

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Jesus' Modus Operandi Applied To Walking In Love

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 (phileō) the Son and outwardly indicates to Him what things He does, and greater things than these He will outwardly indicate to you, in order that you might marvel.’”

John 5:19,20; cf. 7:16,17; 8:28; 12:49

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love (agapaō) one another, even as I have loved you...” John 13:34

Learning From Jesus' Process For Recognizing Ministry Opportunities

According to the first set of verses listed above, **Jesus was very much aware that the works of service that He did, and the teachings that He taught, were not from Himself.** The gospel of John, written at the end of the first century, gives us many different insights into issues that the other gospel writers, who had written earlier, did not cover. One of these areas has to do with how Jesus operated, i.e., what principles or guidelines did He follow in order to do what He did? 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 Jesus know *what* to do, and *when* to do it?** John shares with us what Jesus said about Himself. Once we observe what He revealed about His own process, we can observe some of the ways He implemented these principles in His dealings with people. We also become sensitized to take note of the disciples, and see how they also followed the same procedures. **This is applicable** not only to “works” and “teachings”, but also to **expressing the love (agapē) of the Kingdom.**

(1.) Be aware of your own powerlessness to do the work of the Kingdom, including your inability to produce the agapē of God. Jesus clearly indicated that He knew He could do nothing from Himself. If God was not in it, it was not going to produce anything good. He made the same principle apply to His followers, “...apart from Me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

(2.) Recognize that God is the initiator of ministry opportunities, not you. From 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. The apostle Paul also stated this as a clear principle, “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 around you. 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 Jesus 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. **Jesus said that He “saw” what the Father was doing.** The word translated as “sees” means 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, “**see**” can have both literal and metaphorical usage. 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 which become evident or discernible to those who are willing to pay attention to notice them.**

The other word picture, in verse 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 the scenario in John 4, where Jesus met the woman at the well is a situation where He did not initially know what was going to happen, but He *did* take note of the unusual circumstances, and *responded* by engaging her in conversation (something which would not normally be done in that culture). As the conversation unfolded, I believe Jesus gained more insight, and was able to powerfully and effectively 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 him to “get up and walk”. One more example from Paul's life would be the “Macedonian vision” (Acts 16:9,10), from which the apostle and his co-workers *concluded* that God was calling them to go to that province to do their work.

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

Where? -- *Get involved where you see God opening up doors of opportunity.*

Often the work of God is *not* transferable to another location. The Spirit is at work here, ...in this place. There is no guarantee that the conditions will be right, or that it will be the purpose and timing of the Lord, to present the same, or a similar, opportunity in another location. To ignore this is to attempt to overlook, or disregard, God's invitation to join Him in ministry where you are.

When? -- *Get involved when you see God at work.*

Paul encouraged Timothy to "be ready in season and out of season". 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 a preconceived idea of how things "ought to work", and when we get involved we try to change things to fit our ministry ideas. Unfortunately, that could shut down the opportunity, instead of open it up. Jesus took His signals from what He saw the Father doing in the situation, and did not shift gears. He got involved in a way that was similar to what God had used. Now, that does not mean that possibly down the road other approaches may be needed. For the time being, however, do not try to "turn" the work of God to fit your preference. Instead, get in line with what God is doing, and do what you see is working.

(5.) Know when to quit, or say, "No." A doctor would not be very effective if he stayed by the bedside of only one person until they were totally better, ignoring the needs of other patients, or his other responsibilities in life. Similarly, we must remember the bigger picture of our lives to keep even the work of God in perspective with the other responsibilities that God 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 Stephen to leave a powerful work among the Samaritans to witness to one person. At the time, however, Stephen 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 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 means 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 show that **spiritually mature people learn to live life in such a way that people 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.**

Conclusion

The skills we must learn in life, as we seek to follow Jesus, will cover both ends of the spectrum to provide health and balance. We will learn to be effective as servants of the King, obedient, responsive, sound in faith and in life, producing good fruit. This requires learning to discern both the voice of God in ministry opportunities, and in other life responsibilities. Remember, however, that our primary investment is eternal, not temporal.