

The Great Commission

- By Gary Panell

"The actual words of the Great Commission are repeated five times in the New Testament, once in each of the four Gospels and once in the book of Acts. In each version, there is a slightly different emphasis. If you've not already done so, commit it to memory in each of the five records. Here is how they are translated in the [New] King James Version:

"And Jesus came 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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20)

"And He said to them, ' Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.'" (Mark 16:15-18)

"Then He said to them, ' These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

"Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.'" (Luke 24:46-49)

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

"So Jesus said to them again, ' Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" (John 20:21-23)

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus says this in Matthew 4:19.

"Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." (Proverbs 11:30)

"Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." (Daniel 13:3)

"When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.

"Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul." (Ezekiel 3:18,19)

"I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:26,27)

"The Lord Jesus never intended us to go out in our own strength. He promised miraculous power and authority to those who would wait on Him. These verses hint at nothing of defeat, self-effort or human weakness.

"The Great Commission passages leave us no option. They present an unmistakable mission statement to every believer and to the church. The first task of every Christian is to extend the Gospel to every people-group on earth. Anything and everything else must be subordinated to this great work.

"That means every activity, every building, every effort, every program, every organization and every project are to be evaluated in terms of how they contribute to the ultimate mission of the church-world evangelization in our generation." (The Road To Reality by K.P. Yohannan)

I would just like to add to what has been said here by Brother K.P., and that is when I was in the Army, I had to wait for my official orders. Once these had been given to me, I had no other recourse than to do exactly what they said to do. So it is with us in the Church, our duty is to follow the orders of our Commander and Chief, our Lord Jesus Christ!

"The gospel is at the heart of the Christian faith. If Christians do not know how to share their faith, they have probably never been to 'boot camp.' The gospel should be as much a part of you that presenting it becomes second nature.

"The first step in communicating the gospel involves learning to develop a relationship with an unbeliever. In part, that involves using your personal testimony as a bridge into the presentation of the Good News. This is precisely the reverse of grabbing somebody by the lapels and saying, 'Brother, are you saved?'

"After a relationship is established, you should be equipped to move naturally into a presentation of the gospel. In short, that involves:

"*Communicating the difference between religion (man's attempt to reach up and become acceptable to God by his own goodness) and a relationship (God reaching down and providing a way for us to know Him through the person and work of Jesus Christ).

"*Demonstrating the problem of sin. If people do not realize they are sinners, they will not realize their need for a Savior.

"*Pointing out that God is not only a perfect Father who has loved us with an everlasting love, but is also a perfect Judge whose eyes are too pure to look upon iniquity.

"*Communicating that Christ died to be our Savior and lives to be our Lord.

"*Explaining what it means to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

"Once you have presented the gospel, you also need to know how to be used by the Holy Spirit to lead people in response to the Good News and to the assurance of their salvation.

"Finally, since we are not called to make converts, but rather to make disciples, we need to know how to lead people through the basic steps of discipleship and growth as new believers.

"Consider what would happen if every evangelical Christian led just one person to faith in Christ each year. If we began with only 12 committed Christians and each of them led one person to Christ and discipled that person, next year there would be 24 committed Christians.

"If each of them in turn led one person to Christ and discipled that person, the third year there would be 48 believers. If this process continued, it would take less than 30 years to evangelize the [about 7] billion or more people alive today on the Earth! In the same time frame the population doubled, it would take only one additional year.

"If we re-created this scenario, but instead of beginning with 12 disciples began with approximately 174 million [there must be at least this many committed Christians in the world today if not many more], in six years we would run out of people to evangelize!

"Many people today run from church to church in search of the ultimate experience. No experience, however, can compare with that of the Holy Spirit working through you in the process of bringing someone to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Christianity in Crisis by Hank Hanegraaff)

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

John 3:16, 17 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

The Parable of the Orange Trees by John White

The harvest was plentiful-but where were the orange pickers?

I dreamed I drove on a Florida road, still and straight and empty. On either side were groves of orange trees, so that as I turned to look at them from time to time, line after line of trees stretched back endlessly from the road-their boughs heavy with round yellow fruit. This was harvest time. My wonder grew as the miles slipped by. How could the harvest be gathered?

Suddenly I realized that for all the hours I had driven (and this was how I knew I must be dreaming) I had seen no other person. The groves were empty of people. No other car had passed me. No houses were to be seen beside the highway. I was alone in a forest of orange trees.

But at last I saw some orange pickers. Far from the highway, almost on the horizon, lost in the vast wilderness of unpicked fruit, I could discern a tiny group of them working steadily. And many miles later I saw another group. I could not be sure, but I suspected that the earth beneath me was shaking with silent laughter at the hopelessness of their task. Yet the pickers went on picking.

ENTERING HOME COUNTY

The sun had long passed its zenith, and the shadows were lengthening when, without any warning, I rounded a curve of the road to see a notice: "Leaving NEGLECTED COUNTY-Entering HOME COUNTY." The contrast was so startling that I scarcely had time to take in the notice. I had to slow down, for all at once the traffic was heavy. People by the thousands swarmed the road and crowded the sidewalks.

Even more startling was the transformation in the orange groves. Orange groves were still there, and orange trees in abundance, but now, far from being silent and empty, they were filled with the laughter and singing of multitudes of people. Indeed it was the people I noticed rather than the trees. People - and houses.

I parked the car at the roadside and mingled with the crowd. Smart gowns, neat shoes, showy hats, expensive suits, and starched shirts made me a little conscious of my work clothes. Everyone seemed so fresh, and poised, and cheerful.

"Is it a holiday?" I asked a well-dressed woman with whom I fell in step.

She looked a little startled for a moment, and then her face relaxed with a smile of gracious condescension. "You're a stranger, aren't you?" she asked, and before I could reply, "this is Orange Day." She must have seen a puzzled look on my face, for she went on, "It is so good to turn aside from one's labors and pick oranges one day of the week."

"But don't you pick oranges every day? I asked her. "One may pick oranges at any time," she said. "We should always be ready to pick oranges, but Orange Day is the day we devote especially to orange picking."

MANUAL SCHOOL AND ORANGE PSYCHOLOGY

I left her and made my way further into the trees. Most of the people were carrying a book, bound beautifully in leather and edged and lettered in gold. I was able to discern on the edge of one of them the words, Orange Picker's Manual.

By and by I noticed that seats had been arranged around one of the orange trees, rising upward in tiers from the ground. The seats were almost full- but, as I approached the group, a smiling, well-dressed gentleman shook my hand and conducted me to a seat.

There, around the foot of the orange tree, I could see a number of people. One of them was addressing all the people on the seats and, just as I got to my seat, everyone rose to his feet and began to sing. The man next to me shared with me his song book. It was called Songs of the Orange Groves.

They sang for some time, and the song leader waved his arms with a strange and frenzied abandon, exhorting the people in the intervals between the songs to sing more loudly. I grew steadily more puzzled. "When do we start to pick oranges?" I asked the man who had loaned me his book.

"It's not long now!" he told me. "We like to get everyone warmed up first. Besides, we want to make the oranges feel at home." I thought he was joking- but his face was serious. After a while, a man took over from the song leader and, after reading two sentences from his well-thumbed copy of the Orange Picker's Manual, began to make a speech. It wasn't clear whether he was addressing the people or the oranges.

I glanced behind me and saw a number of groups of people similar to our own group gathering around an occasional tree and being addressed by other men. Some of the trees had no one around them. "Which trees do we pick from?" I asked the man beside me. He did not seem to understand, so I pointed to the trees around us. "This is our tree," he said, pointing to the one we were gathered around.

"but there are too many of us to pick from just one tree," I protested. "why, there are more people than oranges!" "but we don't pick oranges," the man explained. "We haven't been called. That's the Head Orange Picker's job. We're here to support him.

Besides, we haven't been to college. You need to know how an orange thinks before you can pick it successfully-orange psychology, you know. Most of these folk here," he went on, pointing to the congregation, "Have never been to Manual School."

"Manual School," I whispered. "What's that?" "It's where they go to study the Orange Picker's Manual," my informant went on. "It's very hard to understand. You need years of study before it makes sense." "I see," I murmured. "I had no idea that picking oranges was so difficult."

WILL THE REAL ORANGE PICKERS PLEASE STAND UP?

The man at the front was still making his speech. His face was red, and he appeared to be indignant about something. So far as I could see there was rivalry with some of the other "orange-picking" groups. But a moment later a glow came on his face.

"But we are not forsaken," He said. "We have much to be thankful for. Last week we saw three oranges brought into our baskets, and we are now completely debt-free from the money we owed on the new cushion covers that grace the seats you now sit on."

"Isn't it wonderful?" the man next to me murmured. I made no reply. I felt something must be profoundly wrong somewhere. All this seemed to be a very roundabout way of picking oranges.

The man was reaching a climax in his speech. The atmosphere seemed tense. Then, with a very dramatic gesture, he reached two of the oranges, plucked them from the branch, and placed them in the basket at his feet. The applause was deafening.

"Do we start on the picking now?" I asked my informant.

"What in the world do you think we're doing?" he hissed. "What do you suppose this tremendous effort has been made for? There's more orange-picking talent in this group than in the rest of Home County put together. Why, thousands of dollars have been spent on the tree you're looking at now."

I apologize quickly. "I wasn't being critical," I said. "And I'm sure the man must be a very good orange picker-but surely the rest of us could try. After all, there are so many oranges that need picking. We've all got a pair of hands, and we could read the Orange Picker's Manual."

"When you've been in the business as long as I have, you'll realize that it's not as simple as that," he replied. "There isn't time, for one thing. We have our work to do, our families to care for, and our homes to look after. We."

But I wasn't listening. Light was beginning to break on me. Whatever these people were, they were not orange pickers. Orange picking was just a form of entertainment for their weekends. I tried one or two more of the groups around the trees.

Not all of them had such high academic standards for orange pickers. Some held classes on orange picking. I tried to tell them of the trees I had seen in Neglected County but they seemed to have little interest.

"We haven't picked the oranges here yet," was their usual reply.

A CALL FOR WORKERS

The sun was almost setting in my dream and, growing tired of the noise and activity all around me, I got in the car and began to drive back along the road by which I had come. Soon all around me again were the vast and empty orange groves.

But there were changes. Something had happened in my absence. Everywhere the ground was littered with fallen fruit. And as I watched it seemed that before my eyes the trees began to rain oranges. Many of them lay rotting on the ground.

I felt there was something so strange about it all, and my bewilderment grew as I thought of all the people in Home County. Then, booming through the trees, there came a voice that said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers."

And I awakened-for it was only a dream! About the author: John White is former associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Manitoba. His many books include *The Fight, The Cost of Commitment and Daring to Draw Near* (InterVarsity Press, 1979). His latest book is *When the Spirit Comes with Power* (InterVarsity Press, 1988).

"At this moment, thousands of native missionaries are ready to go to the unreached if only support were available. The nation of India is the greatest open door in the world for missions at this time. The need there is outstripped only by the opportunity. Similar situations exist in nearby lands such as Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines.

"But what is actually happening now on the American scene? What are Christians in the United States doing to respond? I read a little article in the Indian Express that said the United States is now sending more money to India to support Hinduism than for any other cause. Christian missions were rated much lower on the list as number seven of all the foreign exchange earners between the United State and India.

"Every villager in India, even where they cannot read or write, knows what Coca Cola is! Marketing firms like Avon cosmetics have more than 1.4 [+] million sales people worldwide peddling soap and makeup. That's 21 times more than the total number of missionaries America sends to the whole world! Mormonism, a false cult, is able to field 30,000 young missionaries every year-four times more than the total number of evangelical missionaries doing pioneer evangelism worldwide.

"What a rebuke these figures are to the disobedience and rebellion of so many Christians and churches today. Our Lord has given us the command to go, the spiritual power to go and the material resources to go. How much longer will we continue to be the bottleneck that prevents world evangelism?" K.P. Yohannan of Gospel For Asia

"We are on the verge right now of the greatest explosion of evangelism in history. God is doing a miracle today in world missions. Through-out the Third World, He is raising UP TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NATIVE EVANGELISTS AND CHURCH PLANTERS WHO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTAND THE CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE THEY ARE CALLED TO REACH. This new soul-winning army is already on the move, going to their own people with the good news of redemption in Christ.

"These native missionaries are incredibly effective. In Thailand, for example, where 150 years of Western missionary efforts have yielded only a handful of believers, recent efforts by native missionary teams are resulting in thousands coming to Christ every month.

"One native missionary evangelist has alone led 10,000 people to Christ using simple flip charts. Another, committed to disciple-making according 2 Timothy 2:2 ["And the things that you have heard

from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."], has seen 12 generations of converts develop from the first one he led to Christ.

"Those are the kind of miracles we're seeing today, not only in Thailand but in India, Myanmar, the Himalayas and the Philippines.

"FINISHING THE TASK OF WORLD EVANGELIZATION IN OUR GENERATION HAS NEVER BEEN MORE POSSIBLE THAN RIGHT AT THIS MOMENT.

"African leader Gottfried Mensah, former executive director of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, has made what Ralph Winter calls 'an electrifying, simple proposal.' He says that if we were to let every 1,000 evangelical believers in the world today select and support one missionary couple from their midst, and send that couple to one of the 11,000 hidden people groups, every tribe, tongue and culture would have a missionary witness.

"Reaching the 500,000 [unreached] villages of India could easily be done if just one out of every 92 evangelicals in America sponsored a native missionary. That's less than one percent of the evangelicals in the United States-and it would be enough to support 500,000 full-time pioneer missionaries in India!"
(The Road To Reality)

K.P. Yohannan, founder and international director of Gospel for Asia, wrote the Road To Reality. He coordinates the efforts of more than 16,000 native missionaries. He also heads a church-planting movement made up of more than one million baptized believers, and gives direction to 54 Bible colleges that train more than 8,000 [+] student each year for the mission field. Check our link out for the Gospel for Asia mission, and think about how you might support your own missionary for as little as \$30 a month.

To encourage you as to what else God is doing in our time; see just the work of one mission in such countries as China, Cuba, Japan, Italy, Ukraine, Romania, Spain, Guatemala, and Vietnam.

"Manny Fernandez lay in his hospital bed not knowing who he was, where he was, or even what language he spoke. He had just been in a severe bicycle accident with a car, but the Lord, having bigger plans for Manny, spared his life and helped him recover.

"At this pivotal pint in his life, Manny came to understand that tomorrow is no guarantee. 'That's why I began to share the Gospel with everybody!' To this day, Manny, a Multnomah, alumnus, remains devoted to spreading the Gospel to people around the world by training and deploying church planters through his agency, World Link Ministries. **'TRAIN AND DEPLOY IS WHAT WE SEE AS THE GREAT COMMISSION.'**

"What began as the Spanish Seminary for Theological and Evangelistic Training (SEFOVAN) in Madrid, Spain, founded by Manny in 1991, quickly became World Link Ministries just two years later.

"Headquartered in Irving, Texas, World Link isn't focused on training Americans to become missionaries to other countries. World Link trains ministers and seminary students from all across the world,

equipping them with a solid, biblical foundation, and deploying them to plant churches in their own communities.

"The strategy is reaching the countries from the inside out,' Manny said. 'I believe it's probably God's next wave in the missionary enterprise: energizing the troops from within to reach their countries for Christ.'

"Manny believes the best method of reaching a country for Christ is to use trained nationals to plant churches. Often times, World Link will partner with nearby seminaries, recruiting students who share their heart for church planting and evangelism.

"Manny said it all boils down to training and deploying. Whether it's in Cuba, Ukraine, Romania, Spain, Guatemala, China, Japan, Italy, or Vietnam, World Link uses the same strategy. 'Train and deploy is what we see as the great commission,' Manny said. 'That's what we're doing. Nothing new, nothing different.

"With the Lord's blessing and this simple strategy, World Link helps get the Gospel in the least likely of places, and its message is spreading like wildfire.

"The invitation to Cuba was amazing because it was like taking fire to gunpowder,' Manny said. As World Link trained and deployed Cuban church planters, growth happened quickly.

"In Western Cuba, an excited pastor shared with Manny that his church had led six people to Christ in their first two weeks of ministry. Manny said, '[The pastor] said to me with great enthusiasm, 'We're going to need a place to gather all of these people that are going to come.' Not wanting the pastor to get ahead of himself, Manny told him to call after he had fifty people.

"Two years later, Manny was visiting the area for a training session. When the time came for everyone to share their stories, the pastor and his wife came to the microphone and told everyone the story of when he asked Manny for a church building. Manny said, 'Hey, wait. Did you call me?'

"The pastor replied, 'No, we didn't. But, today, in the presence of these witnesses here, all the workers, and the Lord, and in the name of our congregation of 180 people and six daughter churches, we say it's time for you to come back.'

"According to Manny, accelerated growth within Cuban churches is fairly common. In fact, he said it's the norm rather than the exception. 'We've been in Cuba about nine years,' Manny said, 'and we have, to the glory of God, 1,400 church plants underway - some of them with as many as 500 people.'

"Manny attributed some of this growth to the unique convictions of the Christians in Cuba. 'It's a powerful thing that is in the heart and soul of how they understand Christianity in Cuba,' Manny said. 'They have a conviction that if a church doesn't have daughter churches, it is barren and they are cursed, just like women in the Old Testament.

"So the moment they have a church, they already think it has to reproduce. Imagine if our world caught on to that principle; it would be explosive!'

"Vietnam is one of World Link's newest projects and has potential to see an even greater harvest than Cuba. Through their work in Cuba and other countries, God has paved the way for World Link to partner with the Vietnamese Evangelical Fellowship (VEF) to employ the same strategy: train and deploy.

"The VEF, impressed by the work World Link had done in Cuba, invited World Link to meet with church leaders and discuss how they could accomplish a similar endeavor in Vietnam.

"The VEF pointed out similarities between Cuba and Vietnam and stated that they needed Christ's church to take a stronger hold within their country. The biggest difference was population: Cuba has 13 [+] million people, while Vietnam has 87 million people.

"World Link accepted the invitation and met with the VEF to present them with a plan: 1,200 church plants in seven years. 'We will start with [100 workers planting 300 churches] and try to add 300 more [churches] every year for four years,' Manny said. 'We're giving three years to each church plant until it goes independent, until it is indigenous.'

"The leaders were thrilled and a little shell-shocked,' Manny said. 'They said they had never attempted anything half that big. Yet, they knew it would be within God's will.'

"The leaders were also nervous because, being made up of twenty-six different denominations, they had never done any cross-denominational work. The most they had done was meet, pray, and fellowship, but they never addressed doctrinal issues.

"Regardless of their differences, however, they knew they needed guidance in this endeavor. They believed that God was in it. They wanted to undertake the task because everything biblical told them this was right.

"Manny and his World Link team signed an agreement with the leaders of the VEF to launch the plan in spring 2008. After some discussion, Manny and the leaders decided they would devote three years to each church plant.

"That's the blessing and beauty of working with local believers,' Manny said. 'Normally, missions takes decades, sometime several decades, to release a project as mature and [as] able to be self supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing.' By contrast, the VEF leaders agreed that it takes only two or three years for a Vietnamese pastor to plant a self-sustaining church.

"The next step was to determine compensation for the workers. They told Manny that a good living wage in Vietnam is about sixty dollars a month. Manny sensed their excitement as he told them that seventy-five dollars a month would be more reasonable, considering the difficulty of the work. Manny said, 'They thought, "Wow, this is generous!" Three church plants per pastor for seventy-five dollars a month. Good deal!'"

"So, what's next for Vietnam? As per the agreement, the plan has been launched as of this spring. World Link will train 100 workers in training centers in Hanoi in northern Vietnam, Da Nang in central Vietnam, and Ho Chi Min City (Saigon) in southern Vietnam.

"In the meantime, World Link is raising funds to support these new church planters as they go to the ends of Vietnam, spreading the Gospel to all who will listen.

Conclusion

"The Lord's blessing on World Link Ministries is plain to see. What began as a fatal bicycle accident became a tool God used to inspire action. When Manny Fernandez and his family first began their overseas ministry in Spain, they thought that two or three church plants would have fulfilled their commission. But God had bigger plans for Manny.

"Currently, World Link's goal is to finish planting 10,000 churches within the next ten years. Using the train and deploy strategy. Ambitious? Certainly. But as the Lord has proven to Manny time and again, He is capable of spreading His Church in miraculous ways." (From the Inside Out by David Hardy Multnomah SUMMER 2008 Volume 10 Number 2)

If you're interested in sponsoring a church planter call World Link Ministries at 972.253.6800, or visit them on the web at www.worldlinkministries.org

Not all of us have been called to go 'overseas' but all of us have been called to be witnesses. We can do that by praying for missionaries and sponsoring missionaries. We can also be witnesses right where we are, and here are some ways we can do this:

We can say a word for the Lord when we are visiting with the unsaved.

We can give out tracts.

We can leave tracts at telephone booths, in bathrooms, anywhere people might find them.

We could send tracts in the mail to the unsaved we write to.

We can pray for the lost that they will get under conviction of sin.

We can work in the church, where many are being saved through its outreach.

We could help at the Union Gospel Mission.

We could talk to our children and grandchildren and lead them to the Lord.

We could give Christian videos and books to friends and relatives for Christmas and birthdays.

There are many methods of witnessing, but we need to pray and say Lord how do you want me to be a witness for you? Remember, most of all, this:

"Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

"Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Luke 10:2)

"Do you not say, There are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35)