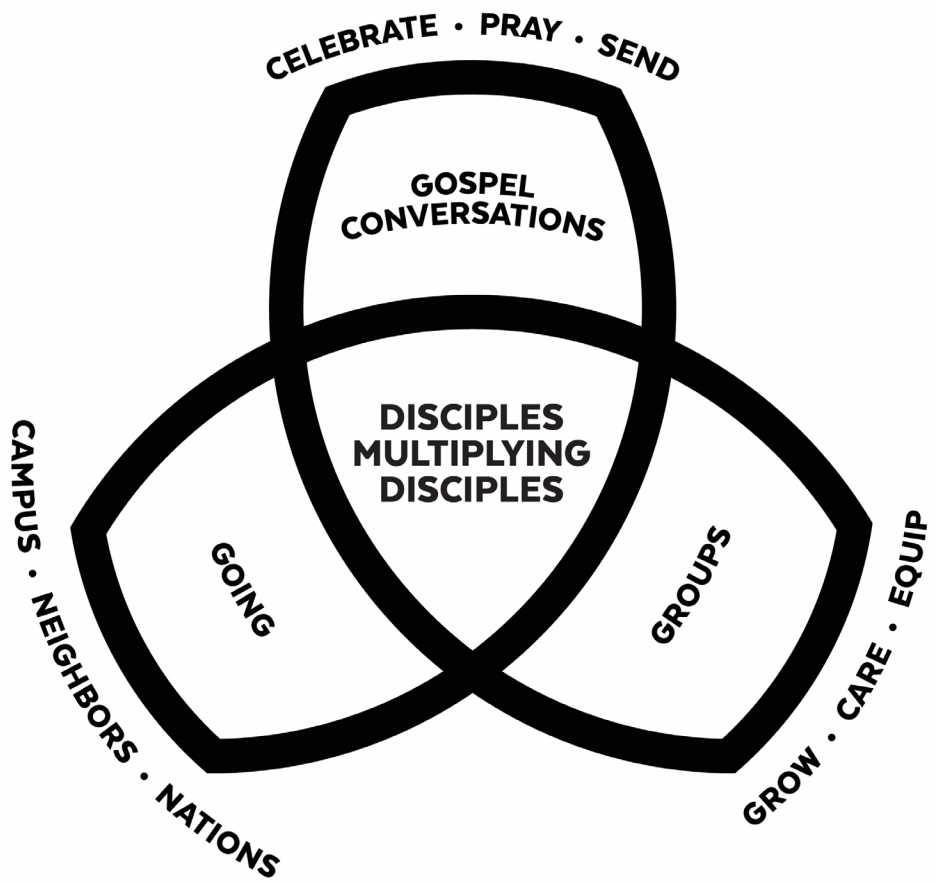
Christ Connection

The gospel is the foundational message that all followers of Jesus are sent to share.

Missional Application

In this passage, Jesus commanded His followers to go into all the world to make disciples who would make disciples. We practice this by participating in groups, going to our neighbors and the nations, and seeking gospel conversations with others.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



1

Session Plan

The Call to Multiply

? For Further Discussion

Are you the disciple of anyone? Do you disciple anyone? What does that relationship look like?

Introduction

- ? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “making disciples?”
- ? Who in the Bible was a disciple maker? What did he or she do to make disciples?

The context for the Great Commission is that Jesus had been crucified, buried, and resurrected. He appeared to His disciples and they worshiped Him, though some doubted. In the midst of this worship, Jesus gave them the Great Commission. It’s difficult to think of a moment in Jesus’ earthly ministry where words would have been more important. What Jesus said here is paramount in His followers’ lives.

1. Go (Matt. 28:18-19a)

Before Jesus’ ascension, He left the church some final instructions in a passage known as the Great Commission. Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions after the resurrection, but He took the opportunity prior to His ascension to leave them His final command. In English, this verse contains two commands—“go” and “make disciples.” In the original language, only one of these is a command. “Make disciples” is the central focus of the passage. The rest of the passage explains Jesus’ vision for how to make disciples.

- ? What does it mean for us that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth?
- ? How does this relate to the mission we have been given?
- ? Application: To whom has God sent you? Where are the places He has given you grace, influence, and presence?

2. Baptize and Teach (Matt. 28:19b-20a)

By His authority, Jesus commissioned the eleven disciples to make more disciples in “all nations.” Jesus’ challenge was not limited in geography. The Greek word translated nations is the plural of *ethnos*, from which

we get the English word ethnic. It included both Jews and Gentiles. God desires to reach all people, not only of every political nation but also of every people group. While many things in Scripture describe events that we should not expect to see happen again (such as the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost), the Great Commission is prescriptive because it is a command to be obeyed by all Christians, at all times.

- ❓ How should we understand Jesus' command to baptize? What does that mean for us as we seek to be disciples who multiply disciples?
- ❓ How should we understand the command to teaching? What does this mean for every follower of Christ?
- ❓ Application: How has God called you specifically to be involved in making disciples of "all nations"?

3. To the End of the Age (Matt. 28:20b)

Jesus gave the disciples a promise at the end of the commission. He assured them of His presence. Jesus promised He would be with His followers always, to the end of the age. The God who sends us will never leave us. Jesus promised His presence to go with believers as they made disciples. Jesus cares greatly about His mission in the world, so much so that He died for it and promised to be with each of us as we faithfully obey to take His gospel to every nation in the world. Though the Great Commission may make us uncomfortable at times, we are compelled by love to obey Jesus' command.

- ❓ How might the promise of Jesus' presence shape our posture toward daily life in a fallen and broken world? How might it encourage us in our groups and as we go and seek gospel conversations?
- ❓ How should Jesus's presence affect the way we work to obey the Great Commission?
- ❓ Application: How can we help one another live sent and support our church's mission efforts as a group?

Conclusion

- ❓ Do you see yourself as under Jesus' authority? How does that affect your life and ministry?
- ❓ In what ways are you participating in the Great Commission? Who have you shared the gospel with in the past month? Who are you teaching/discipling?

❓ For Further Discussion

How does the promise of Jesus' presence in your life compel you to seek out gospel conversations and discipleship?



Expanded Session Content

The Call to Multiply

Introduction

- ❓ What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “making disciples?”
- ❓ Who in the Bible was a disciple maker? What did he or she do to make disciples?
- ❓ Are you the disciple of anyone? Do you disciple anyone? What does that relationship look like?

“Making disciples” may be one of the most frequently spoken phrases in evangelical churches. At the same time, it is probably one of the least carried out the commands of Jesus, at least in the Western church.

The text we are looking at clarifies two important matters. First, it explains that discipleship is a priority. If we don’t grasp the gravity of this command then we won’t do it. Secondly, these verses explain how we are to go about completing the task. This is not a detailed guide to making disciples, but it does give us a broad outline to apply to our disciple-making context.

Session Summary



The context for the Great Commission is that Jesus had been crucified, buried, and resurrected. He appeared to His disciples and they worshiped Him, though some doubted. In the midst of this worship, Jesus gave them the Great Commission. It’s difficult to think of a moment in Jesus’ earthly ministry where words would have been more important. What Jesus said here is paramount in His followers’ lives.

1. Go (Matt. 28:18-19a)

Before Jesus’ ascension, He left the church some final instructions in a passage known as the Great Commission. Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions after the resurrection, but He took the opportunity prior to His ascension to leave them His final command. In English, this verse contains two commands—“go” and “make disciples.” In the original language, only one of these is a command. “Make disciples” is the central focus of the passage. The rest of the passage explains Jesus’ vision for how to make disciples.


The text uses the Greek word, *proselthōn*, which means “He came close to them.” Perhaps there was a larger crowd there and Jesus wanted to speak directly to the disciples. Or maybe He leaned in to them to emphasize the importance of what He was about to say. Whatever the case, His words were astounding. He spoke as One already seated at the right hand of the Father, with a global outlook on the present and future and with all the resources of heaven at His command. Jesus had authority and power before His death and resurrection, but now He would no longer empty Himself of any authority or power. (See Phil. 2:7.) His authority is boundless and includes heaven and earth.

Jesus gave His disciples a task they could never accomplish in their own strength, yet He did not expect them to fail. “All authority . . . on heaven and on earth” (v. 18) means Jesus possessed total authority. Nothing in the universe is outside of the sovereign rule and reign of Christ. When Jesus sent His disciples into the world, He sent them under the banner of His own authority. When people come to believe the gospel, it is not because of a compelling or persuasive messenger but because of the power that lives in the message of the gospel. (See Rom. 1:16.)

-  What does it mean for us that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth?
-  How does this relate to the mission we have been given?

We are under Jesus’ command. There are no lone-ranger, rogue Christians who have the right to draw up their own battle plans. This is one of the reasons we organize in groups that seek to be faithful to this command of Christ. The mission has been clearly stated and followers of Jesus are called to carry it out. Yes, how the mission is carried out is shaped by context, but it must never be shaped in such a way that the essence of the mission is compromised.

Further, we go to complete the mission with full assurance of our security and victory. Our Master has all the authority. This means that no ground upon which we set our foot is outside of the control and authority of our Command-in-Chief. There are no sovereign nations in the spiritual realm. All rulers and authorities are under the authority and command of the one true and living God.

-  Application: To whom has God sent you? Where are the places He has given you grace, influence, and presence?

All Authority

Before the resurrection, Jesus had authority (Matt. 7:29; 9:6, 8; 11:27; 21:23). However, through the resurrection, the Father granted Him “all authority over heaven and . . . earth,” an authority far greater than that which Satan had vainly promised Him.

2. Baptize and Teach (Matt. 28:19b-20a)

By His authority, Jesus commissioned the eleven disciples to make more disciples in “all nations.” Jesus’ challenge was not limited in geography. The Greek word translated nations is the plural of *ethnos*, from which we get the English word *ethnic*. It included both Jews and Gentiles. God desires to reach all people, not only of every political nation but also of every people group. While many things in Scripture describe events that we should not expect to see happen again (such as the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost), the Great Commission is prescriptive because it is a command to be obeyed by all Christians, at all times.



How should we understand Jesus’ command to baptize? What does that mean for us as we seek to be disciples who multiply disciples?

Does Jesus want us to only go around baptizing people? No. That’s not the point here. For Jews, baptism was synonymous with conversion. It was a ritual that was used to signify and mark one’s conversion. We can see this dynamic playing out in the Book of Acts. Conversion is so closely linked to baptism that sometimes it seems that conversion is equivalent to baptism (Acts 2:38), though a brief survey of the New Testament teaching quickly dismisses that possibility. Nonetheless, baptism is an important step in the life of a newly converted follower of Christ; it is both his or her public confession of and identification with Jesus Christ.

So, we should read baptism in this passage and think conversion. We know that conversion only happens when a person responds with faith and repentance to the gospel. So, if we want to obey the first part of Jesus’ command to make disciples, then we must seek out gospel conversations. We must be about explaining the gospel to everyone with whom we have a hearing.



How should we understand the command to teaching? What does this mean for every follower of Christ?

Though this aspect of the Great Commission is much more straightforward, it generally isn’t what we think of when we consider how we might accomplish the Great Commission. Being obedient to the command of Jesus in Matthew 28 is more than teaching the gospel through a one-time message, though it is certainly not less than this.

Jesus said that we should teach them “to observe everything I have commanded you” (v. 20). This is what we commonly call discipleship. So, when we read the Great Commission, it is clear that Jesus’ command is for us to be faithful in evangelism and discipleship. We ought not to be only concerned for the justification of sinners, but also the sanctification of the saints.

Making disciples is the mission of every Christian; this is the reason we remain on earth. Jesus challenged His followers to take the gospel to others. Jesus did not call His disciples to make converts, but to make disciples. This implies the total witness of proclaiming the gospel, leading people to faith, and training them to follow Jesus. Living sent every day is about much more than evangelism; it includes helping people grow in their relationship with Jesus and teaching them how to go out and share the good news of the gospel, too. The most important calling we can embrace in life is to make disciples of others around us by going, baptizing, and teaching.



Application: How has God called you specifically to be involved in making disciples of “all nations”?

3. To the End of the Age (Matt. 28:20b)

Jesus gave the disciples a promise at the end of the commission. He assured them of His presence. Jesus promised He would be with His followers always, to the end of the age. The God who sends us will never leave us. Jesus promised His presence to go with believers as they made disciples. Jesus cares greatly about His mission in the world, so much so that He died for it and promised to be with each of us as we faithfully obey to take His gospel to every nation in the world. Though the Great Commission may make us uncomfortable at times, we are compelled by love to obey Jesus’ command.

How significant this must have been. The disciples were looking at the One with whom they had walked, talked, and followed for three years. They had given up everything to follow Him and they loved Him deeply. So, Jesus’ promise of presence was doubly comforting for those disciples. This isn’t to diminish the profound comfort that it is for all believers, but we should acknowledge how those men must have felt in that moment.




How might the promise of Jesus’ presence shape our posture toward daily life in a fallen and broken world? How might it encourage us in our groups and as we go and seek gospel conversations?


It must have been a mountaintop experience for the disciples to see the risen Christ, receive the Great Commission, and watch Jesus’ ascension. Their hearts must have swelled with love and joy. Blood and adrenaline must have coursed through their veins, causing a heightened sense of energy, resolve, and optimism. Of course they would complete the Great Commission and Jesus would be with them!

But, what about when that memory began to fade and they grew weary with the work? What about when Stephen was martyred and believers were chased out of Jerusalem? (See Acts 8.) Jesus’ blessed and amazing

promise is that He will be with His disciples—all His disciples—in every day, sorrow, suffering, weakness, and trial. The promise Jesus’ presence is just as certain when it doesn’t feel as though He is there, as when it does.

 How should Jesus’s presence affect the way we work to obey the Great Commission?

Jesus’ promise wasn’t intended to allow us complacently rest in our own wellbeing and security. Rather, it ought to be an incentive to pour ourselves out on the altar of service to our Lord for the completion of the Great Commission.

 Application: How can we help one another live sent and support our church’s mission efforts as a group?

Conclusion

Followers of Christ are sent into the world to faithfully labor to complete the Great Commission. While we might think of missionaries as those sent around the world to share the gospel, the reality is that all Christ-followers are sent to tell others about Him whether near or far.

Jesus, with all the authority in heaven and earth, sent out His disciples. That commission wasn’t for that small band of believers only, it carries forward to all those who trust in Him. Not only is this logical, but it is embedded in the command itself. They were to teach new converts to obey all that Jesus had commanded them, which would include the commission itself. (See v. 20.)

It’s clear that every Christians’ mission is to make disciples by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must be careful not to assume that “proclaiming the gospel” necessarily refers to being behind a pulpit or standing on a street corner. Those certainly are proclamations of the gospel, but there are many other contexts in which the gospel may be proclaimed. A proclamation of the gospel may take place when you share the gospel to your seatmate on an airplane. The gospel is proclaimed when you read a gospel tract with your neighbor.

The original mission to go and make disciples of all nations hasn’t changed at all 2,000 years later. Christ-followers are still sent by the Lord Jesus into the world to fulfill the Great Commission by going; praying; and supporting the work of proclaiming the gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation.

- ❓ Do you see yourself as under Jesus' authority? How does that affect your life and ministry?
- ❓ In what ways are you participating in the Great Commission? Who have you shared the gospel with in the past month? Who are you teaching/discipling?
- ❓ How does the promise of Jesus' presence in your life compel you to seek out gospel conversations and discipleship?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the mission of telling others about Jesus. Thank Him that He has promised to be with us and that His purposes are certain under His complete authority and power.

Additional Resources

- *Multiply* by Francis Chan and Mark Beuving
- *Follow Me* by David Platt
- *Growing Up* by Robby Gallaty

For Next Week

Session Title

- Community: What Are We Trying to do Here?

Main Passages

- Mark 12:31

Memorize

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

- Matthew 28:19

Daily Readings

- Monday - Matthew 28:19-20

- Tuesday - 2 Timothy 2:2

- Wednesday - Luke 9:23

- Thursday - Acts 1:8

- Friday - Matthew 24:14

- Saturday - Luke 10:2

Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaenus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Extended Commentary

Matthew 28:18-20

28:18–20. The Great Commission passage is reminiscent of Acts 1:6–11. In Matthew, Jesus issued a similar commission in different words with a different emphasis. However, the setting in the Acts passage was in Jerusalem. It coincided with Jesus’ ascension into heaven at the end of the forty days. Jesus probably met with the disciples in Galilee and then instructed them to return to Jerusalem. All of this was done in preparation for their receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5) and their continuation of his Spirit-empowered ministry in Acts 2 (in Jerusalem). Matthew did not record Jesus’ ascension into heaven, as it likely would have distracted from his emphasis in 28:18–20. He wanted the Great Commission to linger in people’s minds as they finished his Gospel. Jesus had a big job in mind for his followers. All is a key word in 28:18–20. It emphasizes Jesus’ divine identity: all authority, all nations, all things.

Before issuing his commission, Jesus laid the foundation for the success of their future ministry: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. This was critically important. Without the Messiah’s authority, the mission of the disciples and our mission today would be doomed to failure. The reader of Matthew’s Gospel should know well by now the nature and power of the Messiah’s authority.

The heart of the Great Commission is 28:19–20, the last words of Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew knew the principle that “last words are lasting words.” He chose carefully, under the Spirit’s direction, the words he wanted to linger in his readers’ minds. Therefore identified Jesus’ authority (28:18) as the reason the disciples must carry out his orders.

The central command is make disciples. At the heart of our mission is the reproduction in others of what Jesus has produced in us: faith, obedience, growth, authority, compassion, love, and a bold, truthful message as his witnesses. They were learners commanded to produce more learners.

Jesus’ disciples were to reproduce other disciples of all the nations (the word translated nations is the plural of *ethnos*, meaning “peoples, ethnic groups,” as in 24:14). He was hinting that their fulfillment of their commission would ultimately lead to his second coming. It is significant that Matthew ended his Gospel with one more reference to the Gentile mission, challenging the Jewish Christians to lose their prejudices and unify the church. This also challenges us to break down any artificial boundaries erected by our culture. We must minister impartially. Jesus was an equal-opportunity Savior.

We see three participles here that are subordinate to the central command to make disciples. Each of these clarifies the way in which Jesus’ disciples are to make disciples.

First, in the emphatic first position, even before make disciples, is the aorist participle *go*. In the context, this Greek participle is best rendered, “when you have gone.” “Going” is one of the three means by which to fulfill the central command to make disciples. Going means more than traveling across geographical borders, although this is part of Jesus’ meaning. The point is that

we believers are active; we are not inert. Going means crossing boundaries to make disciples—going across the street, going to dinner with an unbelieving friend, going into the inner city, going beyond one’s comfort zone to make the gospel accessible to the lost. Living life is “going” with a purpose, every day.

Going also implies our support of people who are literally going to other cultures. We must support global outreach financially and support the people going emotionally and personally as well as through prayer. We are a part of their team. In all these ways we “go,” in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

We also “go” when we support efforts to equip indigenous ministers in different cultures. We help equip them to lead people of their own culture and language. This enables them to fulfill the Great Commission at home and in cultures where they will find a better reception than we would.

Second, we come to the participle baptizing (present participle of baptizo meaning “continually immersing them”). Because baptism was so closely associated with the decision of faith (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:36–38; 10:47–48). It may be best to see baptizing as Jesus’ way of summarizing the evangelistic half of the disciples’ ministry. The third participle, teaching (Matt. 28:20), represents the other half of the disciples’ ministry—the edification of those who are already believers. Baptism is an initiating rite that “immerses” the believer into a whole new world.

Baptism is not a step to salvation. Rather, it is an initial step of obedience that results from a person’s decision to trust the Messiah. Baptism represents the identification of people with this new way of life and faith. Baptism should be experienced as soon as possible after a person trusts Christ. Jesus specified that we are to baptize disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The use of the singular name implies clearly that this listing of three persons should be thought of as one name. Here is a clear affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity—one God, three distinct persons. The believer who chooses to submit to baptism into this name identifies with God’s name as well as the spiritual family of all others who are identified with this same name.

This is a good summary of the evangelistic task of the church. It is bringing those who identify with the world into a new identification. It is seeing themselves anew as citizens of God’s kingdom, as children of God, as brothers and sisters of the Messiah, and as brothers and sisters with the rest of the family of believers. Our mission is to bring people to a point where they see themselves differently—because they have become different through the transforming work of God’s grace.

Third, the participle teaching (present participle of didasko, meaning “keep on teaching them”) completes the series of three means by which we fulfill the Great Commission. This represents the other half of our mission—the edification or building up of those who are believers.

Jesus instructed us not only to teach content, but to train people into obedient action: teaching them to keep everything I have commanded you. The teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew are the essence of the practical teaching we are to pass on to new disciples. There is much more teaching from Scripture beyond Matthew that the church needs. But his teaching in Matthew serves as a strong foundation.

By fulfilling the teaching portion of the Great Commission, we take believers at every stage of spiritual maturity to the next stage of growth. This can range from the infancy of a brand-new believer to various levels of spiritual adulthood. Every believer should progress toward the perfect character of Christ (Eph. 4:11–16), but none will arrive there short of eternity. So we must see ourselves as learners in a family of teachers, who themselves are also learners. The believer who is most mature will be most ready to listen and learn, even from the newest member of the family (cf. Matt. 18:4).

Matthew's last words are a concluding promise from the Messiah-king. Surely adds a note of assurance, similar to Jesus' "I tell you the truth." A paraphrase of the phrase I am with you always would read, "I myself am continually with you always until the end of the age." Among other things, Jesus claimed omnipresence, again laying claim to deity (note "Immanuel, God with us" in 1:23). He will be with us every step of the way. I am with you always reminds us of the great promises to saints of old like Moses (Exod. 3:12) and Joshua (Josh. 1:5).

This promise complements Jesus' claim to universal authority in Matthew 28:18, and it undergirds the believer's confidence in fulfilling the Great Commission. If we take out the three subordinate participial clauses from 28:18–20, boiling the commission down to its grammatical essence, we end up with this: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, make disciples of all the nations; and surely I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹

References

1. Weber, Stuart K. *Matthew*. Edited by Max E. Anders. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000.

Author Bio

Francis Chan (Multiply)

Francis Chan is the best-selling author of *Crazy Love*, *Forgotten God*, *Erasing Hell*, *You and Me Forever* and the host of the BASIC series (*Who Is God & We Are Church*). Currently, Francis is planting churches in the San Francisco area and recently launched a countrywide discipleship movement called Multiply with David Platt.

Mark Beuving (Multiply)

Mark Beuving is a professor at Eternity Bible College in Southern California, where he lives with his wife and daughters.

David Platt (Follow Me)

David Platt is the author of three New York Times bestsellers, including *Radical*. He is lead pastor at McLean Bible Church in metro Washington, D.C., the former president of the IMB (International Mission Board), and founder of Radical Inc., a global center for the unreached that serves churches in accomplishing the mission of Christ. Platt received his master of divinity (MDiv), master of theology (ThM), and doctor of philosophy (PhD) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia with his wife and their children.

Robby Gallaty (Growing Up)

In addition to his leadership at Long Hollow Baptist Church, Robby is also the founder of Replicate Ministries and the author of several books, including *Growing Up*, *Firmly Planted*, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, and the LifeWay Bible study *Knowing Jesus*.

Stuart Weber (Matthew)

Stu Weber is senior pastor of Good Shepherd Community Church near Gresham, Oregon. He is a much-in-demand international speaker and the author of the popular *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, *Tender Warrior*, *All the King's Men*, and *Along the Road to Manhood*. He and his wife, Linda, have three children: Kent, Blake, and Ryan.

Max Anders (Matthew)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume *Holman Bible Commentary* series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.