

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Persistently Devoted To God

by Dan Trygg

“And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for (might-be-continually-devoted to) Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush Him” Mark 3:9

“Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with (was-persistently-devoted-to) Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.” Acts 8:13

“When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal (being-devoted) attendants.” Acts 10:7

“They were continually devoting themselves (continuing-unremittingly) to the apostles' teaching and to the sharing, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. ... Day by day continuing with one mind (persisting with the same passion) in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” Acts 2:42,46

“But we will devote ourselves to (persist-with-intense-effort-in) prayer and the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:4

Coming to the end of one year, and peering over the edge into the ongoing future, it is good to take time to reflect and evaluate. It is good to review the events of the past year, ...revisit the upturns and downturns, ...grieve the losses and count the blessings, ...and take stock of where you *are* as a person, and where you are *headed*. **If you were to step back and objectively look at your life, what would you conclude?** What does it look like from the outside? If there were a fly on the wall, watching your days, listening to your words, observing your activities, what conclusions would it make about what is important to you? **Where are you spending your time, energy and money?** As you look back at this time a year ago, **have you grown, and become stronger in your faith, ...or has your passion cooled?** Have you been *distracted from* devotion to Christ and His Kingdom, or have you thrown off the sins and weights that impede your progress and usefulness? **Do you have the same besetting sins you had a year ago?** Are they less, or more, of a problem in your life? **Are you becoming more like Jesus**, or more like others around you? Are you an *example to others*, or are you *following others* into foolishness? **Are you walking with integrity, or hypocrisy?** Are you *investing your life* in other people, or are you *wasting your life* on escapism? **Is God present in your mind when you wake up, or is He an afterthought later in the day?** Do you regularly spend time with Him? Are you investing in that relationship daily? **Do you talk with Him throughout the day?** Is your relationship with Him deeper than it was a year ago? **Do you recognize His working in your life?** Are you a doer of the word, or just a talker? **Did life knock you on your butt, last year? Are you getting up, and back into the fight**, ...or are you giving in, and settling for what is comfortable? **Where do you want to be next year?** Do you want more of the same? **Are you progressing, or regressing?** Do you want *more* of Him? **Do you want to go deeper and farther in your walk with Him?** Are you willing to be stretched in new ways?

That should have stirred up some thoughts. One of the realities that becomes obvious as we reflect over our lives like this is that **the faith-walk is a long distance marathon, not a short sprint**. It is a cross-country race, over hills and through valleys, slogging through difficult places, as well as running along the smooth areas. Our Christian walk involves endurance. *If we don't have that kind of endurance when we start out, certainly God will work to develop it in our lives.* **There are several different words for “perseverance” or “endurance”**. One emphasizes **remaining consistent under pressure** and hardship (*hupomonē* – e.g., Rom. 5:3,4). Another is about **remaining calm and patient** in the face of irritating situations, instead of blowing up in anger (*makrothumia* – e.g., Heb. 6:12). Another word means to **endure, or bear with, someone's irritating, offensive or disappointing behavior**. It literally means to “hold up”, like to “hold up one's hands in a fight”, to not strike back, to refuse to fight, argue or even to verbally snipe at others (*anechomai* – e.g., Eph. 4:2). A different word (*stegō* – e.g., I Cor. 13:7) is related to a word meaning “roof”. It literally means to **“cover over” the offense**, to bear it in silence and confidentiality. Another word means to **“bear up under” or “carry” a burden or trial** (*hupopherō* – e.g., I Cor. 10:13). Then there is the word translated as **“endure hardship”** in II Tim. 4:5. It literally means “to suffer trouble or misfortune” (*kakopatheō* – cf. II Tim. 2:9; Jas. 5:13). It is important to see that “suffering hardship or pain” is not inconsistent with being a Christian. We are to pray for deliverance, healing, or for the grace to bear it victoriously. Finally, there is the word, *kartereō*, which means **“to be steadfast, to persist, to persevere in an undertaking”**. It is used in Hebrews 11:27 of Moses, who “did not fear the wrath of Pharaoh. He persisted, as seeing the One who is unseen.” It is from a root word that means “strong”. It refers to keeping the strength of will and *determination to persist, even when the going gets difficult*. The word for our consideration today is the Greek word, *proskartereō*, a more pointed, emphatic form of this word, *kartereō*. The word, *pros*, means “toward” or “with”. Adding it to the stem of the verb makes it more directional and focused. It

means to “**continue to do something with intense effort, even in the face of difficulty**”, to “continue unremittingly” or to “devote oneself” to a purpose or a course of action. While most of the other words for “perseverance” or “endurance” have to do with *bearing with* pressure or difficulty put upon them, this word has to do with *persevering through* the obstacles encountered when someone tries to accomplish a goal. They face inconvenience and difficulty in order to accomplish a greater good.

Thus, we see in Mark 3:9 that someone had to keep a boat ready for Jesus to retreat to, in case the crowds began to press upon Him in their desire for healing. This meant that someone had to man the boat. They had to be sitting there, keeping the boat nearby, ready to move in to pick Jesus up. Jesus was preaching on the shore, and there probably was no dock, so those in the boat had to be attentive to the movement of the crowd, and ready to swing into action, should things get out of control. Thus **Jesus said that a boat should “stand ready” or “be devoted to” Him. It required effort, focus, patience, and persistence**, until the need was past and the crowd was dispersed.

In Acts 8:13, Simon the magician had become a Christian, and was “continuing unceasingly with Philip”. He was seeing the miraculous signs and works of power being done, and was amazed. The use of *proskartereō* here emphasizes how Simon was *consistently following* Philip wherever he went, *attentively watching* what he was doing. This required determination and sacrifice on Simon’s part. Basically, *he put everything else on hold so that he could follow and learn from Philip*. He “**persistently devoted himself” to track Philip’s movements and activities, so he could be on hand to learn from him.**

In Acts 10, when Cornelius was instructed by the angel to fetch Peter, we find that he sent two of his “house servants” and a “devout soldier from the ones consistently-devoted to him”. He sent his most trusted servants. They were trusted because they had been consistently in his life. He had come to know their hearts, and had influenced their lives, by the daily exchanges of relationship. It is easy to see that this would develop with “house servants”, but we discover that there were some soldiers who were “devoted to him”, as well. **They were consistently, persistently in his life, and showed their love and loyalty to him by their “strong commitment toward” him.** They were willing to do whatever he asked of them, and had shown their regard for him by their lives. **Their consistent presence, faithful obedience and willing service had won them the favor of their leader.** Of these soldiers, Cornelius chose one who was particularly “good-devoted” in his heart toward God. Not only did he have a loyalty toward Cornelius, but he had a high regard for God, as well. Since Cornelius was also a devout man, this further cemented their friendship. He was the soldier Cornelius entrusted above all others.

In Acts 2, we find that **the early disciples consistently devoted themselves to learn the teachings of the apostles, to share their hearts and help with one another, to meet together over meals, and to pray for and with one another.** The strength of this word, “*proskartereō*”, is that it describes *unremitting* continuance. In other words, **these early believers were not going to miss out on these commitments. They showed up. They opened up. They shared generously with one another. They sought God’s face together.** No matter how inconvenient, unpopular, or difficult, they consistently invested themselves to grow in God and to serve one another. In spite of obstacles, emotions, feelings, relationships with others, other possible diversionary activities or events, they *strongly and regularly* devoted themselves to God, His Kingdom business, and His people. To make the point even stronger, Luke used a grammatical phrase that emphasized the ongoing nature of this commitment (vs. 42). It is a combination of the verb, “they were being”, and the participle, “persistently continuing in”. **They were in an ongoing shared pursuit of purposeful discipleship and ministry together.** Then, he uses *proskartereō* again, just four verses later, along with a word meaning, “same-passioned-ly”. He really is emphasizing the determined, persistent nature of their commitment.

In Acts 6, the rapid growth of the church had spawned numerous ministry opportunities and commitments. One of these ministry commitments was to distribute food to the needy widows among the disciples. Initially, people donated money to the apostles to distribute food to those who were needy. They were more than happy to help with this, but they soon began to be overwhelmed with ministry activities, and were “dropping the ball” in some areas. When this was pointed out to them, they prayerfully determined that it was not fitting for them to abandon the word of God in order to ‘serve’ (*diakonein*) tables. They asked the people to pick other spiritually-minded mature people to address the needs of the poor, while they would “continue-unremittingly in the prayer and in the ‘service’ (*diakonia*) of the word”. In other words, they made a priority decision. **To keep the main thing the main thing, they needed to put aside these other demands on their time, worthy as they may be, in order that they could persist in prayer and the teaching of the word of God. Our devotion to God will require us to reevaluate and trim our life interests and activities in order to persist effectively at accomplishing God’s will.**

As you prepare for 2015, **do you need to reevaluate and refocus?** Do you need to put some things aside in your life, to be more ready and available for Christ to call upon? **Do you need to reprioritize** so you can invest time to follow Christ and learn from Him? **Be unremitting in your persistence to follow Christ and do His will!**