

Notes for the Ones Called–Out to Meet

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Jesus' Modus Operandi

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father is doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son and outwardly indicates to Him what things He does, and greater works than these He will show Him, in order that you might marvel.’”
John 5:19,20; cf. 7:16,17; 8:28; 12:49

The gospel of John was written at the end of the first century. The other gospels had been written and distributed decades before. John presents a very different perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus than these other writers. His work was *meant* to be supplemental. He expected his readers to be aware of the other gospel accounts. Consequently, he offers to us background information *not* expressed by the other writers, ...and he shares with us insights into issues that the other gospel writers did *not* cover. One of these areas has to do with how Jesus functioned. **What principles or guidelines did Jesus follow in order to do what He did? What was His *modus operandi*, or “method of operation”?** The other writers record *what* He did, but had little to say about *how* He did it. John gives us a much more intimate view of Jesus' personal process. How did He know *what* to do, and *when* to do it? **John shares with us the things Jesus said about Himself.** Once we understand what He revealed about His own process, we can begin to see some of the ways He implemented these principles in His dealings with people. We also begin to recognize that the disciples later followed the *same* procedures.

(1.) Be aware of your own powerlessness to do the work of the Kingdom. Jesus clearly indicated that He knew He could do nothing from Himself (John 5:19,20; 8:28; 12:49). If God was not in it, it was not going to produce anything good. He made the same principle very applicable to us, “...apart from Me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

(2.) Recognize that God is the initiator of ministry opportunities, not you. If you read the passages noted above, it is obvious that *Jesus was a follower*. He was following the leading and initiatives of His Father. He got involved with what He perceived God to be doing. He taught what He perceived the Father telling Him to teach (7:16,17). The apostle Paul also stated this as a clear principle, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

(3.) Be watchful for indications of God's presence at work. Jesus said that He was not *able* (lit. “powerful, capable”) to do *anything*, unless He saw that the Father was at work in it. **How was He able to tell when the Father was at work?** The text does not give us a list of things to watch for, but there are some clues here for us to take note of. The word translated as “sees” can mean to literally see with the eyes, but it can also mean to “become aware of, to perceive, discover, mentally consider and gain insight”, much like our English word. This broadens the picture a bit. It was not necessarily limited to something Jesus physically saw with His eyes, though it certainly could involve that. The point of the word picture is that **God is initiating something which has clues, indicators or signals that become evident or discernible to those who are willing to pay attention to notice them.**

The other word picture, found in 5:20, is that **the Father will “show” His works to those looking for them.** The Greek word here means to “make known the character or significance of something, to outwardly expose, or clearly demonstrate by an outward example or indication”. In other words, **God will leave some kind of clues, some kind of outward sign that He is at work, something that we can perceive, if we will be circumspect and attentive.** What examples do we have of this?

I believe Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well was such a situation (Jn. 4). Remember, the disciples left Him tired and thirsty, while they went into town to try to purchase food? Then, *an unusual thing happened*. A woman came out to the well at high noon, carrying her water pot! This did not normally occur until the evening. I believe Jesus did *not* initially *know* what was going to happen, but *He did take note of the unusual circumstances*. Maybe she was sent there to provide for His thirst. He responded by asking her for a drink, and engaging her in conversation (something which would also not normally be done). As the conversation unfolded, I believe Jesus gained more insight, and was able to powerfully get through her defenses by a word of knowledge.

Another example would be the lame man in Acts 14. Somehow, Paul could “see” that he had faith to be made well (lit. “saved”). What did he see? We are not told. *Something* was apparent to Paul, however, that prompted him to command the man to “get up and walk”. An additional example from Paul's life would be the “Macedonian vision” (Acts 16:9,10). God revealed His leading through a dream. The apostle and his co-workers *concluded* that God was calling them to go to that province to do their work, and they immediately did so.

[Another key concept in the NT is to *watch for what the Father is “inworking” within you*. The Greek word is *energeō*, which literally means to “work within”. The word occurs in several passages that are in the context of God’s power being given to accomplish something -- I Cor. 12:6 (2x), 11; Gal. 2:8 (2x); 3:5; 5:6; Eph. 3:20; Phil 2:13; Col. 1:29; Jas. 5:16 (lit., “the inworking prayer of the righteous is able/powerful much”).]

(4.) Get involved in what you see the Father doing. This is the method of operation (the *modus operandi*) which Jesus followed and advocated, stated in one brief sentence. There are three corollary principles:

Where? -- Get involved *where* you see God opening up doors of opportunity. Often the work of God is *not* transferable to another location.

When? -- Get involved *when* you see God at work. Paul encouraged Timothy to “stand ready in season and out of season” (II Tim. 4:2). Not only is there a *local* “door of opportunity”, but there is also a *temporal* “window of opportunity”. Some of these are more immediate than others. Sometimes, we must “strike while the iron is hot”, or the opportunity will be lost. In John 4, Jesus put aside eating for the time being, because He saw an opportunity that was ripe, and did not want to miss it.

How? -- Get involved in a way that is in accord with what you see God doing. Jesus said He did what He saw the Father doing “in like manner” or in a “similar fashion”. In other words, *take note of what is working* and do not drastically change the recipe! Often, we have our own ideas of how things “ought to work”, and we try to make things fit our expectations. Unfortunately, that could shut down the opportunity, instead of open it up. Jesus took His signals from what He saw God doing in the situation, and did not shift gears. Do not try to “turn” the work of God to fit your preference. Instead, get in line with what God is *currently* doing, and work *with* Him.

(5.) Know when to quit, or to say, “No.” Just as a doctor would not be very effective if he stayed by the bedside of only one person until they were totally better, in the same way we must remember the bigger picture of our lives. We must keep even the work of God in perspective with the other responsibilities that He has entrusted us with. This is where the reality of our finiteness must be taken into account. **We have limits. There is only so much of us to go around.** We have only so many hours, so much energy. We cannot be two places at once. We cannot be “on call” in two different directions at once. We will have to choose one or the other.

(a.) Sometimes we must bypass an opportunity because of a higher calling. Just because the Spirit of God is strongly evident and moving in power does *not* mean that *we* should continue to stay in one place, or repeatedly return to meeting after meeting. In Mark 1:32-39, Jesus left a prospering, Spirit-empowered ministry to “take the message to other places”. In Acts 8, the Spirit instructed Philip to leave a powerful work among the Samaritans to witness to *one* person. At the time, however, Philip did not even know *that*. All he knew was that the Spirit was telling him to go elsewhere.

(b.) Sometimes we must bypass, or “shut down”, a ministry opportunity because of physical limitations. More than once, Jesus sent crowds away because it was late, or because they would be exhausted. It was out of concern for the stresses that would come on them if they stayed longer that He sent them home. He was considerate. At other times, He left a busy ministry schedule to recover His own vigor, or that of His disciples (Mk. 6:31). The limitations of our physical bodies sometimes dictate that we must leave.

(c.) Sometimes we must limit ministry involvement because of responsibilities at home and work. The realities of our personal limits mean that *we must take care to protect our time and energy enough to be effective stewards of our family and work commitments, as well* (I Tim. 5:8 -- The word translated as “provides” is not limited to financial provision. It is about foresight concerning the total needs of the family. Cf. Col. 3:22-25; I Pet. 2:12). The qualifications for elders and deacons indicate that **spiritually mature people learn to live life well, so that even outsiders find no fault with the fruit of their walk.** They are good workers, good spouses and good parents, all of which requires time, energy and resources. **We are to become effective servants of the King, ...obedient, responsive, sound in faith and in life, producing good fruit.** Jesus said, “*Going about, make disciples...*” (Matt. 28:19). We make disciples *as we live life*. We are to *seize opportunities* that the Lord provides, but we cannot put life on hold for long, or we begin to shirk other responsibilities. **We must learn to discern the voice of God in ministry opportunities, and also in life responsibilities.** He will lead us in integrity and love.

Ephesians 2:10 says that God gifts and prepares us to do work, and then He brings those ministry opportunities to us. We should *expect* Him to be leading and directing us. **As we watch for what He is initiating, pay attention to the unusual or the “more-than-coincidental”.** God often leads by bringing a message or idea repeatedly before us in a short period of time, or from many different places. Then, it is important to recognize that **just because some of us in the body are called to get involved in a particular ministry effort, does not imply that we are all called to do that.** We can be supportive, yet *not* be personally called to participate. If we are not *drawn* to be involved, or if we are *lacking the vision*, we may be called to something else. Again, don’t do things from *yourself*, or from what *others* say. Look for the initiative to come *from God*. **Ask God for your duty assignment!**