

## Essential Truths III: Working With God

# 6

## Joining the Work of God

As we saw earlier in this module, Jesus made an extraordinary statement that now defines your ministry.

### Read John 20:21

You have been sent by God in the same way Jesus was sent. In fact, Jesus has passed on his ministry to you. This one thought – that the ministry you now have is nothing less than an expression of the ministry of Christ himself – is enough to change forever the way you view ministry. For if you are called to the same ministry as Jesus, it is important for you to learn *how* Jesus ministered.

So how did Jesus minister? If the ministry of Christ were boiled down to its central core, what would that core be?

One statement by Jesus describes the central core of Jesus' style of ministry.

### Read John 14:10-12

This passage is very enlightening, revealing the nature of the ministry of Jesus and thus the ministry he has passed on to you.

Put Jesus' description of his ministry under the magnifying glass.

- ☞ **“Don't you believe that *I am in the Father*, and that *the Father is in me*?”** – Not only was Jesus sent by the Father, he maintained an ongoing relationship with his Father that he considered to be the defining characteristic of his ministry. He was able

The Birthright

Taking the Baton

The Great Commission

The Body of Christ

The Ministry of Every Believer

▶ **Joining the Work of God** ◀

The Tree of Life

Ministry of Reconciliation

Filled with the Spirit

Ministry to the Body

Sent into the Harvest

Speaking the Word of God

A Lifestyle Gospel

Salt of the Earth

Enforcing the Victory

Signs and Wonders

A New Kind of Leadership

Establishing a Daily Church

Making Disciples

The New Wine

The Goal of Ministry

- to minister simply because “I am in the Father” and “the Father is in me.”
- ☞ **“The words I say to you are not just my own”** – Jesus claimed that the words he spoke did not find their source in himself. His words were the Father’s words.
  - ☞ **“Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work”** – The result of being “in the Father” and “the Father in me” was that the Father, through Christ, did *his* work. What Jesus was saying was that the words were not his own and neither was the work – both came from the Father (read [John 5:36](#); [9:4](#); [17:4](#)).
  - ☞ **“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves”** – The signs and wonders performed by Jesus were direct evidence that he was in the Father and the Father was in him.
  - ☞ **“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing”** – No Jesus puts an entirely new spin on his meaning. Up till now, he has simply been describing his own ministry, but now he extends that ministry to you. What is the one requirement? “Anyone who has faith in me,” Jesus says, “will do what I have been doing!” The miracles that were the evidence that Christ was in the Father and the Father was in Christ are now also to be the evidence that you are in Christ and that Christ is in you (note [John 15:1-8](#)).
  - ☞ **“He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”** – Not only does Jesus compare your ministry to his own, he also increases the scale of that ministry. All this because someone has faith in him!

*The Message* throws a colloquial light on Jesus’ amazing description of his ministry in [John 14:10-14](#):

“Don’t you believe that I am in the father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren’t mere words. I don’t just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act. Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can’t believe that, believe what you see – these works. The person who trusts in me will not only do what I’m doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I’ve been doing. You can count on it. From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I’ll do it. That’s how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. I mean it. Whatever you request in this way, I’ll do.”

Jesus was not just working *for* God. God was working *through* Him. Jesus saw it clearly as His Father’s ministry, not His own. And this is how he also wants you to see your ministry – not as you working *for* God, but as God working *through* you!

## Doing the Works of God

### Read John 6:28-29

The people asked Jesus a simple question:

“What must we do to do the works God requires?”

And Jesus gave a simple answer:

“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

How do we do the works of God? Simple: Believe in Jesus! Repeatedly, Jesus emphasizes the importance of faith in doing the works of God.

### Read Matthew 21:21-22

### Read Mark 11:22-24

Faith is the key ingredient to working with God (**1 Timothy 1:4**). The Bible says that anything that does not come from faith is sin (**Romans 14:23**). For this reason, if we are to be pleasing to God in ministry, our ministry must be an act of faith in him (**Hebrews 11:6**).

### Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3

### Read Galatians 5:6

Look back for a moment at Jesus’ statement in **John 14:12**. Do you notice the preconditions he lays down for doing his Father’s work?

“...*anyone* who has *faith* in me will do what I have been doing...”

Faith is the one prerequisite for doing the work of God. But what does it really to have faith in God? For some, having faith means quoting the promises of God back to God. While there is an element of truth in this (the Greek word translated “confession” means “to speak the same word”), having faith in God is far more than just saying the right things. Faith means an intimate dependence upon God’s ability, not your own. It means hearing from God and acting upon it (**Romans 10:17**).

We have an insight into the nature of faith, as it relates to ministry, in a story of failure, recorded in two of the Gospel accounts. By comparing these two accounts, we see a richness of Jesus’ meaning when he says “anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.”

## The Big Lesson

**Mark 9:14-18** records a particular incident that apparently was imprinted upon the minds of the disciples as one of the biggest lessons they learned in their apprenticeship with Jesus, the master minister. Mark records:

“When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw

Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ‘What are you arguing with them about?’ he asked. A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit...I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, *but they could not.*’”

As we have previously seen, the disciples were not novices. They had already been sent out two by two, with authority over evil spirits (**Matthew 10:8**). They had already returned, rejoicing that “even the demons submit to us in your name” (**Luke 10:17**). But this time they had tried to cast out an evil spirit and had failed—and failed quite spectacularly.

Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples for a moment. If you had just experienced this failure, what would you do? You had just seen Jesus cast out the evil spirit, doing in a moment of time what you had failed to do over many hours. Wouldn’t you watch closely to see what Jesus did that was different from what you did?

The disciples obviously had done this, yet their observation failed to uncover the reason for their failure. It seems apparent, however, that Jesus didn’t do anything that struck the disciples as being markedly different from what they had done, for **Mark 9:28** tells us:

“After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’”

Now isn’t that what you would do? Wouldn’t you ask the Lord for some clue as to the reason for your failure, at least to avoid having to make the same mistake twice? Yet Jesus’ response, recording in two separate Gospel accounts, is both revealing and puzzling.

- **Mark 9:29** – “This kind can come out only by prayer.”
- **Matthew 17:20** – “Because you have so little faith.”

Now these two answers seem to contradict, don’t they? They are two totally separate answers, with separate meanings, aren’t they? Or are they?

We know that Jesus gave both these answers. Mark simply records one answer while Matthew records the other. Mark focuses on lack of *prayer* as the issue and Matthew focuses on lack of *faith* as the issue.

Jesus’ answer obviously combined these two aspects. His answer may have been something like this:

“Why couldn’t you drive it out? Because you have so little faith! You are not hearing from the Father and you are not putting what you hear into practice. For this kind can come out only by prayer.”

As we saw in **Module 102**, when Jesus said, “This kind can come out only by prayer,” he was not meaning that the disciples should hold a special prayer meeting in order to gain the power and authority to deal with this evil spirit.

We do not see Jesus, at any time prior to casting out the evil spirit, pulling his disciples to one side and saying, “Hey, guys, this is a tough one. This one comes out only by prayer and fasting, so let’s hold a quick prayer meeting. Or better still, let’s make an appointment for this boy to come back in, say, three days time, so that we can fast and pray and better prepare ourselves for the onslaught.” No, Jesus simply casts out the evil spirit.

So what was Jesus referring to when he said, “This kind can come out only by prayer”? Jesus was referring, of course, to a *lifestyle* of prayer, not just a prayer meeting as a response to a particular problem.

The disciples had thought they had missed out on an important formula, something they had done wrong when they had tried to cast out the unclean spirit. But Jesus’ answer to their question was not a formula. It was prayer!

Yet he was not talking about prayer as an *activity*. He was talking about prayer as *an integral part of ministry*. He was not talking about prayer in the open. He was talking about the time we spend hidden in prayer with God.

### Read Luke 5:16

As we have established right from the very first lesson of the Biblical Studies Course, prayer was a characteristic of Jesus’ daily life (see [Matthew 14:23](#); [Mark 1:35](#); [6:46](#); [Luke 5:16](#); [6:12](#); [9:18](#); [11:1](#)). Prayer was the key to his ministry, and it was this key that he sought to teach his disciples. For out of a lifestyle of prayer-intimacy with the Father comes true faith.

## True Faith

### Read Matthew 17:20-21

Here we see Jesus’ conclusion to his explanation as to why the disciples had failed to cast out the evil spirit. He explains:

“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

There are two possible views of faith, one of them prevalent in the Church today, and the other relatively rare:

- ➡ Remote-control faith
- ➡ Dynamically-linked faith

Let’s take a look briefly at each.

### ***Remote-Control Faith***

Have you ever used a remote control? Maybe while watching television you’ve flicked between channels, or while crossing the road you have remotely locked your car. We now have remote-control air-conditioning, remote-control garage

door openers, and even remote-control lawnmowers. And the sole attraction of using a remote control is so that you can avoid having to go anywhere near an appliance in order to operate it.

And sadly, all too often in the Christian Church we have a remote-control faith. We believe that if we learn the right verses and the right formulas, we can operate God by remote control. We press the button and, beep! God does it! Beep! God heals us! Beep! God provides for us! We are a Church enamored with the next formula. We attend the seminars. We read the books. Like the disciples, we search for the one missing formula that will at last make everything work for us.

But faith is not a remote-control experience. In fact, it is just the opposite. Faith is not about getting God to do things for you; it is about God getting you to do things for him. Faith is not about getting God to participate in *your* purposes; it is about you actively participating in the purposes *of God*.

### ***Dynamically-Linked Faith***

True faith is what links you to the Father. It is through true faith that you are able to say, like Jesus, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” It is from this dynamically-linked experience that the power of God flows.

Rather than finding the remote-control formula that will finally get God to do what I want him to do, true faith is a recognition not just that I am totally dependant upon God, but that my purposes have merged with his, my will with his, my desire with his. This is the faith that Jesus spoke of when he said:

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

Rather than it being a matter of learning the right verses to quote back to God, it is a matter of us abiding in Christ and his words abiding in us – becoming a part of us in the same way we have become a part of him. For it is out of this intimate yoking with Christ’s will and purpose that true faith is born. That faith is a fire. It consumes you and drives you forward in the work of God. As Corrie Ten Boom expressed it:

“Faith is an activity; it is something that has to be applied.”<sup>1</sup>

Now that we have seen faith in its biblical perspective, we are ready to examine more closely how Christ himself ministered.

## **Christ’s Method of Ministry**

### **Read John 5:17**

In this statement, Jesus reveals his undergirding attitude toward ministry. “My Father,” he says, “is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working...” Jesus saw himself as “full time in the ministry” simply because his Father was “full time in the ministry.” But then, in **John 5:19**, Jesus goes on to say:

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

As we look at the ministry of Jesus, we see that ministry is not *doing* the work of God, but joining in God’s own work. God is always at work. Even when we speak with somebody who has not yet received the Lord, God has been working in his or her heart long before we arrived on the scene. Ministry is all about doing what we see God *already* doing.

**Read again John 14:10**

## **A New View of Ministry**

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**Read Philippians 2:5**

The ministry of Jesus was founded on an attitude – a way of looking at himself, at his Father and at the world. This attitude included three elements:

### ***Jesus was working with the Father***

**Read again John 5:17**

The ministry of Jesus was not a nine-to-five job. Because his Father was continually at work, so Jesus was continually at work. Jesus joined in the work of his Father.

### ***Jesus could do nothing by Himself***

**Read again John 5:19-20**

Jesus stated very clearly that he was not doing his ministry in his own strength or by his own initiative. He only did what he saw his Father doing. His ministry was an outworking of his obedience.

### ***Jesus sought to please His Father***

**Read John 5:30**

The sole goal of Jesus in all his ministry was to please his Father. In the same way, our ministry must not have a self-focus (**2 Corinthians 2:17; 3:4-6; 4:5**). Our ministry should be aimed at pleasing God, not men (**Galatians 1:10; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 11:6**).

**Read John 4:34**

**Read Hebrews 10:5-7**

We can never be greater than Jesus but He wants us to be trained to be like Him (**Luke 6:40**). If Jesus said that he could do nothing by Himself, how much more does that apply to us?

**Read John 15:4-5**



## Fellow Workers with God

### Read 2 Corinthians 6:1

God has declared you to be a fellow-worker with him! You are not just a servant of the Most High God; you are also a partner of the Most High God!

The whole essence of ministry is summarized in this word “fellow-worker.” As a partner with God, our whole focus in ministry is learning to *cooperate* with him in *his* work. Like Jesus, the question you must constantly ask, in any given situation of ministry, is:

“Father, what are *you* doing? I want to join you in *your* work in this person’s life. Show me your work, Lord, so that I can cooperate with you.”

### Read 1 Corinthians 3:9

If we are to be fellow workers with God, then we need to draw on God’s daily and continual grace (**Acts 14:26; 2 Corinthians 9:8**). His grace not only sustains us; it also empowers us so that we can “give [ourselves] fully to the work of the Lord” (**1 Corinthians 15:10,58**).

In **Ephesians 2:8-9**, we discover that salvation is:

- By grace
- Through faith
- Not of ourselves
- So that no one may boast

But guess what! Ministry operates on exactly the same principle. Ministry also is:

- By grace
- Through faith
- Not of ourselves
- So that no one may boast

Ministry is all about hearing from God, seeing what God is doing, and stepping into the work of God himself. It is no accident that, following his description of our salvation in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, Paul declares in **Ephesians 2:10**:

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God *prepared in advance* for us to do.”

<sup>1</sup> Corrie Ten Boom, quoted by Edythe Draper in *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

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