



Slide #1

At first glance you might be thinking there is a mistake with this title. Probably you are asking yourself, “Why isn’t the subject the making-disciples process. Certainly Matthew 28 teaches, ‘go and make disciples.’”

Making-Followers Process in Acts & the Epistles

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1

Slide #2

We are all familiar with Matthew 28:19-20, particularly the key elements: “go,” “make disciples,” “baptizing them,” and “teaching them.” Yet, there are issues that are in dispute regarding the verb or verbs and the participles that may or may not be explaining the manner by which “making disciples” is accomplished.

MATTHEW 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

2

Slide #3

Option A is seen on slide 3. Notice the grammatical analysis of this approach to the text and then the usual translation. The text structure indicates the main verb is “make disciples” and all three participles, ending in “ing,” are subordinate circumstantial (or adverbial) participles, which express the how the action of the main verb is carried out. Wherever the Christian’s location, his responsibility is to make disciples, which involves “baptizing” those that come to faith in Christ and then “teaching” them to grow in knowledge of and obedience to Christ. Consequently, the translation is “as you are going make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them.”

There is a problem with this particular approach. Notice in the structure of the sentence that the first participle *going* precedes the main verb *make disciples*. That positioning of the words, where the main verb follows a participle, indicates a different type of participle in the Greek language—an attendant circumstance participle.¹ Consequently, a different approach to this text is required.

Slide #4

Option B is shown on slide 4. Notice the grammatical analysis of this approach and the way it is translated. In this case all three participles are understood as attendant circumstance participles (not ending with “ing”), which are dependent on but not subordinate to the main verb *make disciples*. They all take on the mood of the main verb (imperative force in each case) and are translated as finite verbs, being connected by “and.”² While “the relative weight in such constructions is that a greater emphasis is placed on the action of the main verb than on the participle[s],” each is understood as a command.³ In this case, the translation is “go and make disciples and baptize them and teach them.”

This also has problem. The last two participles do not possess the structural pattern of an attendant circumstance participle, since the participles must “precede the main verb”—both in word order and time of event (though usually there is a very close proximity).⁴ While baptism should be in close proximity to a person’s trusting in Christ, it is obvious that “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” requires time since it is an extended process. Again, a different method of understanding this text is required.

MATTHEW 28:19-20
Option "A"

Grammatical Analysis

All three participles are subordinate circumstantial (or adverbial) participles, which express the manner the action of the main verb is carried out. Each participle ends in “ing.”

P	Going
V	Make Disciples
P	Baptizing
P	Teaching

Translation

As you are going make disciples,
baptizing them and teaching them.

3

MATTHEW 28:19-20
Option "B"

Grammatical Analysis

All three participles are attendant circumstance participles, which are dependent on but not subordinate to the main verb. They take on the mood (imperative force) of the main verb and are translated as finite verbs, being connected by “and.”

P	Go
V	Make Disciples
P	Baptize
P	Teach

Translation

Go and make disciples and
baptize them and teach them.

4

Slide #5

In Option C, the first participle is an attendant circumstance participle, which is dependent on but not subordinate to the main verb. Having the structural pattern where it precedes the main verb, it takes on the mood (imperative force) of the main verb and is translated as a finite verb, being connected by “and.” The remaining two participles are subordinate circumstantial (or adverbial) participles, which express the manner the action of the main verb *make disciples* is carried out. These two participles end in “ing.”

Not only does the first participle *go* precede the main verb *make disciples*, both being commands and inextricably linked, but as an attendant circumstance participle its action is a prerequisite before the action of the main verb can take place and/or continue to occur. Before the process of making disciples can begin and proceed the Christian in his/her spheres of influence (where

one lives, works, or goes to school) must intentionally develop connections with non-believers in order to reveal Christ through life and words.⁵ As a person trusts in Christ as a result of those connections, baptism occurs and the teaching aspect of discipleship begins one-to-one as well as in a community of believers.

The translation “go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them” aligns with the grammatical structure and intent of the text. It is the preferred translation.

[**Note:** While “go and make disciples” is the correct translation, this very text is often abused for a missionary emphasis. The text isn’t about going to foreign lands. As explained above, the “go” is inextricably linked to the whole process of “disciple making” and is the responsibility of every Christian in their spheres of influence—intentionally initiating and maintaining relationships in which Christ is revealed through life and words. Jesus gave this command to the Eleven before His return to the Father, yet two years later we find the Eleven remaining in Jerusalem when persecution had driven all the other believers out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).⁶ Jesus commanded the Eleven to “Go,” but they never left Jerusalem for those first few years. Remember: *The issue of Matthew 28 isn’t location, rather the issue is intentionally developing connections with non-believers in which Christ is revealed through life and words no matter the location.*]

Slide #6

The break down of Matthew 28:19-20 segmented by who, what, when, where, which, and how in the terminology of the Gospels is shown on slide 6. The

MATTHEW 28:19-20
Option "C"

Grammatical Analysis

The first participle is an attendant circumstance participle, which is dependent on but not subordinate to the main verb. It takes on the mood (imperative force) of the main verb and is translated as a finite verb, being connected by “and.” The remaining two participles are subordinate circumstantial (or adverbial) participles, which express the manner the action of the main verb is carried out. Each participle ends in “ing.”

P	Go
V	Make Disciples
P	Baptizing
P	Teaching

Translation

Go and make disciples,
baptizing them and teaching them.

5

MATTHEW 28:19-20
Terminology of the Gospels

What	"Go and Make Disciples" (Participle + Main Verb—Imperative)		
When	Continuous Process (Ongoing)		
Where	Wherever You Are (Varying Locations)		
Who	"All Nations"		
Which	Curious Disciples (Matt 5:1)	Convinced Disciples (Jn 2:1-11)	Committed Disciples (Lk 9:23-26)
How	Revealing Christ (Walk & Talk)	"Baptizing Them" (Birth)	"Teaching Them" (Growth)

6

command to “go and make disciples” is a continuous, ongoing process no matter where you may be located. While its focus is to the whole world, the individual Christian’s responsibility concerns initiating and maintaining connections in their own spheres of influence so that through their life and words Christ is presented to the curious, baptizing the persuaded, and teaching them in growing commitment and obedience to Christ (see article *Distinction in Disciples*).⁷

Slide #7

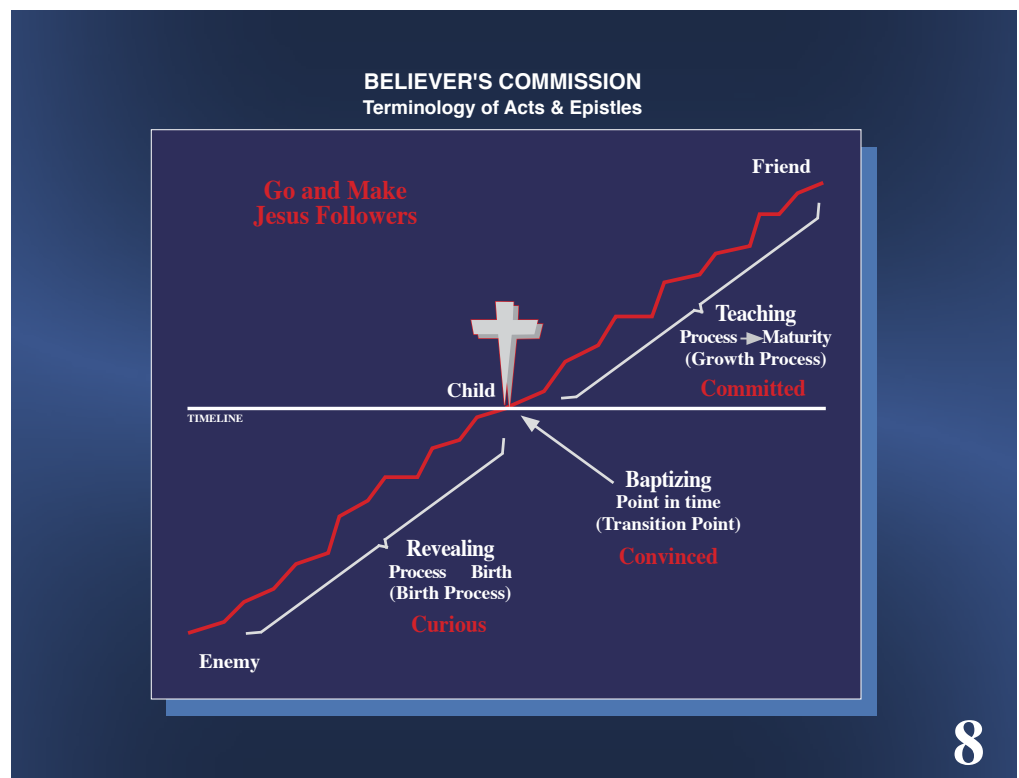
The identical break down is on slide 7. The only exception being that in each instance where the term *disciples* appeared on the previous slide is now replaced by the term *followers*. In the article, *Transition in the Making-Disciples Process*, we point out the distinct change in terminology from *disciple* in the Gospels to *brethren* in Acts and the Epistles. In fact, the term *disciple* is never used in the Epistles. Since each term refers to *Jesus followers*, the shift from disciples to followers on this slide provides a clearer perspective to the believer’s commission.

MATTHEW 28:19-20 Transition into Acts & Epistles Terminology			
What	"Go and Make Followers" (Participle + Main Verb—Imperative)		
When	Continuous Process (Ongoing)		
Where	Wherever You Are (Varying Locations)		
Who	"All Nations"		
Which	Curious Followers (Matt 5:1)	Convinced Followers (Jn 2:1-11)	Committed Followers (Lk 9:23-26)
How	Revealing Christ (Walk & Talk)	"Baptizing Them" (Birth)	"Teaching Them" (Growth)

7

Slide #8

In light of the change in terminology, the believer’s commission is to “go and make Jesus followers.” The timeline is divided into two distinct periods. Prior to the cross, with the cross representing the point in time when a person trusts in Christ as savior, the curious individual moves from being an enemy to a child of God. The birth process is the result of Christians revealing Christ were they live and work. At the point in time when salvation occurs, those convinced are baptized as an outward demonstration of their trust in Jesus. The second period, from child to friend of God, addresses the growth process in which believers increase in knowledge of and obedience to Christ, leading to maturity and becoming a friend of God.



8

Slide #9

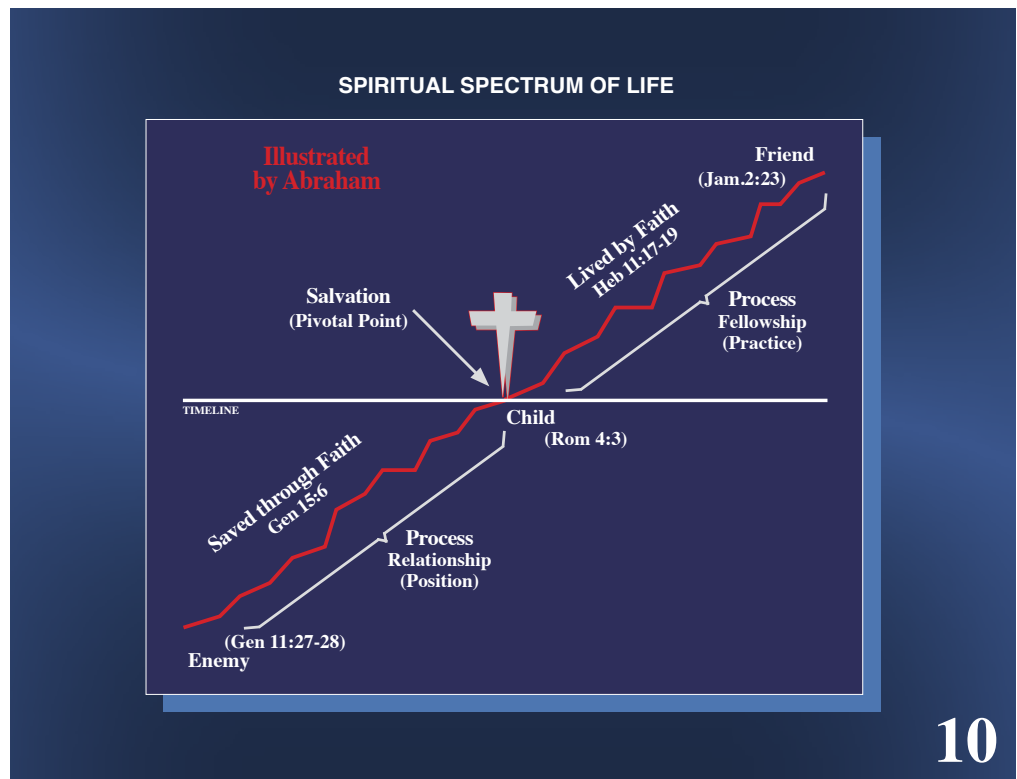
The three “follower” categories are further developed on slide 9. Jesus is Lord unknowingly for the curious follower, as contrasted to knowing the Lord positionally and experientially for convinced and committed, respectively. While curious followers have rejected Christ throughout their lives, at salvation convinced followers experience a one-time reception of Jesus and committed followers experience an ongoing influence by the Spirit of Christ. Being an enemy of God owing to rebellion from Christ, curious followers experience eternal death. For the convinced follower, he is a child of God possessing eternal life due to his relationship with Christ. Owing to his position in Christ, the committed follower can experience intimacy in fellowship with Christ, leading to abundant living and becoming a friend of God.

LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST Terminology of Acts & Epistles		
CURIOUS FOLLOWERS	CONVINCED FOLLOWERS	COMMITTED FOLLOWERS
LORD (Unknowingly)	LORD (Positionally)	LORD (Experientially)
Life-Long Rejection of Christ	One-Time Reception of Christ	Ongoing Influence by Spirit
Rebellion from Christ	Relationship with Christ	Fellowship with Christ
Eternal Death	Eternal Life	Abundant Life
Enemy of God	Child of God	Friend of God
Process → Birth		Process → Growth

9

Slide #10

Abraham is used in slide 10 to illustrate the total process from first an enemy to a child of God and then second from a child to a friend of God. Born in the Ur of the Chaldeans, Abraham was an idol worshiper, an enemy of the true God (Gen 11:27-28) but he became a child of God, being justified by faith (Rom 4:3). This process from enemy to child led to Abraham’s new position and relationship with God at salvation. James 2:21 then tells us, after thirty years from that point in time when he was declared a child of God, Abraham offered up Isaac. This thirty-year process of walking in obedience to and fellowship with God culminates in this one act of obedience and he is declared a “friend of God” (v 23). Notice the process leading to a relationship with God is based on being “saved through faith” (Gen 15:6). On the other hand, the process leading to becoming a friend of God depends on having “lived by faith” (Heb 11:17-19).



10

The process of making-followers of Christ, moving from enemy to friend is the responsibility of every Christian—intentionally initiating and maintaining relationships that result in salvation and then teaching those new believers how to grow in Christ.

It is important to remember that the second step in this process from child to friend isn’t the sole responsibility of the individual believer. While it does mean that once a person trusts in Christ as savior, the Christian who was used by God to bring that person to faith continues on in a one-on-one manner to teach and encourage the new believer to maturity and friendship with Christ. However, it is the responsibility of the community of believers to provide an environment under the leadership of elders

for growth, particularly of new believers, through mutual ministries. Remember: *we come to Christ individually, but we grow in Christ corporately.*

Slide #11

In the article *Transition in the Making-Disciples Process*, we explained that the properly functioning body of Christ was the essential ingredient for the making-followers process in Acts and the Epistles. Repeating one more time: “teaching them [new believers] to observe [obey] all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:20) occurred primarily within the community of the gathered church.

Slide 11 provides insight to the phrase *teaching them* as the responsibility of the church. Notice first that a period of time is required to teach “all that I [Jesus] command you [Apostles].” The “all” is all-inclusive, indicating “everything” that Jesus taught the Apostles. We should remember that Jesus spent two-and-a-half years 24/7 with the Twelve and they themselves had trouble internalizing some of His teachings. If so, we certainly should not expect to know “all that Jesus taught” to be instantaneous, yet we should strive to learn everything He taught. In fact, the *red line* on slide 11 compares *time to learning the truth*. Notice the learning curve, indicating the rate of absorbing information. While the curve may vary (being compressed or stretched out in time) depending on the person, learning the truth always requires time.

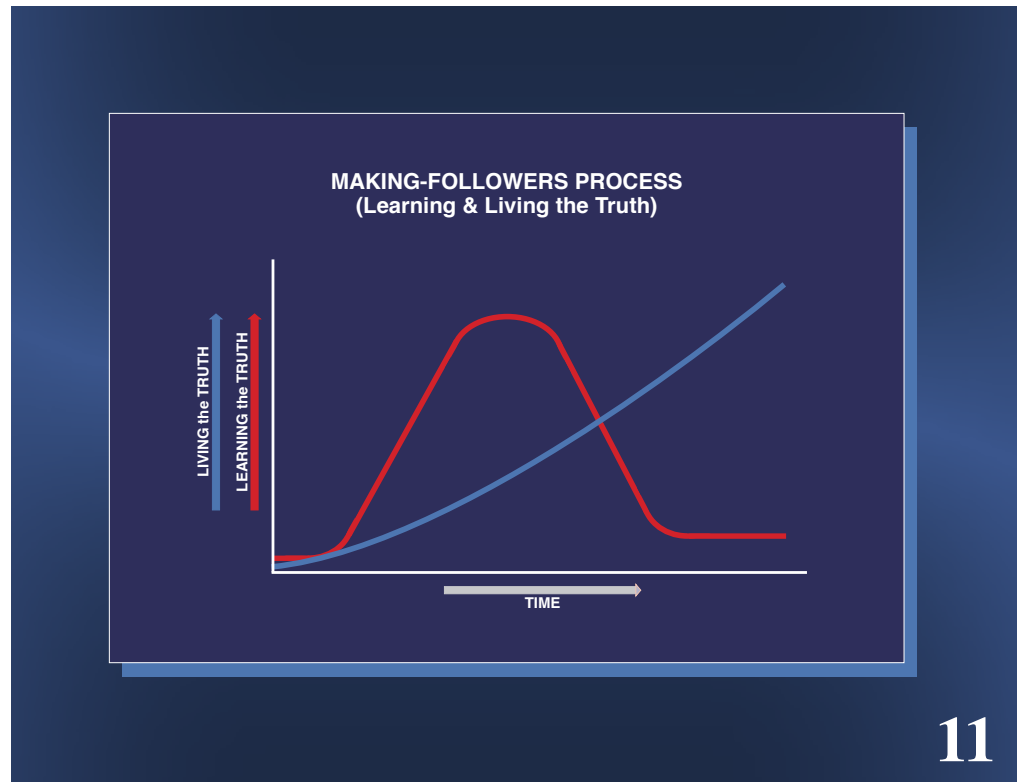
Recognizing it takes time even to absorb information, knowing information differs from application. The *blue line* compares *time to living the truth*. The point is that application of the truth isn’t instantaneous. In fact, there is generally a lag-time, a separation of time between related events—knowing the truth and living it out. As diagrammed, *living or obeying the truth accelerates as the knowledge accumulates*. Truth internalized eventually and increasing leads to truth lived out in daily life, resulting in the believer experiencing the benefits from living the truth.

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Slide #12

There are benefits of knowing and obeying the truth. Two particular texts stand out. First, consider John 14:21:

He who has [knows] My commandments and keeps [obeys] them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.



BENEFITS OF KNOWING AND OBEYING THE TRUTH

Manifest Love

He who has [knows] My commandments and keeps [obeys] them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.

Contentment

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it [continues in it], not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer [one who lives it out], this man will be blessed [content] in what he does.

12

This text takes us right back to Matthew 28:20 (paraphrased): “All those commandments they need to know, teach them to obey.” Notice that the Christian who knows and obeys the Word demonstrates loving/service to God and God reciprocates in loving/service to him. Beyond God’s love for the world (John 3:16), this love is manifested through the Spirit’s ministries of filling, leading, and teaching, which the Christian can personally experiences.⁸

Second, look at James 1:25:

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it [continues *in it*], not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer [one who lives it out], this man will be blessed [content; cf. v 12] in what he does.

Intently considering the commandments of Christ and continuing in them leads to becoming a Word-doer. Notice further that after absorbing and internalizing the Word and becoming a Word-doer, the Jesus-follower experiences being blessed, experiencing contentment.⁹ As the blue line rises higher to the right on the slide 11, contentment likewise increases because one’s walk is increasing in harmony with God. The end result then of the making-followers process is maturity in Christ and friendship with God.



Endnotes:

1. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 462.
2. Ibid., 640-42.
3. Ibid., 642-43, italics his.
4. Ibid., 642, italics his.
5. David Janssen, a friend in a private conversation, suggested that “go” indicates “initiation.”
6. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), xi-xvii.
7. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 13-21.
Pentecost indicated the distinction between *curious*, *convinced*, and *committed* followers of Christ.
8. Ken Neff, *Escape* (Jacksonville Beach, FL: LeaderQuest, 2018), 200-01.
9. Ibid., 235-37.
“Blessed” is equivalent to “happiness” or “contentment” in both James 1:12 and 1:25.