

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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A People of Purpose

by Dan Trygg

“I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you have a different mind, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶ however, let us follow in what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

Philippians 3:8-17

Last week we looked at how **God is a purposeful Being. He has an objective, a goal which He is working toward. He has formulated a plan to bring this out, and He is working according to His plan.** We have the choice to either yield to Him, and come into agreement with His plan and His purpose (Eph. 1:7-14), or to resist His will (Lk. 7:30). **One of the key ideas of what it means to “become a Christian” is that we must repent.** The Greek word for “repent” means to “change your mind” or “change your perspective and perception of reality”. It is not about “feeling sorry” as our term, “repent” has come to mean. Feelings of sorrow and remorse over poor choices, past regrets, or a wasted life, may indeed be sparked by a change of perception, but these feelings are not what the central meaning of the term is. **Part of this change of perception has to do with what it means to be His, and what it means to live in agreement with His will and His ways.**

God has made us in His image, and has given us the capacity to also be purposeful, intentional beings. He has given us great latitude to discover and utilize this capacity in our lives. **When we come to Christ, the Spirit begins to work in our lives, but God continues to respect our free will.** We find that we will have a new desire for God, and for the things of God, but **the Lord wants us to choose to invest our lives toward things of the Spirit.**

The principle of sowing and reaping seems to generally be in operation in our lives regarding our spiritual growth process. If we choose to invest our lives toward honoring and pursuing God, ...toward listening and responding to His Spirit..., we generally find that we will grow more, spiritually. If we choose to invest in the things of our flesh, ...the things that draw us away from God, or are in conflict with His will, or disregard the Spirit’s inner promptings..., we tend to become retarded in our spiritual growth, remain stuck in old behaviors, and experience little of the Lord’s power. Sowing and reaping, ...that is the word picture that God chose to use to help us understand how our choices affect our lives. First century agricultural people would have readily understood this word picture. It may not be quite as clear to twenty-first century urban dwellers, however. **The principle of sowing and reaping is that you will receive a multiplied result from your investment.** You don’t plant one seed to get one seed back. For each seed you plant, you hope to get a much bigger return than what you planted. **Furthermore, when you understand the principles of growth, you can maximize your returns by making adjustments that will encourage growth and increase your return.** This requires a choice to apply your mind and will to understand and implement these helpful changes. The same is true of building a business, or training to become good at some sport. **Intelligent, consistent investments will produce multiplied results, whereas doing nothing, or investing poorly will not develop what we would like to see.**

From this, you can see the value of being intentional about developing your ability to follow Jesus. Jesus told His apostles to “make disciples” of all nations (Matt. 28:19). **Disciples are active followers, people who attempt to obey their Master, and become like Him.** Also implicit in the Greek word for “disciple”, *mathētēs*, is the notion that **they have a strategy for growth, and are following it.** Like their intentional Creator, they have an objective or goal, have a plan or strategy to get to there, and are purposefully working their plan. They have a “discipline” (a strategy or method), or “disciplines”, which are practices that have been proven to be helpful to develop their walk with God. **True disciples are intentional people who implement such disciplines in order to grow.** For example, Jesus told some Jews who had come to believe in Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are true disciples of Mine... (Jn.8:31). He also taught His followers to pray (Matt. 6:5-16; Lk. 18:1-8). In the early church, the new believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine, the fellowship-sharing, the breaking of bread, and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). They also were taught the value of studying the Scriptures as a means of developing growth (I Pet. 2:2; II Tim. 2:15; 3:14-17; Heb. 5:11-14). Jesus also spoke about the discipline of fasting (Matt. 6:16-18; 9:14,15), also practiced by early church believers (Acts 13:2,3; 14:23). The discipline of giving is addressed by Jesus, and early church teaching and example (Matt. 6:3,4; 19-21; Lk.

6:38; 12:33,34; 14:12-14,27-33; 16:9-15; Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; Rom. 15:24-27; I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8:1-9:15; Gal. 6:6-10; Phil. 4:10-17; III Jn. 1:5-8). Another discipline is to set your minds on things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5,6; cf. Col. 3:1,2). There is no set number of spiritual disciplines laid out for us in the Scriptures, but **it is clear that God expects us to apply ourselves in order to grow.** Other suggested disciplines would be praise, worship, silence, solitude, simplicity, service, and meditation. These are not laws that are required, but proven methods which can help us grow. We may find some of these more helpful than others, but the point is that **these are means by which we encounter or express the grace of God. They are ways in which we can intentionally invest in our relationship with Him.**

As we look at the passage from Philippians at the top of this study, **we see the strong determination of Paul to experience all that God had for Him. The primary passion and objective of his heart was to experientially know Jesus,** to be found in Him, and to have the righteousness which comes from God. **In order to follow Jesus, he chose to abandon his past identity** as a church persecuting agent of the priests and rulers in Jerusalem. **He gave up his good reputation, and his good name, in the social circles which he had been associating with.** In fact, the people who had cheered him on for arresting and prosecuting Christians soon were plotting against *him*. **He willingly “suffered the loss of all things” for the sake of his goal of knowing Christ.** Twice in this passage he used a word, *diōkō*, translated as “I press on”. This word occurs 45 times in the NT, 32 of these occasions it is translated as “persecute”. It is the same word Jesus used when He first appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” In fact, it is used by Paul in this very context in this manner, “as for zeal, a persecutor of the church” (3:6). The other 25 percent of the time it means “to strongly pursue, to seek after”. In his days before meeting Jesus, personally, Paul had “strongly pursued” His people in order to destroy them. Since then, he turned that determination toward following Jesus. **Paul “strongly pursued” Jesus. He was an aggressive disciple. He was not following Jesus at a distance, sauntering along the way. He was “hot on the trail” after Jesus.** He pressed on to know Him, putting all else aside, and now, in these two verses in Phil. 3:12,14, he “pressed on” or “followed hard after” two primary things: (1.) that which God had laid hold of him for; and, (2.) the high calling of God for his life. I need to comment briefly on vs. 14. I think many of the current translations miss the point of this verse. They translate it as “I press on after the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”, making it sound like his goal was just going home to Jesus. It is clear from 1:20-25 that, although Paul saw death as going to be “with Christ” and a “far better” thing, it was not his overarching goal. “Fruitful labor” was his goal. So, in this context in 3:14, the Greek could be rendered “according to the watchman (the one observing the runners in a race to be sure they compete properly), I press on toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” In other words, what Paul was pursuing in verses 12 and 14 were the same thing, namely **Paul wanted to do all that God had for him to do. This would require a “hard pursuit”.**

Then he wrote, “as many as are mature, might we think this way”. In other words, he is applying this same mindset to us. **The goal is to accomplish God’s will for our life, to be fully used for His glory. We are to complete that which God had in mind for us to do when He laid hold of us.** Sadly, most of us are not at all thinking about this. In our minds, our faith is all about us. No. Our faith is to be all about Him. What is “all about us” is to relate back to what is “all about Him”. **Lord, what have You created me for? What did You have in mind for me to do when You laid hold of me? How do I fit in to Your grand plan?** We need to grasp that we have a significant role that we can play in this world for the kingdom of God. **We need to see this “high calling” as a very practical and real thing.** It will affect real people. It will change their lives. Whatever our role is to be, it is to produce “fruitful labor” for God’s purposes.

Finding and walking out this “high calling of God” in our lives will require a “hard pursuit” of Him. It requires us to get serious about our faith. It requires us to get intentional, to get purposeful about our lives, ...our lives in Christ, ...our lives in this world. **It is important to focus our pursuit on Jesus, getting to know Him.** Again, **what is “all about us” is to relate back to what is “all about Him”.** He has all the answers, all the insight, all the power, all the resources for all that He desires to do with us. Note what Paul says, “Become fellow-imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and look out for the ones walking in the same manner as you have a pattern in us” (Phil. 3:17). **Paul was holding himself up as a reliable example of what a disciple, a “pursuer after Jesus”, should look like.** He also said that **there was a “pattern” or “model” that could be seen in his life. These would be the disciplines we were talking about earlier.** *Paul was an intentional disciple, investing his life in those things that would bring about intimacy with God, empowerment of the Spirit and fruitfulness in his life.* We need to become intentional disciples, too.