

PRAY & GO

A 30-DAY JOURNEY

**Your Invitation to Become a
Great Commission Christian**

THOM S. RAINER

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Pray & Go: Your Invitation to Become a Great Commission Christian

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION *1*

DAY 1 PRAYING FOR A HEART WITH AN OUTWARD FOCUS *9*

DAY 2 YOU *WILL* BE MY WITNESSES *17*

DAY 3 GETTING THE BODY MOVING *23*

DAY 4 PRAYING FOR YOUR PASTOR *31*

DAY 5 PRAYING FOR GREAT COMMISSION CHURCH MEMBERS *39*

DAY 6 PRAYING FOR THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT *47*

DAY 7 THAT THING CALLED COURAGE *55*

DAY 8 TO LOVE MY COMMUNITY *63*

DAY 9 TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE *71*

DAY 10 PRAYING FOR YOUR ONE *77*

DAY 11 WRITING OUTWARDLY *83*

DAY 12 TO BE UNASHAMED *91*

DAY 13 THE POWER OF THE INVITATION *97*

DAY 14 PRAYING FOR YOUR PASTOR AGAIN *103*

- DAY 15 IT'S TIME TO GO *111*
- DAY 16 VIP: VERY IMPORTANT PRAYERS *117*
- DAY 17 WRITE TO SOMEONE AGAIN *125*
- DAY 18 PRAYING FOR UNITY *131*
- DAY 19 THE GREAT COMMISSION PASSAGE *139*
- DAY 20 PRAY AND GO FOR THE FAMILIES *145*
- DAY 21 INVITE YOUR THREE *153*
- DAY 22 INVITE SOMEONE YOU DON'T KNOW *159*
- DAY 23 THE GREAT COMMISSION AND YOUR FAMILY *165*
- DAY 24 PRAYING AWAY THE OBSTACLES *171*
- DAY 25 GO WITH PRAYERS OF EVANGELISM *179*
- DAY 26 TELLING YOUR STORY *187*
- DAY 27 RECONCILIATION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION *193*
- DAY 28 INVITE THREE PEOPLE AGAIN *201*
- DAY 29 TIME TO GO TO THIRTY *209*
- DAY 30 THE END IS BUT THE BEGINNING *215*
- NOTES *223*
- ABOUT THE AUTHOR *225*

INTRODUCTION

YOU'VE TAKEN A GIANT STEP

Thank you for opening to the first pages of this book. I mean it with all my heart. Thank you.

At the very least, you're curious about what it means to become a Great Commission Christian.

Here's my promise to you: If you will read every chapter, representing thirty days of a Great Commission focus, I have no doubt you will become an instrument of outreach and ministry for God in new and powerful ways.

God does not intend for us to keep the Good News to ourselves. We are meant to share our faith, to tell others about what God has done in our lives through Jesus Christ.

God also designed us for community—that is, to be connected to other believers through the local church. From Acts

2 to Revelation 3, the New Testament is all about the local church. It is the story of local churches making a difference in the world. It is the story of messy and messed-up churches still being used by God. It is the story of sinners like you and me being saved by grace. It is the story of God giving us a second chance again and again.

You see, God designed us to be bearers of the truth about his son, Jesus. And he intends for us to carry out the Great Commission mostly in the context of a local church.

If you are a church member, you are a bearer of the Good News. Well, you *should* be a bearer of the Good News.

At Church Answers, our team continues to look at information coming from the front lines of ministry called the local church. We have provided a tool called Know Your Church that helps churches and church members self-evaluate. We look at six areas of church life: *evangelism*, *discipleship*, *prayer*, *ministry*, *fellowship*, and *worship*. Do you know which one consistently scores the lowest? If you guessed *evangelism*, you are correct.

SATAN AND EVANGELISM

The gospel of Jesus Christ is about truth. Jesus himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “[Love] does not rejoice about injustice

but rejoices whenever the truth wins out” (1 Corinthians 13:6). The truth of the gospel is meant to be shared. The way of salvation through Christ is meant to be on the lips of believers.

But Satan will do everything within his great, but limited, power to keep the truth of the gospel from spreading. Speaking of the devil, Jesus said, “He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Simply stated, the father of lies does not want us sharing the truth. Sadly, at least in the North American context, we often see Satan winning these battles in our churches. He has given us a bevy of lies to keep us silent.

“I don’t have time.”

“I don’t want to offend people.”

“I might get rejected.”

“Evangelism is not my spiritual gift.”

“That’s what we pay the pastor to do.”

“I don’t need to *talk* about Jesus; I’ll just *show* my love to others.”

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN AND EVANGELISM

Peter and John were in jail. Their crime? Telling people about Jesus. The authorities gave the two apostles a way out. If they

promised to stop talking about their Savior, they would be set free. The conditions were clear: “They called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18).

It could have been a life-and-death situation. If the apostles promised to stop talking about Jesus to unbelievers, they would be set free. If not, they would be punished. They might get long prison sentences. They might get flogged with a whip. Or they might face execution.

Faced with these dire possibilities, Peter and John did not hesitate to respond: “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

Ironic, isn't it? Faced with possible death, Peter and John continued to tell others about Jesus. Today, many church members remain silent lest they offend someone or inconvenience themselves.

A PLAN TO JUMP-START YOUR OUTWARD FOCUS

When I was a young seminary student, I had little time and little money. The last thing I needed was an ornery car that wouldn't start. But my car was totally stubborn. Sometimes it wouldn't start in the mornings. Sometimes it went dead during the day. On a few occasions, it died while I was in traffic.

I finally joined AAA so I wouldn't have to pay for the

jump-starting service every time the car quit on me—which was typically two or three times a month. I didn't have the funds to get it repaired or even to buy a new battery.

For a few years, I saw the power of jump-starting. The AAA service person would connect the cables to his truck and then to my car. My automobile came to life every time.

I've needed spiritual jump-starting on many occasions. I certainly needed jump-starting to restore a Great Commission focus. This book is designed to provide you with a Great Commission jump-start. It focuses on three main areas: *prayer*, *Scripture*, and *going out*.

A PLAN FOR YOUR CHURCH

At Church Answers, we have designed a program we call Pray & Go to help church members develop an outward focus, get out into their communities, pray for their neighbors and their cities, and invite people to church.¹ This book incorporates many of the same principles into a thirty-day action plan that any church member or group can implement.

Ideally, several members of your church will embark on this adventure with you. You will pray together. You will encourage one another. You will hold each other accountable.

Yes, you can move through the thirty days of this book on your own. But the better scenario is for several members

to move forward together. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul refers to the local church as *the body of Christ*. We are all different members of the body (which is why we are called church members). Each member of the body—the metaphorical hand, foot, ear, eye—must function well and properly for the entire body to function as intended.

Would you make a commitment right now to go through each of the thirty days in this book? The process isn't designed to be cumbersome or time-consuming, but it is designed to be completed.

Once you have completed the thirty days, you will have taken fifteen days to pray about becoming outwardly focused. You will have studied five key Bible passages about reaching beyond yourself to others. You will have prayed in front of sixty homes in your community. You will have sent a note or email to five people who are not part of your church. And you will have specifically invited eight people to visit your church.

That's all in a very achievable thirty days—thirty days that can change your life and the life of your community.

That's if you do it alone.

But if *ten* people from your church will commit to these thirty days of Great Commission focus, together you will invest 150 days of prayer toward developing an outward focus for your church. Together, you will study what the Bible says about the Great Commission for a total of fifty

days. You will write to forty people and invite eighty people to church. And you will have gone out into your community and prayed for six hundred families and their homes.

Ten's not that many, so what about twenty-five?

Here are the totals from a simple thirty-day commitment to becoming Great Commission Christians:

- 375 days of prayer to recalibrate your church to an outward focus.
- 125 days of studying what the Scriptures say about the Great Commission.
- 125 notes or emails to people and 200 invitations to church.
- And you will have gone into your community and prayed for 1,500 families and their homes!

In God's power, you can change the world. You can turn it upside down. And if a few other members of your church join you, you will have a Great Commission *movement* in your community.

Are you ready to make a commitment that will change your life in exciting and powerful ways? Are you ready—in God's power—to change the world?

If you are willing, please sign the commitment below. It's a way to make you accountable to God and to yourself.

Now get ready for a great adventure!

As God guides and enables me, I commit to move forward with the thirty-day plan to become a Great Commission Christian.

Name:

Date:

DAY 1

PRAYING FOR A HEART WITH AN OUTWARD FOCUS

The first church that I served as pastor was on the cusp of closing. One of the seven remaining members clearly communicated to me that the church was at a critical juncture. Would they call the new, young pastor, or would they admit that it was time to close down the church? After she heard me preach, she had all but decided that the doors needed to close.

“We have had some bad preachers,” she said bluntly, “but you’re probably the worst I’ve ever heard. It’s a toss-up to me whether we close the doors or have to listen to you every week.”

Sigh.

So much for encouragement from your membership.

The church had been around since the late 1700s, coming together just a few years after our nation was founded. It had served a rural farming community well for two centuries. But most of the farmers were gone now. The community had no businesses to speak of. It didn't even have a traffic light. The situation was bleak.

Within a few weeks, I learned that the church had called me as pastor because they had no other candidates. Again, not very encouraging.

I am not the hero of this story, but it is a good story. God gave me the opportunity to share the gospel with someone. That one person became God's instrument to reach others. One by one, our few church members decided they did not want to close the doors after all. One by one, they started reaching outward instead of being inwardly focused.

We had no musicians in the church except our piano player. She hit the right note about half the time. When the congregation sang along, we barely made a joyful noise. The facilities were in disrepair. There were no restrooms, only an abandoned outhouse that reportedly was home to several snakes. I never checked it out.

We had only a few hundred dollars in the bank, enough to pay my weekly salary of fifty dollars, but with not much left for ministry. Our members were understandably discouraged.

But God had a plan for our church . . .

Instead of dying, it began to thrive. Instead of giving in to discouragement, our members became bearers of encouragement. Instead of bemoaning our paucity of resources, they grew in faith that God would provide us and the church everything we needed.

It didn't happen overnight, but our members started talking to other people in the rural community. They expanded their conversations to people in two adjacent communities. They developed an amazing commitment to prayer. Simply stated, they prayed for hearts with an outward focus. They prayed that God would use them to reach people. They prayed they would be God's instruments to fulfill the Great Commission.

God heard. God answered.

Over the next several years, the church reached many people with the gospel, growing in both numbers and depth of discipleship. They were still reaching and discipling people years after I left.

PRAYING FOR YOURSELF

I would guess that you have prayed for your own needs many times. My own prayer life has included prayers to be a better dad and husband. I have three incredible sons and a wife who is a gift from God. Though I know I don't deserve them, I love them dearly. I have messed up in both my roles—as

dad and husband. I have prayed prayers of repentance for my bouts of selfishness, anger, inattentiveness, and indifference. I have needed to ask God to help me get my act together.

Now in the autumn of my life, I pray also for my eleven grandchildren. I pray that I would be a godly granddad (or “Rad Rad,” as they call me), that God would make me a good example and a joy to my family.

I know you have prayed for yourself as well. Perhaps you identify with some of my prayers. Perhaps you have prayed for spiritual healing, physical healing, or emotional healing. One of the greatest prayers you can pray for yourself is to become a Great Commission Christian—outwardly focused on advancing the gospel.

PRAYING FOR YOURSELF TO BECOME A GREAT COMMISSION CHRISTIAN

I will use the phrase *Great Commission Christian* from time to time in this book. There are several passages of Scripture where Jesus commands us to share the Good News and go and make disciples. Perhaps the best-known passage is Matthew 28:18-20: “Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given

you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We will study that passage more closely on Day 19. For now, we will use the basic understanding that the Great Commission is all about sharing the gospel of Christ with unbelievers and then helping those who commit their lives to Christ to grow as his disciples. Simply stated, a Great Commission Christian is someone who seeks to communicate the Good News of Christ to a world that does not know him.

On this first day of the thirty-day challenge, please pray for yourself. Pray specifically that God will use you in supernatural ways over the next month. Here are some suggestions on areas for prayer:

- For a heart that prioritizes reaching others with the gospel.
- For open opportunities to share the gospel and invite people to church.
- For good time management—to not be so busy that you can't do the work God has called you to do.
- To be an encourager for others in your church to become Great Commission Christians as well.
- To have the right words to say, or not to say, when you have the opportunity to share the gospel or invite someone to church.

- To be the type of servant to others that causes them to be drawn to the Savior who works through you.

You are praying that God will make you a consistent Great Commission Christian. You want your heart to be receptive and your eyes to be open to the world as Christ sees the world.

TIME TO PRAY

Day 1 is a day of prayer. Day 1 is a day of commitment. Day 1 is the beginning of your great adventure.

On fourteen of the next thirty days, you will be asked to do nothing other than pray. That's because prayer is *essential* to your becoming a Great Commission Christian. If you try to accomplish this goal in your own power, you will not succeed. If you seek God's direction and power, you will see victories in your life, in the lives of others, and in your church.

So it's time to pray. You will have other days to pray about other important matters, but this day is a time for you to pray for yourself. You can use the guide above, and of course you can pray any way you feel led.

Would you pray now for a Great Commission heart with an outward focus?

Sign and date here when you have completed the first day of the thirty-day challenge to become a Great Commission Christian.

Name:

Date: