

Essential Truths III: Working With God

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The Goal of Ministry

This Module – “Essential Studies III: Working with God” – has explored the wonder of our involvement with God in his plan and purpose upon the earth. We’ve seen how all ministry is shaped by an understanding of these important truths:

- **The Birthright:** You have received the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a firstborn son.
- **The Baton:** You need to have a Jacob-attitude to God’s purposes, not an Esau-attitude.
- **The Great Commission:** Your ministry falls with the mandate to “make disciples of every nation.”
- **The Body of Christ:** Your ministry finds its context in the mix of gifts and ministries that God has placed in the Church.
- **Every-Believer Ministry:** You are full-time in the ministry, regardless of your occupation.
- **Joining God’s Word:** You work with God, not for him, and must learn to see what God is doing and cooperate with his work.
- **The Tree of Life:** You must impart life as you minister to others.
- **Reconciliation:** Your ministry is, first and foremost, a ministry of reconciliation – between man and God and between man and man.

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

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Filled with the Spirit

Ministry to the Body

Sent into the Harvest

Speaking the Word of God

A Lifestyle Gospel

Salt and Light

Enforcing the Victory

Signs and Wonders

A New Kind of Leadership

Establishing a Daily Church

Making Disciples

The New Wine

▶ **The Goal of Ministry** ◀

- **The Infilling of the Spirit:** God expects you to be filled with his Spirit in order to fulfill the ministry that you have in Christ.
- **Ministry to the Body:** You are a partner with God in the ministry of encouragement and “building up” others in the Body of Christ.
- **The Harvest:** You have been called as a laborer in the harvest around you, under the direction of the Lord of the harvest.
- **Speaking God’s Word:** God is equipping and sending you to share his Word with others.
- **A Lifestyle Gospel:** The Gospel that you preach is not just about words, but also about lifestyle.
- **Salt and Light:** In order to have maximum impact for the kingdom of God, you must have potency, proximity and proclamation.
- **Enforcing the Victory:** You have been called to advance the Gospel into enemy territory, tearing down strongholds and breaking through the gates of Hades.
- **Signs and Wonders:** You can participate in a heritage of miracles, as God works with you to confirm his Word with signs and wonders.
- **A New Kind of Leadership:** Regardless of your gifting, you are to lead others, by example, into a deeper understanding of the Lord.
- **A Daily Church:** God wants you to discover the excitement of a daily walk with him and participate in church life and ministry on a daily basis.
- **Making Disciples:** God plans for you to multiply yourself by making disciples and start a chain reaction of his Word in other people’s lives.
- **The New Wine:** You are to be a new wineskin that can contain the new wine of God’s glory and pour it out to others.
- **The Goal of Ministry:** God’s goals are your goals, and these goals define your ministry.

In this lesson we are examining the scriptural goals of ministry. While it can be said that the end never justifies the means, the end most definitely *shapes* the means. So let’s take a look for a moment at the end of the road – the destination toward which all ministry moves.

The Goals of God

The Lord has a four stated goals, as described in Scripture.

The goal of unity

Read John 17:20-21

This prayer, prayed by the Lord Jesus just before he was crucified, reveals the “joy set before him” for which he endured the Cross (**Hebrews 12:3**). Strengthening the unity of the Body of Christ is a major focus of ministry.

The goal of conformity

This is not a conformity to one another, but a conformity to two things:

- To the likeness of Christ (**Romans 8:29**)
- To the purpose of his will (**Ephesians 1:11**)

Ministry is a cooperation with the Holy Spirit in this conforming process.

The goal of maturity

Read James 1:4

From the beginning of time, God has planned for his Church to reach full maturity in Christ. All ministry has the maturing of the believer as its ultimate goal.

Read Colossians 4:12

The goal of totality

Read Ephesians 1:9-10

God’s goal is “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” Christ’s authority is total (**Matthew 28:18**), but his rulership is not yet universal (**Ephesians 2:1-2; 1 John 5:19**).

Notice that the goal is not supremacy. Christ is already supreme over all (**Matthew 28:18**). But this supremacy must be outworked in totality (**1 Corinthians 15:24-25**).

Read Matthew 24:14

God has a “whole world” objective. His stated intention is that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (**Habakkuk 2:14**), and that “all mankind together will see it” (**Isaiah 40:5**).

The Grand Objective

Read Ephesians 4:13

This is God’s stated goal for the Church – the grand objective. Everything in God’s plan culminates at the point where God declares his Church to be mature, to have attained the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Let’s take a closer look at the four components of God’s grand objective, as described in this verse:

Unity in the faith

Read Colossians 2:2-3

The central purpose of Paul's ministry was to impart "the word of God in its fullness" (**Colossians 1:25**), and this is also main means to God's grand objective. It is not in doctrinal compromise that we find unity. It is in a full understanding of the Gospel of God's grace that we discover true unity in the faith.

Read Colossians 1:6

Unity in the knowledge of the Son of God

In **Colossians 2:2-3**, Paul equates "the full riches of complete understanding" with knowing Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".

God has designed everything in the Christian life to find its focus in the Lord Jesus. It is in fixing our eyes upon Jesus that we discover him as "the author and perfecter of our faith" (**Hebrews 12:2**).

Read Philippians 3:10

Maturity

Read Colossians 1:28-29

In this passage, Paul describes his goal in ministry, a mirror of **Ephesians 4:13**, but from a more personal perspective. He writes:

"We proclaim [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, *so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ*. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

The *Amplified Bible* catches the full spectrum of Paul's meaning:

"Him we preach and proclaim, warning and admonishing every one and instructing every one in all wisdom [in comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God], that we may present every person mature – full-grown, fully initiated and complete and perfect – in Christ, the Anointed One. For this I labor [unto weariness], striving with all the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles and works within me."

God's goal is for his Church to "come of age," fully reflecting the nature of God, fully conformed to the likeness of Christ – in character, purpose and power. Simply put, maturity means growing up into Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:14-15

The whole measure of Christ

Read Colossians 2:9-10

Christ expressed the fullness of God's nature in bodily form. Now God's plan is for his Church to do the same. It is only as the Body of Christ matures in "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" that the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" can be manifest to the world.

The concept of “fullness” is woven into the relationship between Christ and his Church. We are growing into “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,” and Christ, in turn, is through the Church expressing his fullness to the world (**Ephesians 1:22-23**).

Going on to Perfection

Read Hebrews 6:1

The writer to the Hebrews is distressed that his readers are lingering around the elementary teachings about Christ, and not pursuing a deeper knowledge of him. He remarks, in **Hebrews 5:11-12**:

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!”

His admonition to his readers is to “go on to maturity” (NIV) or “go on to perfection” (KJV). The literal meaning behind this phrase is, in fact, “let us be born on to completeness,”¹ and the nuances of the original Greek are further expounded by the *Amplified Bible*:

“Therefore let us go on...advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belongs to spiritual maturity.”

The New Testament speaks much of the “perfection” spoken of in **Hebrews 6:1**. In **2 Corinthians 13:9** we find Paul writing these words:

“We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection.”

Then, two verses later, he writes:

“Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection.”

Again, as we saw in **Colossians 1:28**, Paul’s express aim is:

“...that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”

In **Philippians 1:6**, Paul addresses the Philippians with these words:

“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

The same Greek word, translated “will carry it on to completion” (NIV) and “will perfect (it)” (KJV), is also used in **2 Corinthians 7:1**, where Paul writes:

“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, *perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*”

The scriptural concept of perfection is somewhat different from today’s common

understanding of the word. Most people associate perfection with sinlessness, but although related, the Bible separates the two concepts. Let's take for example the following three verses:

Read Hebrews 2:10

Read Hebrews 5:8-9

Read Hebrews 7:28

Here we see a description of the Son of God. In **2:10**, we find that God makes Christ "perfect through suffering." In **5:9**, we are told that Christ "once made perfect" became "the source of eternal salvation." Once again, in **7:28**, we discover that Christ "has been made perfect forever."

What does this mean? Is the Bible telling us that Christ was not perfect, that he had sin in him? The balance of Scripture informs us emphatically that this is not the case (see **2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15**). Could it be, then, that prior to his suffering, Jesus was sinless yet *not* perfect?

In order to understand this paradox, we need to understand the biblical concept of perfection. The various Greek words used in the Bible for perfection have the following meanings:

- To render fit, complete.
- A fitting or preparing fully.
- A fulfillment, completion, perfection, an end accomplished as the effect of a process
- To bring to a completion.
- Having reached its end, finished, complete, perfect, full grown, mature.
- To bring to an end by completing or perfecting, accomplishing, bringing to completion.
- To carry to the goal or consummation.
- To bring through to an end, to complete.

As the *New International Version's Expert Commentary* explains:

"Christ had not been morally or spiritually imperfect, but his incarnation was completed (perfected) when he experienced suffering. He identified with us on the deepest level of anguish, and so became qualified to pay the price for our sinful imperfection and to become our sympathetic high priest."²

The Son of God was already perfect in his behavior and in his relationship with his Father. The perfecting spoken of in **Hebrews 2:10** had to do with his capacity to atone for our sins before God. Once perfected through his obedience under suffering, he then became the author of our salvation.

The perfecting of the Son was, paradoxically, through his total identification with

sinful humanity. Without compromising on sin, Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful man” (**Romans 8:3**). Now we are being perfected through our total identification with Christ.

The Mechanism for Perfection

Read Galatians 3:3

Paul rebuked the Galatians for the lunacy of thinking that the “perfecting” process (KJV) could be accomplished through any means outside of the grace of God. J. B. Phillips, in *The New Testament in Modern English*, captures the exasperation of Paul toward his dearly loved, but seriously deceived, Galatians:

“O you dear idiots of Galatia, who saw Jesus Christ the crucified so plainly, who has been casting a spell over you?...Surely you can't be so idiotic as to think that a man begins his spiritual life in the Spirit and then completes it by reverting to outward observances?”

As we have seen in **Module 102**, there are only two ways that a person might try to achieve the perfection that is commanded by God (note **Matthew 5:48**). These two ways are described in **Romans 7:6**:

- The old way of the written code
- The new way of the Spirit

The Bible is unequivocal about the fact that the old way of the written code is not only an inferior way, it is in fact totally incapable of perfecting anyone.

Read Hebrews 7:18-19

Read Hebrews 10:1

The writer to the Hebrews is emphatic that the Old Covenant's sacrificial system was incapable of making anyone perfect. God, however, had a solution:

Read Hebrews 10:14

This verse reveals the nature of God's perfecting process. According to this verse, two things are held in tension:

- We *have* been made perfect forever – “once and for all”
- We are *being* made holy – “daily”

The Bible declares you perfect! But before you begin jumping too high, here's the qualifying statement: Your perfection is solely in Christ. You are not “perfect forever” because you are sinless (note **1 John 1:8,10**), nor because you have already reached your goal (note **Philippians 3:12**). You are perfect only because you have stepped into the perfection of Christ himself. It is Christ's perfection, not yours! But now God is working in your life to outwork the perfection of Christ into practical, everyday holiness.

Read Philippians 2:12-13

Pressing on to the Goal

Read Philippians 3:12-14

Paul declared that he was “press[ing] on toward the goal to win the prize for which God [had] called [him] heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

In these two passages, Paul describes a “prize” toward which he is running. He is drawing from the Greek Olympic tradition, familiar to both the Philippians and the Corinthians. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains Paul’s phrase, “I press on toward the goal.”

“The goal of the foot-race [was] a square pillar at the end of the stadium opposite the entrance, which the athlete as far as possible kept in view and the sight of which encouraged him to redouble his exertions...”³

The Hope of Glory

So far we’ve looked at the goal of ministry from various angles. We’ve had a look at the four stated goals of ministry – unity, conformity, maturity and totality. We’ve also dissected **Ephesians 4:13**, which provides us with God’s grand objective, and we’ve looked at the perfecting process that is found in the new way of the Spirit. Now let’s take a look at one verse that sums up all these goals in one statement:

Read Colossians 1:27

Let’s read this verse again through the lens of different Bible translations:

New International Version: “...God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

New King James Version: “...God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

God’s Word: “God wanted his people throughout the world to know the glorious riches of this mystery – *which is Christ living in you, giving you the hope of glory.*”

New Century Version: “God decided to let his people know this rich and glorious secret which he has for all people. *This secret is Christ himself, who is in you. He is our only hope for glory.*”

New Living Translation: “For it has pleased God to tell his people that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. *For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory.*”

Good News Bible: “God’s plan is to make known his secret to his people, this rich and glorious secret which he has for all peoples. And the secret is that Christ is in you, which means that you will share in the glory of God.”

The New Testament in Modern English: “...God has planned to give a vision of the full wonder and splendor of his secret plan for the nations. And the secret is simply this: Christ *in you!* Yes, Christ *in you* bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come.”

The Message: “This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it’s out in the open. God wanted everyone...to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is this: Christ is in you, therefore you can look forward to sharing in God’s glory. It’s that simple.”

The Amplified Bible: “To whom God was pleased to make known how great for the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is, Christ within and among you the hope of [realizing] the glory.”

There you have it. One verse, in a nutshell, describing everything that God has planned for your life. This is the goal God has for you, and it is also the goal of your ministry to others.

But wait! There’s more! **Colossians 1:27** is followed by a simple statement, rendered by the *Good News Bible* as:

“And so we preach Christ.”

The *New International Version* elaborates:

“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”

God’s entire plan is encapsulated in Christ. He is our hope for glory, and he is also the means to that glory. Your ministry is thus summarized by these two statements:

- ➔ Christ is the goal
- ➔ Christ is the means

No wonder Paul declared in **Galatians 4:19**:

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

God’s goal is that you grow into the fullness of Christ, not just as an individual believer, but as part of a Body growing up into Christ. How will this happen? Only as Christ is fully proclaimed.

As we close this lesson and this module, let’s take a look at two final verses that show just how the proclamation of Christ will affect the Church and the world:

Impact on the Church: “...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, *cleansing her by the washing with water through the word*, and to present her to himself as *a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (**Ephesians 5:25-27**).

Impact on the world: “Now to him who is able to *establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ...by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him...*” (**Romans 16:25-26**).

This is the ultimate aim of the Gospel – a radiant Church impacting the world with the news of salvation in Christ. The goal of all ministry is to work with the Holy Spirit to meet this aim and thus fulfill the prayer of Jesus in **John 17:20-21**:

“My prayer is...that *all of them may be one*, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us *so that the world may believe...*”

¹ *Vincent's Word Studies*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.1, Deluxe Edition.

² *Expert Commentary*, Hebrews 2:10, excerpted from *Compton's Interactive Bible NIV*.

³ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.1, Deluxe Edition.

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