

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Are We Ready To Engage?

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“He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people for His own possession, eager to do good works.” Titus 2:14

“Remind them to order-themselves-under to rulers, to authorities, to be compliant, to be prepared for every good work...⁸ I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone...¹⁴ But let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.” Titus 3:1,8,14

“On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside by himself and save, in keeping with how he prospers, so that no collections will need to be made when I come.” 1 Corinthians 16:2

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

God is calling out a people for His own possession, ...a people who are *dedicated and committed* to Him. We are to be a kingdom of priests, *serving both people and God by how we live*. Part of how we are to do that is through the acts of service and help that we offer to people in Jesus' name. As in everything else, this is not some rule we are to live by, ...or a command to “help the poor” as a general commission that *we* decide how to fulfill. We are to be led by the Spirit in this matter, paying attention to what we see God doing, ...both in the circumstances around us and in the promptings within us. **When we see or sense God at work, we are to join Him as partners, bringing our abilities and resources to serve as He directs us.**

Our study is to offer practical counsel to help us in the discerning and mobilizing process. It offers us a very down-to-earth pragmatic perspective for discovering and acting on God's leading for ministry opportunities. **“But let our people also learn...”** (3:14). The word translated “learn” is a form of the Greek word, *manthanō*, which means “to discover, to learn by experience, to find out how”. It is the verbal form of the word translated as “disciple”, an *active* follower, an *experiential* learner. As disciples **we are to discover *how* “to-stand-ready-to-engage-in good deeds”** (3:1). This implies that **this quality is *not* a ready-made thing**, something we can take for granted. **There is a “*how-to*” skill, or an *ability to be developed* which would enable us to consistently and effectively serve others.**

If we look back, **there is a *progression* in the letter concerning what Paul teaches about this subject:**

(1.) Emotional Eagerness. In 2:14, he talked about how God redeemed us to make us a people “zealous” or “eager” for good deeds. **That describes an *emotional desire, an interest in, and motivation for, doing good works.***

(2.) Proactive Preparation. In 3:1, he counseled Titus to “*remind them... to be (being) prepared* for every good work”. **This describes some *forethought and deliberate action taken in order to be capable of doing these benevolent acts.*** This comment recognizes that good deeds will require time, energy, and often money, in order to carry them out. These are resources that *must be set aside* from my regular life, to make possible the expenditure of them for somebody else. Without proactive planning there will not be the capability to do anything for others.

(3.) Mental Mindset. In 3:8, Paul encouraged Titus to “give special emphasis in order that *they might think to-stand-ready-to-engage-in good deeds*”. In other words, Titus was to help *keep this in front of their minds* so that they would begin to *be conscious* enough of it to begin *to recognize opportunities* to help, and *be mentally prepared* to get involved. **Creating a mindset of service was what Titus was to be doing.** Without this, people tend to just go on their merry way, being absorbed in their own affairs. They tend to be oblivious to others, so that if a need might come to their attention, they do not recognize its potential significance. They do not see it as an opportunity to help, an open door to get involved in another person's life. They either do not recognize it at all, and the opportunity blows by them unnoticed, or, if they do notice it, they are not mentally prepared to jump in and help. **We need to create a *mindset of helpfulness.*** I am to *see myself as a servant of other people for the sake of Christ* (2 Cor. 4:5), so that when the opportunities come up, ...and they *will...*, we will *see ourselves as part of the solution.* We are to *be thinking about it* enough to “get used to the idea”, to *get our imagination involved* so that we *see ourselves as helpers.* Then, when the opportunity arises, we will see it as an answer to prayer, ...as a gift from God *to us...*, and we will get involved.

(4.) Developing Dexterity. In 3:14, Paul wrote, “let our people learn to-stand-ready-to-engage-in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that we might not be unfruitful.” The idea is that **we can experientially discover effective ways of doing good for people, ways that will be welcome and winsome. This is a skill development process, ...which probably means we will be awkward and sloppy to begin with.** Through repeated effort, observing and evaluating as we go, *we can learn how* to graciously offer assistance to people in ways that will open their hearts toward us and

toward God. We can also learn how to be ready, willing and able to give help to others *without debilitating or destroying ourselves*. **These are life-skills, ...learned, strengthened, and finely-tuned over time.** We are not “there”, yet. We are *learners*, disciples. The phrase, “let them learn” is an imperative in Greek, a *command*. It is *not* optional. It is a directive to leaders, ...something which God expects all of us to learn. **It is part of the curriculum for disciples.** “Experientially-train them to ...engage in good deeds.”

(5.) Recognize Opportunity. We are especially to meet “pressing needs”. The word for “pressing” means “necessary and urgent”. **These arise in times of crisis.** That is why we need to “stand-ready-to-engage”. Crises are *not* planned. **They are not convenient, and cannot be “scheduled”.** Yet, **these are our greatest opportunities to shine.** Help offered as such times is especially visible and appreciated. **We must be prepared mentally and materially to rise to the challenge, or we will miss these opportunities to show the love of Jesus.**

(6.) The Desired End: Fruitfulness! It is possible to have opportunities all around us, and miss out on stepping into these situations in productive ways. Jesus has called us to bear fruit. If we prepare ourselves, and engage in the avenues for service which God brings to us, **we will express Jesus in those situations. The revelation of His love and concern, expressed in practical ways to help others, will open the hearts of people toward God.** We get to be partners with God, ...conveyors of grace and kindness. **Hopefully, these acts of service will turn into opportunities to share and testify about the God who we serve, ...who sent us to help them at the time of need.** Jesus put it this way, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). **Not everyone will respond, but we will reap the fruit, if we are responsive to God’s leading, and do not give up** (Gal. 6:9).

God is preparing us to be a people who are eager and zealous to help others. This is part of the discipleship call. This is the direction that growth in the Spirit will take us. He will foster in us a heart of compassion, and a readiness to serve, people in need. If we *say* we have the love of God at work in our lives, but we *do* nothing to help those in need, how can the love of God really be seen in us?

As we follow Christ, God will move us from sentimentality to practicality, when it comes to serving. What good is the *desire* to help, if we have no *follow-through* in action? **And how can we offer help, if we have no means or resources from which to draw upon to actually supply a given need?** This is a very practical matter. It implies growth in several different areas. It is the fruit of intentionality, the outworking of practical wisdom in our walk with God. **Disciples are people of intentionality and practicality. They are people who develop or follow a plan, a ‘discipline’, to help them get to where they want to go in their walk with God.** One practical discipline would be to **pray** for a heart to serve, ...a heart that is zealous and eager to do good deeds. Another would be to **watch** for God-directed opportunities, and to do what you can to join what you can see God doing. In 1 Corinthians 16 another discipline Paul mentions has to do with **developing a resource to draw upon** when needs and opportunities come up. Note that this is a systematic thing. It is a discipline, ...a strategy,...a practical plan, to come up with the resources you will need in order to be able to help when crises come up. (Note that this is *not* the same as supporting the people in ministry. *This* plan Paul is describing is for helping the poor. I believe that God’s discipline, ...His plan for supporting those who are set apart to proclaim the gospel was *the tithe*, 10% off the profit – but that is another discussion. Paul is advocating a plan that is *in addition to other giving*.)

What is his plan? To intentionally set aside what you can, according as you prosper, and keep it with you, so that you may have something to give when the need or opportunity arises. This is a savings plan. Purposefully setting a little aside each week, “on the first day of the week”, which would be Sunday. **Note that this money is not to be given to the church. It is to be kept with you, in your possession or at your disposal somehow.** Some people start a new checking account, or put the money in an envelope, or “God’s cookie jar”, but however you do it, it is about an intentional, purposeful, systematic method of setting aside resources so that you will have money to help when a need arises. This is what Paul is referring to when he mentions to Titus, “Remind them to **be prepared for every good work.**”

You might say, “Well, I can’t afford to give. I don’t have any extra money.” Well, Paul left that caveat, “*as each may prosper*”, ...but **start to pray about and examine your cash flow. Ask God to make you a resource for the kingdom.** Most of us can generally trim a little off our weekly spending. But if you *can’t*, ...you can’t. No one is asking you to give what you do not have, nor to give under compulsion (2 Cor. 8:12; 9:7). God is the One who supplies the resources. Ask Him to enable you to give. **There are some basic realities here. To have more to give means that we have to make more, ...save more, ...or sacrifice more.** We either increase our income somehow, economize our expenditures, or we choose to give up some things in order to free up resources. **Ask God to help you with this.**

Finally, live out a life of light. Let your *light* shine before people. **There should be a joy, a freedom, a glow about giving and serving.** It should not be out of drudgery or obligation, but out of joy. **It is that grace, that freedom, that joy and that love that will most clearly and brightly show forth God’s love.** People will see your heart, your positive attitude and your generosity, and they will praise God for your practical help when they needed it.