

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Trained As Disciples of Jesus

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“How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience because of you before our God,<sup>10</sup> as we pray earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete (equip) what is lacking in your faith?” 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10

“Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, but you might be fully-trained with the same perception and the same purpose.” 1 Corinthians 1:10

“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice, be fully-trained, be encouraged, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” 2 Corinthians 13:11

“A disciple is not above his teacher; but having been fully-trained, he will be like his teacher.” Luke 6:40

“Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus -- the great Shepherd of the sheep -- with the blood of the everlasting covenant,<sup>21</sup> equip you with every good thing to do His will, working in us what is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-21

The common theme of these passages is the need to be equipped or fully-trained. The Greek word in all of these contexts is *katartizō*. This means to “fit out, equip, educate; to put in order; to repair or restore; to make sound, whole or complete; to strengthen, adjust, or make someone come to be what they ought to be.” As you can see, that covers a lot of ground, and could have application in a variety of areas of our lives. **It is a process, and it should be a pursuit and goal in our lives. We should want to come to be equipped and strengthened in our faith, and ultimately become fully-trained to be like our Master, Jesus Christ.**

This is both a personal growth issue, *as well as one of the stated goals of a healthy, interactive community of believers*. The church is not just a place to gather together with others to worship, ...it is a place where we are to learn more about what Jesus has done for us, who He is for us now in our lives, and to come to see how we can help one another to grow. In short, **we are to be prepared and equipped to serve one another.**

**Obviously, we do not start out our journey in Christ as “equipped”.** When we first give our lives to following Jesus, we undoubtedly have misconceptions, misperceptions and incomplete information, ...both about Jesus, and what HE has done, ...as well as what it means to follow Him. **There is a lot to learn, ...but usually when most of us hear that, we tend to think about information, facts, and concepts.** While that is part of this growth process, the goal is not to pass some kind of trivia test, or to even rightly understand general theological concepts. **Being a disciple is not the same as being a pupil, or a student.** A disciple is not *just* a learner of information, ...**a follower of Christ is learning to see, perceive, operate and do what Jesus did.** A disciple is a practitioner, an apprentice. Following Jesus implies being active, learning the understanding, insights, skills and practices that will enable us to live as He did. Sunday school *classes*, Bible *studies*, counseling or therapy *sessions*, and so many of the activities that we may participate in so that we can grow may give us insight, encouragement, and new perspective, but **the goal is to transform our perception of the world so that we operate differently.** The goal is to *become* like our Teacher, so that we can *live* like our Teacher.

That may seem like an unattainable goal, when you first hear it, ...but, when you look at the scriptures, you see that **this is what the apostles and early believers were pursuing.** They weren't going to church just to fulfill an obligation, ...or to sing some songs, ...or to be taught theological concepts. **They were meeting together in order to learn how to more effectively live a Spirit-empowered life, ...and to do it!**

This was essential, ...because the front line of ministry was *their lives*. It has *always* been that way, but sometimes we have lost sight of that reality, and have fallen into a corporate teaching model, ...or a feel-good singing and worship model, ...and, while those approaches can sometimes be effective in gathering a crowd, if they can't effectively motivate the attending people to invest in personal growth and activate them to take action, the impact of the congregation is very limited. But, **when a family of believers can effectively stimulate one another to devote themselves to getting equipped, and choose to engage in the service opportunities God places in front of them, then the Holy Spirit will cause amazing things to take place!** The equipping, healing and maturing growth of the body will cause the expansive growth of the body, as Jesus is clearly revealed through the lives of the people who have learned to actively respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. **In the early centuries of the church, ...when there were no large church buildings, or sound systems, or electronic instruments, or platforms or pulpits..., it was the dynamic influence of practicing disciples that caused the body of Christ to grow and expand the fastest that it ever has in church history!**

With this in mind, you can see why Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 3, was praying night and day that he would have the opportunity to equip the believers in what was lacking in their faith. He was grateful, ...even excited..., that they had responded to the message of the gospel, ...but that was only the beginning! **There was so much more that he desired to teach them, and help them discover, so that they could be fully-equipped in their faith.**

We often read of how Paul came through a community, preached the gospel, and then had to quickly leave, because of persecution. We tend to overlook the emphasis he placed on follow-up. **He often left his co-workers behind to continue to teach and train the new believers, so that they could learn to stand on their own, and become effective in ministering to others.** These follow-up coaches and trainers were effective enough that, within a relatively short period of time, the report of their new-found faith had spread throughout the countryside, even reaching to the churches of another province (1 Thess. 1:6-10). **A key aspect of that growth and excitement was that they had become imitators** of Paul, his team, and even of the Lord Himself, in how they joyfully received the word of the Lord, even in the midst of difficulty. **They were not just intellectual believers, they were active doers, ...putting their faith into practice. They had learned how to walk out their faith and to please God (4:1), as well as to overflow in love toward each other and to all people (3:12; 4:9-10).** Again, Paul even heard of their love from people outside of their community!

In 1 Corinthians 1, the issue was divisions in the church. There were several different factions, and it was causing a breakdown in the relationships within the group. Interestingly, **Paul saw this problem also as a problem of a lack of training.** He wanted them to *choose to not accentuate the differences*, and instead focus on “saying the same thing”. **They were not to be talking about the things they disagreed with, but the things they were in agreement with. Keep the main thing the main thing.** This would minimize the divisiveness. Next, they were to be equipped or trained in the same way of perceiving things and in the same purpose. This was not cultic mind control, or propaganda. **They were being equipped to think about and see things more clearly from God’s perspective, and come to be in agreement with God’s purpose.** So often, divisions are about minor issues, or temporal issues. **When the focus is to love God, grow in Christ, and love and serve others, most of the divisive issues disappear. When other people or issues become more important than serving Christ or demonstrating the love of Christ, that is when divisiveness creeps in.** Divisiveness is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). This attitude will disappear when loving God and loving others are first. Note that Paul continued to encourage the Corinthians to become fully-equipped in 2 Corinthians 13. **Being like-minded and at peace with one another is a by-product of a clearer perception of reality.** Paul referred to God as “the God of love and peace”. What does *that* say about what is important to Him? If we want His power and blessing, then we better honor His wishes, values and priorities.

The context of Luke 6:40 is very telling. **Jesus is calling His followers to act very differently than what we would commonly expect people to act.** We are to bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us. We are to turn the other cheek, and treat people as we would like to be treated, ...even if they *don’t* deserve it! Jesus challenges us, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for He is gracious to the ungrateful and evil.” This is very radical thinking! **What is more important, things, or people? If we get fully-trained we will come to see things like God does.**

Finally, in Hebrews 13, the author prays that God would equip us with everything good in order that we might do His will, working in us all that is well-pleasing in His sight. The way this verse is constructed indicates that **we must receive equipping, training or the tools to do the good things that He desires to do through us. He is ready to actively work in your life to bring about what is well-pleasing to Him.** He will supply what is needed: insight, skills, resources, co-workers. As long as we are willing to do *His* will, *His* way, He can give us what we need to do what He wants.

**How about you? Do you desire to partner with God to accomplish His will?** Are you ready to be a real disciple, ...one willing to put His word and will into practice? Are you willing to invest deeply in your relationship with God, so that He can more deeply transform your perception of the world around you, and help you to see as He sees? Are you willing to give up, or de-emphasize “lesser things” in order to become more focused and effective in the more important things, ...the things God is calling you to invest in? Can you believe that God can do amazing and powerful things in and through *your life*? Are you willing to dedicate yourself to discovering how to be an effective disciple-practitioner? Are you willing to *try things* you have never tried before? **Ask Him to equip or train you with whatever is needed in order to be prepared and ready to do what HE wants to do with you.**

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul describes what he calls “the wisdom of the mature” in this way, “...the things that eyes have not seen, nor ears heard of, ...the things that have not entered the heart of a human being, ...the things God has prepared for those who love Him.” **Are you willing to be equipped to imagine and do such God-sized things?**