

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtrminc.org Today's Date: July 18, 2021

Training With Purpose

by Dan Trygg

"I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a co-sharer of it. ²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ And everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (tested-and-found undesirable or useless)." 1 Corinthians 9:23-27

"...train (exercise – *gymnazō*) yourself towards godliness; ⁸ for bodily training is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." 1 Timothy 4:7-8

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2

What is *your* life all about? What are *you* living for? How does your faith figure into that picture? You see, most of us have it *that way*. We try to find a place for our faith somewhere in the mix of all the *other* things in our lives, ...but we have not *ordered our lives around our faith*. **Our relationship with Jesus *should* be the *foundation upon which our lives are built, and the focus around which our priorities find their place.*** If Jesus is Lord, then His desire and purpose for our lives should be foremost. **These passages above employ word pictures regarding the focus, training, and strategy involved in athletic contests, and then apply principles from them to living out our faith. They cover three key ideas: purpose, training, and strategy for becoming effective in living for Christ.**

In 1 Corinthians 9, the emphasis is on *having a determined purpose in how we live.* Paul says, "Run the race so that you might win!" ***Winning is the goal, ...what would that look like?*** He says, "I run, as not without aim..." **We are to have an *aim*.** What *is* our aim? "I box, as not just beating the air". **The goal is not to just exercise or train, or go through the motions. The goal is to *accomplish something!*** If it was boxing that we were training for, it would mean that **we are to prepare for a *real fight!*** ...and train to win! **The goal is to be *victorious!*** **The goal is to *lay hold of the prize!***

Just think for a moment how foreign that is to so much of American culture. Most of us are *spectators.* We watch *other people* do things, but we generally do not get involved. **Christianity is *not* a spectator sport!** The church consists of people called out from this world to *engage in* the King's business. **We are *all* to be *active participants.*** Yet, for most people in our culture, **they go to church, ...they don't think of *themselves* as the church. They don't think that anything is expected of them, *except to show up.*** We Americans watch *other people* race, ...or box, ...or play football. We don't go to a football stadium expecting to play. **The NT is saying that we are the *participants, ...we are the racers, ...or the boxers, ...or the ones who are in the contest.*** Just think of how that shift in your thinking about *your role* might affect how you would dress, eat, prepare yourself, ...or whether or not you would even come! **Would *you* come, if you were going to be asked to get involved in some way?** **Would *you* come, if you were told *you* were going to be involved in leading the prayer, or reading scripture, or *giving a message?*** Or leading in worship, or serving in the kitchen, or teaching Sunday school. Wait, ...those roles *do* sound familiar! People here *are* doing those things. **What about *you?* How are *you* to serve?** What can *you* do? **Actually, the Bible plainly teaches us that we are *all* expected to be participants!** "When you come together, *each one* has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor. 14:26).

Is "*finding a place of service*" the aim? *THE AIM?* Obviously, there is more to life, and your walk with God, and His purpose for your life than just finding *a* way to share and invest in others, ...but it *is* an important piece! **Paul said he did all things *for the sake of the gospel.*** That might sound like a trite phrase, ...a well-worn religious expression. It may have been taken out of context when you have heard it. But **this *does* bring us right back to Jesus' marching orders for His followers.** He told us to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..., and teaching them to keep all that I said" (Matt. 28:19,20). **We are to discipline people, ...people everywhere, ...from every place. THAT should be our AIM, as far as the challenge before us. But notice that Paul added another phrase to his statement in 1 Corinthians 9:23, "...in order that I might become a co-partner of it".** This has been poorly understood and translated. It has been presented as though I might lose out on my salvation, if I don't do enough. And the last phrase of the chapter is used to confirm this notion, "...lest after preaching to others, I might be disqualified." This does not square with the clear teaching of scriptures that we are saved by grace through faith,

...not based upon works. We aren't saved by works, and we can't lose our salvation by works, either. A better translation would be, "lest somehow preaching (at-a-point-in-time), I might become ineffective, useless, unsuitable, rejected". **The context is about removing every barrier to communication so that the ministry of sharing could be effective. If we don't do that well, we might be rejected for the wrong reason.** It is not about being rejected by God, here, ...it is about being rejected by *the people* we are trying to reach. **And that "co-partner" of the gospel from verse, 23? That is referring to our partnership together to get this "gospel work" done.** We don't all have the same role, but **we are all to be active joint-partners together in a common pursuit, building up and supporting one another and helping each other get the "gospel-goal" accomplished.** Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-16 describe the importance of each one of us to the team. We cannot do the job, if we are not all healthy, functioning and Spirit-led. **The AIM is to share the gospel and make disciples, and WE ALL are to be active, functioning partners of a team of people working together to accomplish that goal. And we need a winner's determination!**

From 1 Timothy 4:7,8 we are confronted with the reality that there is a need to exercise and train ourselves, spiritually. Paul wrote, "...train yourself toward godliness...". The first observation to make, is that *we don't start out there*, ...this is something to *develop or grow into*. **What is "godliness"?** We might think of someone who is morally upright and consistently observes certain religious practices, ...but that really misses the point of the word. **The focus of the word is not about outward things, ...it is about the devotion of the heart.** Literally, the word means "well-devoted". **We must train ourselves to have a healthy devotion and focus toward God.**

The word for "train" is the word we derive "gymnasium" from. It is unquestionably referring to practices, habits, and disciplines that we could use to help strengthen our heart devotion and mental acuity toward God. **These are spiritual exercises that we habitually engage in to develop our heart's love, respect, worship and responsiveness toward God.** Interestingly, in Hebrews 5:14, the same word is used for **training our faculties of perception** to discern good from evil, ...to see and perceive things at a deeper level of spiritual insight. In that context, a key part of this process of developing and maturing our discernment is to become habitually accustomed to the scriptures. Another passage that uses this word for "exercise" or "train" is Hebrews 12. In verse 11 it describes the fruit of righteousness that is produced by one "having been **trained by the discipline (or, 'instruction') of the Lord.**" This "discipline of the Lord" refers to experiences where the Lord brings things out into the light that need correction (vs. 5). The repetitive experiences of exposure and correction "exercise us" to produce the fruit of righteousness. We should not shrink back from such experiences, but recognize that God is drawing us deeper. It is interesting that **God does not give us an exhaustive list of spiritual exercises to follow. We must discover our own profitable ways to "train toward godliness", but it is quite clear that being a disciple means that we must choose to develop our spiritual maturity through a regimen of spiritual exercises. You can't become an effective disciple, if you do not embrace spiritual disciplines!**

What about strategy? What does the Bible tell us about practical methods for success in accomplishing our AIM? Hebrews 12:1,2 offers **three key principles to live by**, some of which we have touched on already. **The first is to put aside everything and anything that gets in the way.** The determined purpose of a serious-minded disciple will motivate putting aside whatever conflicts with growth, training, spiritual development and active ministry. Note that the writer differentiates between definite sin from other "neutral" things which would simply make you less effective. We cannot have intimacy with God, and empowerment from the Spirit, if we are living in ways that are offensive to Him. So, sin must be confessed and dealt with. We must put it aside. But then, there are other things, ...things that may not be sin *per se*..., but they divert our attention, or take up our time and resources, or which can be side-issues, customs or practices which could interfere with our effectiveness. These, too, must be put aside. We must be willing to be streamlined, to travel light, to be as inoffensive about unessential things as possible. Anything that entangles us with worldly affairs, political issues, personal opinions or preferences must be willingly set aside so that people can see Jesus clearly in us, and not be deflected by anything else. **Secondly, we must run our race with perseverance. It is important to realize that this is a protracted endurance-run we are called to**, not a brief jaunt. If we have unrealistic expectations, we will fade and give out along the way. Part of our training program should have prepared us for this long-term reality of living for Jesus in this world. As long as we are here, we are to be seeing ourselves on duty, still at it. Being a follower of Jesus is a marathon race, not a Sunday stroll. It will require a lot from you, ...and then require *more*. You can't win the race if you don't finish, ...or if you stop along the way. **Thirdly, we must keep our eyes on Jesus.** He is our first-leader and completer of our faith. He has successfully been through the "faith race" already. He is our example, and can give us encouragement, instruction and even empowerment to get through whatever we are facing. If we can keep our eyes focused on Him, we will not be distracted by other things that would lead us astray or divert our attention from Him. He is our Source of life and power. He is the Vine and we are the branches. He said that apart from Him we can do nothing, but if we abide *in Him* we will bear much fruit. "Success", "winning", "defeating the enemy" and securing hearts for Jesus will happen most readily, if we are living *in Him*.