

# PARTNERING WITH GOD

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According to Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, “*God... has called you to be partners with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Corinthians 1:9; NJB)

Partnership with God is an awesome privilege! Perhaps you’ve seen the bumper sticker “God is My Co-Pilot” (or the dyslexic version, “Dog is My Co-Pilot”). It’s a way of acknowledging this partnership. But I prefer to say, “I am God’s co-pilot.” I want Him to sit in the pilot’s seat, and I’ll try to cooperate and follow His instructions.

Now, some people speak as though every human being is a child of God. I know that every human being has been created by God in God’s image, but the Bible reveals that there are criteria for becoming a child of God; it is not automatic. John wrote, “*To all who believed [Jesus] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12). And again, “*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God’s Son does not have life*” (1 John 5:12).

## What Does It Take?

Similarly, there are criteria for becoming a partner with God. For an example, take the story of the disciples’ last evening with Jesus before His arrest and death. Jesus stood up from the table, removed His robe and wrapped Himself with a towel and began to wash the disciples’ feet with water.

*LB John 13:6 When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Master, you shouldn’t be washing our feet like this!”*

*<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now why I am doing it; some day you will.”*

*<sup>8</sup> “No,” Peter protested, “you shall never wash my feet!”*

*“But if I don’t, you can’t be my partner,” Jesus replied.*

What was Peter feeling as Jesus offered to wash his feet? Pride? Humility?

What sort of feelings motivated his protests? Shame? Embarrassment?

We cannot be partners with God on our own terms! We can only partner with Him on His terms; we must listen and observe and cooperate. If you refuse to let Him have His way in your life, even when it seems inappropriate or absurd, you cannot be His partner.

Moreover, it’s not only how we begin the partnership, but how we continue it.

*NRSV Hebrews 3:14 We have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.*

Partnership with God means sticking by His side, and if we’ve been diverted, hastening to return to His side again. Partners with God hold firmly to their faith in Him, however weak or fragile they may feel, however many times they stumble, or however difficult it may be to understand God’s plan. They just keep coming back to Him.

*Proverbs 24:16 The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again.*

The really great thing about this partnership is that it is two-way! Not only do we partner with God in what He wants to do, but He also partners with us in what we are doing! It's a mutual-aid arrangement. (The public safety agencies of Marin County have a mutual-aid agreement, whereby when a major need arises in one jurisdiction, members of the other jurisdictions will also assist.)

*AMP Romans 8:28* *We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.*

When God is up to something special, we should drop what we are doing and lend a hand to the work, in the same way that we ask God to come to our aid in a time of special need.

We have established that God wants us to partner with Him in return for His partnering with us. But how?

We have seen that it must be on His terms, and we must stick with it and keep returning to Him.

## **The Heart of Partnership**

At the heart of that process is an essential spiritual quality that not everyone possesses, and of those who do possess it, many do not express it, and of those who do express it, many do not feel like they do it well or effectively. Yet it is the very heart of partnering with God. It is what the Bible calls "faith."

*NKJV Hebrews 11:6* *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

If doing a certain thing is "impossible," does there remain *any* possibility of doing it? No. Without faith it is *not possible* to please God. Therefore, Biblical faith is *absolutely essential* for partnering with God. Nothing else can make up for a lack of faith.

The person who comes to God — who wants to partner with God — must believe that God exists, not that He is a concept (no apologies to John Lennon) or a phantom or an illusion, but a personal being to whom we can, in some meaningful way, come or approach or meet or partner with.

We must trust that He is (available to us), and that He rewards those who seek Him with the meeting that they are seeking. At this point, we encounter the *level* of trust that is necessary.

The Bible says that God rewards those who *diligently seek* Him. Sincerity of faith and persistence of faith are required.

I used to do some "cold call" evangelism. That means arriving unannounced at someone's home and knocking on the door in the hope of speaking to them about their spiritual life. If it was a total stranger on whom I was calling, I often felt a good deal of fear about their potential response (I don't like being rejected). At first, I would knock very timidly (lightly), secretly hoping they would not hear and would not answer. (Still I could report that I had made an attempt!)

When I was a child, I sometimes played a prank on neighbors by knocking on their door and running away or hiding. Somehow, it seemed amusing to me to watch their puzzled expression, as they scratched their heads and wondered if they had imagined the knocking sound.

Well, enough of the highs and lows of my sorry life. The point is that if you “knock and run” — such as when you kneel to pray, but only briefly, because you have little to say and much else to do — that cannot achieve a meeting with God.

God rewards those who sincerely and diligently seek Him. And when you approach Him, you are to *trust* that He does so and *demonstrate* both sincerity of heart and mind and diligence of purpose and persistence.

Trusting that God waits for you and will meet with you when you seek Him intently is the only kind of faith that pleases Him. There is no substitute for that kind of faith.

Practicing religion is no substitute for genuine faith. Believing the right doctrine is not the same as trusting God. Doing the right thing can't replace real faith. Even doing a lot of right things can't. Keeping a positive attitude is not an acceptable alternate for authentic devotion.

Partnership is what God wants. Meeting with God is the way such partnership is developed. And faith is what it takes to meet with God.

But both faith and partnership go far beyond those meetings. Your trust and joint venture with God are for impacting the world in Jesus' name. For leaving His mark and changing people's hearts. For achieving the dreams God has sown in your heart, and bringing to pass what has not been done before!

NKJV Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

“Things hoped for” — dreams and visions — are in the future, but faith is “now.” Faith is what you do now, while you hope for and wait for the promises of God to be fulfilled. If you don't practice faith today, you won't see the things you hope for tomorrow.

And even when you do practice trusting God, He will test your diligence, He will examine your sincerity, He will prove your persistence in meeting with Him, before He unpacks those dreams of yours.

Faith often encounters delay or resistance or opposition. And here the old proverb is true:

Jeremiah 12:5 *If racing against mere men makes you tired, how will you race against horses? If you stumble and fall on open ground, what will you do in the thickets near the Jordan?*

God is faithful to train us gradually and will not permit you to be tested beyond your ability (1 Corinthians 10:13). But if you will not persist in the lesser trials, how will you overcome the greater ones?

If you mistake a feeling of confidence for faith, then you will assume that good feelings usually accompany God's path. You will also assume that faith is something you just wait for, like a feeling, to arise; when in truth faith is active, not passive, even while waiting for your hopes to be realized. To live by faith you must often act *before* feelings arise — when you *don't* feel comfortable, or when you feel *nothing at all*.

Faith is the “substance of things hoped for.” Things hoped for do not yet have substance; they are dreams or ideas. “Substance” is the translation of the Greek *hupostasis*: the foundation, the basis, the reality that underlies what is apparent, the essence of a thing. Its opposite is a *phantom* or an *apparition*.

Flip the phrases around: the substance of things hoped for is faith (or, the basis of hope is faith). Faith is what gives hope its staying power, its persistence. Without faith, hope cannot endure. Yet, endurance is often required in order for a dream to be fulfilled.

*Proverbs 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life.*

When hope is rooted in faith in God, it has substance, it is substantial, it will come to pass. Faith is the foundation.

Faith is the “evidence of things not yet seen.” Things that you do not yet see are not evident, they are imagined. “Evidence” is translated from the Greek *elegchos* (a legal term): conviction, persuasion of reality (truth), especially against opposition or doubt.

Again, flip the phrases: the evidence of things yet invisible is faith. Ordinarily, when the lights go out, when you cannot see, you freeze, you stop in your tracks — you wait for the lights to go on or for your eyes to adjust to the darkness. But faith keeps you moving forward in the right direction even when you cannot see the rightness of the way. Faith is the motivation.

Faith is the stability of hopes and dreams. Such hopes will not be disappointed. Such dreams will surely come to pass.

Faith is your foundation. Faith is your motivation.

Have faith in God. Keep your mind focused on Jesus. Be faithfully obedient. Be obediently faithful. Listen, and really hear these words from Jesus:

*John 14:1 Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.*

Make Jesus Christ your partner for life.