

The Difference in Being WITH God or FOR God

One of my favorite moments in the Gospel of Mark is in the description of Jesus's appointment of the disciples. In [Mark 3:13-14](#), we read:

Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons.

Our eyes are drawn to the end of the sentence where the ministry of the apostles comes into focus. Jesus appointed his followers and sent them out to preach and to drive out demons. How exciting! What authority! What power!

But don't miss the brief mention of the purpose that precedes the power. Jesus appointed 12 apostles "to be with him." Do you see the focus on proximity to Jesus? He summoned "those he wanted" and appointed them first and foremost to *be with him*. Don't miss the beauty of this order.

If you are a follower of Jesus called into his service, remember that he called you—first and foremost—to be with him, not to work for him. Yes, he sends his disciples out to preach, and he gives them authority to drive out demons. Hallelujah! But before proclamation comes proximity. Before the power comes the Person.

[Kim Huat Tan writes](#) that being with Jesus "defines succinctly what discipleship means. By being with Jesus they can know him intimately and understand his teaching."

The faithful follower of Jesus cultivates life *with* God before life *for* God. Get those backwards, and you'll run dry. You may be a someone who knows and spreads the gospel, but you will slowly see your spiritual vitality fade if your relationship to Christ is not a priority. Proximity to Jesus is key. Your relationship with him is the most important part of your ministry. What happens in your prayer closet matters more than anything you do on a public platform.

It's true that evangelicals sometimes imagine our life with God as a continual Bible study or prayer time, an ever-present feeling of "closeness to God" that manifests itself in semi-mystical fashion. And surely listening to the voice of God through his Word and demonstrating our dependence upon him in prayer make up part of what it must mean for us today to "be with Jesus."

But we should take care not to paint too rosy a picture of what this relationship looks like. [David](#)

[Garland](#) is right:

The task of being with Jesus is one that is harder than it might first appear. The Twelve will have to learn that there is a difference between hanging around with Jesus and truly being with him. The latter means that they must follow wherever he leads and share the toil of the ministry, the harassment of the crowds (3:20; 6:31-33), and the same bitter draught of suffering (10:39).

Being with Jesus—in proximity to him—means not only that we cultivate a relationship with him that inspires and empowers us in general but also that prepares us for the suffering that must mark the life of any who follow in the steps of a Suffering Servant. Without this emphasis, we run the risk of minimizing the challenges we are sure to face on the road to faith.

In the end, our relationship with Christ must precede any work we do for him. A generation ago, [Francis Schaeffer warned in a letter](#) about religious activity that neglected our personal relationship with Christ:

I believe most strongly . . . that our efforts in Christian service fall into three concentric circles: the outer circle is the apologetic and defensive. (This is an important portion of Christian activity and should never be minimized, but it is not the heart. . . .)

The middle circle is inside the outer one and is more central. This is the intellectual statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith in a positive way. (This to me is an even more important portion of Christian activity, but if it stands alone, it still is not Christianity.)

The innermost circle is the spiritual—the personal relationship of the individual soul with a personal God, including all that is meant in the apostolic benediction when we say, “The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” It is this last, innermost circle with which the devotional deals and without which Christianity is not really Bible-believing.

Don't miss the order, brothers and sisters. Proximity before power. The Person before the proclamation. Life *with* God before work *for* him.

> [Read more from Trevin.](#)
