

Revisiting the Tokyo Declaration

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We are now 10 years removed from the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation which took place in May of 2010. On the final day of that consultation, 1000 international delegates took the decisive step of adopting the *Tokyo Declaration* as a basis for ongoing networking and collaboration. The intent of this Declaration from its inception was not to be a stagnant document, but rather the dynamic basis on which Great Commission activities and collaboration would take place. It is therefore appropriate that the Declaration be revisited with key portions highlighted as we commemorate the consultation's anniversary.

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Our Message

At the outset the Declaration states:

We set forth this declaration in obedience to Christ's final command, as a means of calling Christ followers everywhere to whole-heartedly embrace and earnestly engage in "making disciples of every people in our generation."

One may question why it is so important to extend a clarion call to Christ followers worldwide to engage in "making disciples of every people in our generation." The answer to that question boils down to two realities.

First is the reality of humankind's spiritual condition. All people, everywhere, are lost apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Sadly, every individual is a sinner by

nature, choice and practice. That condition is universal. The tragic result of man's sinfulness is alienation from God. That alienation leads to everlasting death. (Rom. 6:23) But as tragic as that is, the consequence of man's sin extends beyond the human experience. Creation itself is in bondage to corruption and subject to futility. (Rom. 8:18-21) Consequently, both humankind and the physical world are in a desperate plight.

But God, in His grace, provided a remedy and this leads to the second reality. Out of love (1 John 4:9-10), God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile the world to Himself. (John 3:16) Through Jesus' vicarious death on a cross and victorious resurrection from the grave, mankind is brought into a restored relationship with God. God's justice for the penalty of sin was satisfied by Jesus' atoning death on man's behalf. And here is the really amazing part: God offers forgiveness of all sins and salvation to anyone—living anywhere, in any age—who repents and believes in Christ's redemptive work. (Rom. 1:5,16,17; 3:21-26)

Therefore, the message which grounds the Great Commission is clear: 1) salvation is found in none other (Acts 4:12) nor in any other way (John 14:6), than through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, and 2) this message is to be proclaimed to all peoples everywhere (Luke 24:47) in every age. (Matt. 28:20) Thus, the opening paragraphs of the *Tokyo Declaration* focus on mankind's spiritual need along with a divinely given message and mandate.

Our Methodology

But Jesus did not impart this message without also giving a methodology to follow. Put another way, he did not leave us clueless as to how we are to proclaim that message. He articulated a goal coupled with a three-step methodology to be followed to reach that goal.

These key components are found in Jesus' commission recorded in Matthew 28:19. Without getting too technical, there are four verbs in this passage and the main one, which is also an imperative, is "make disciples." This is the centerpiece of Jesus' command. Making disciples should also be the focus of our endeavors. The other three verbs give three essentials to follow, comprising the process of making disciples. These can be summarized with the words "penetration" (go) "consolidation" (baptize) and "transformation" (teaching).

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The first step in making disciples is penetration—to "go" to where people are not Christ followers. This is the reaching-out aspect of making disciples. Placed first in the sentence shows it is the first step. The verb can readily be translated "as you go," indicating associated circumstances. This is a reminder that in every life experience, believers should be sensitive to the presence of others around them who are in need of the gospel. But most importantly, it shows our responsibility to take the gospel from where it is known and believed to where it is not known or believed.

The second step is consolidation. "Baptizing them" is the bringing-in aspect of making disciples. Jesus did not mean for baptism to be used as a magical rite that automatically brings people into relationship with Him without first having a change of heart. Sadly, it has deteriorated into such in some church traditions. Rather, baptism is the culmination of the repent-believe-baptize experience of salvation.

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This public symbol of initiation is very meaningful. It is a picture of beginning a new life in Christ and of ongoing allegiance to him, consolidating the believer into His

church. The ordinance is a powerful outward expression of a changed life within and a new identity without, visible to others.

Third, there is transformation. Making a disciple does not stop with the initiation experience. There is an educational, "teaching them" process that follows, intended to spur new followers of Christ on to be learning and growing in their new faith. This is the changing-over aspect of making disciples. Some today would equate it with spiritual formation. Whatever the label, the important thing is that there is an ongoing growth experience. A new believer's worldview must be changed; his lifestyle adjusted to increasingly conform to the image of Christ and his ethical conduct increasingly marked by integrity. When transformation is apparent in these areas, that believer, in turn, is in a position to teach others also and thus duplicate the process.

Teaching has a desired outcome—obedience. New believers are taught with the goal "to obey," becoming increasingly obedient to all Christ's commands. Among the many things Jesus commanded, they are to live out the great commandment (Matt. 22:37-40), show great compassion (Matt. 9:36) and engage in the Great Commission. (Matt. 28:18-20) It takes growth experiences in community with other believers for these outcomes to be best realized.

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Finishing the Task

Since the day of Pentecost, devoted followers of Christ have been avidly taking the message of the gospel across continents, countries and cultures. Yet after 2000 years, the quest to fulfill Christ's commission remains uncompleted even though no greater effort in the history of humankind compares in scope and expenditure to this undertaking. Literally hundreds of thousands of messengers have gone forth, with billions of dollars expended and innumerable prayers offered on its behalf. Over the centuries thousands

of vibrant regional sending centers have emerged and then disappeared as zeal for missions waxed and waned. Through it all, the propagation of the gospel continues unbroken and unabated. However, the task remains unfinished.

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The *Tokyo Declaration* fixes our eyes on finishing the task. Rather than being ambivalent, the document makes our current missional posture clear. It states the following:

Although none dare predict when the task of making disciples will be brought to completion, we leave Tokyo cognizant of two realities:

- 1) We are closer now to finishing the task than in any time in history.
- 2) God has entrusted this generation with more opportunities and resources to complete the task than any previous one. We have more mission-minded churches, more sending structures and bases, more missionaries, more material resources, more funding, more and better technology, more information and data, a deeper understanding of the task, and a clearer focus of our responsibility than previous generations. God will require much of our generation.

Yet at this moment, 3.1 billion people, 40% of the world's population, remain unreached. By "unreached" we use a recently refined definition by David Platt: "Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the Church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help." (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/rethinking-unreached-peoples>)

The Declaration calls on all believers, everywhere, to band together in concerted efforts to make disciples of peoples in all unreached/minimally reached/superficially reached/partially reached people groups and areas of the world.

Going Forward Together

The Declaration recognizes that finishing the task will demand effective cooperative efforts by the entire global Christian community. In this regard, the final paragraph of the *Tokyo Declaration* remains significant. It recognizes the need for cooperative efforts to finish the task.

Here is how the Declaration concludes:

Finally, we recognize that finishing the task will demand effective cooperative efforts of the entire global body of believers. To facilitate cooperation and on-going coordination between mission structures worldwide, we agree to the necessity of a global network of mission structures. With this in mind, we leave Tokyo pledging cooperation with one another, and all others of like faith, with the singular goal of "making disciples of every people in our generation."

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It is the hope of the **Global Great Commission Network** that many more will join in and sign the document. Each person reading this article is invited to do so. If you have yet to put your signature to it, we encourage you to do so now. The document is easily accessed by going to: <https://www.ggcn.org/tokyo-declaration/> .

The *Tokyo Declaration* was not intended to be showcased and then shelved and forgotten. It remains a living document. It is the basis for going forward together in cooperative efforts to "make disciples of every people in our generation." 