

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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There's More: Becoming Joyful, Faith-filled Givers

by Dan Trygg

“Just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that in this grace also you might abound. ⁸ I do not say this as a command, but through the earnestness of others also the genuineness of your love being-tested-and-approved. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:7-9

“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Acts 20:34-35

We have been examining what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. So many people hear the gospel message, ...that Jesus died for their sins, and rose again on their behalf, and that forgiveness of sins is available to those who “believe” in Him..., but they really do not understand what it is that Jesus is expecting of them. To many, “believing in Jesus” means that you intellectually know and accept that He lived, and He died on the cross for you. The word for “believe”, however, is not just about knowing facts, or accepting that historical events took place. A better translation may be “trust”. “Trust” implies a relationship with someone. “Trust” implies that you will do what they say, because you know they are dependable. “Trust” is more than intellectual belief, ...it implies a willingness to yield and follow, especially in our relationship with Jesus. This fits with the calling to be disciples, ...active followers, people who are taking instruction and guidance from the Lord, and doing what He says. Remember that Jesus told the apostles to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to keep all that He said. **We are called to trust, follow and do as He tells us.** Today’s study is another area of growth and skill that He wants us to train us in.

Many people get all defensive when people talk about money. They consider that our use of our own money is none of the business of the church, or of preachers. **This reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of reality, and of our relationship with God.** First of all, God is the One who created and owns everything. He made it, and it all belongs to Him (1 Chron. 29:10-16; Psa. 24:1; 50:10-12; Deut. 10:14; Hag. 2:8). Secondly, He distributes the resources He has made according to His will, and in alignment with certain principles He has established. He is the One who enables us to make wealth (Deut. 8:1-20; Prov. 10:22; 30:8; 2 Cor. 9:6-10). Third, He says that we are not owners of what He has entrusted to us. **We are stewards.** We are sojourners, tenants, who temporarily are granted the use of what He entrusts to us (1 Chron. 29:15,16; Lev. 25:23). He gives us things for our use and enjoyment (1 Tim. 6:17), but also according to His will and purpose. We are responsible to use what He gives us in accordance with His will. **There is no “mine” and “His”. It is all “His”.** We are to manage what He has given to us as He directs us, ...both through the teachings of His word and by the leading of His Spirit. **Financial stewardship is a discipleship skill that we are to learn.**

The Bible has a lot to say about the use of money. There are some 2,350 verses having to do with money in the Bible. Approximate 28% of the parables that Jesus taught deal with money and possessions, in some form or fashion, and over 15% of His total teachings address this subject. **It was the topic He talked about most often.** By contrast, there are about 650 prayers in the Bible, and about 1,100 verses on prayer. **BUT, usually His teachings about money were addressing spiritual principles or matters of a person’s heart.** He wasn’t giving financial management seminars, or instructing His disciples on how to build wealth. **He was focused on how our concerns about wealth, and our usage of it, are a reflection of our faith in and obedience to God.** Clearly, the subjects of money, material possessions, property and stewardship are important, because our relationship to God and the world around us are reflected or expressed through our management of these things. **Someone referred to money as “coined life”, in that it represents the time and effort of our labor. It is the medium of exchange we use to “spend” that labor. What we do with our money is a reflection of our values. As stewards of God, our values should be in alignment with His values.** This is not simply a nebulous “nice ideal”. **We will actually have to give an account to God for what we have done with what He entrusts us with.**

In 2 Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, ...people who had all the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:4-7), so that they overflowed in faith, Spirit-led utterance, knowledge, earnestness or zeal, and even in agapē-love..., and he exhorted them to **also overflow or abound in this grace, the grace of becoming joyful, faith-filled givers.** He listed this skill of radical giving as another area of growth for these followers of Jesus, and he wanted them to learn to **abound or overflow in it.** He didn’t want just baby-steps, or occasional faith-stretchers,

either. **He was looking to see this become a regular, abundant aspect of their lives and character in Christ.** Again, this is clearly a mindset and skill to develop as an apprentice-disciple of Jesus.

In the beginning of the chapter, Paul describes how the Macedonians, who were struggling to make ends meet, had experienced this giving-grace of God. Even though they were in a great test (*dokimē*) of affliction (oppressive and restrictive circumstances), nevertheless, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty overflowed unto a wealth of liberality (giving-without-restriction-or-reservation). **Notice the recipe here: This is a JOY sandwich!** Oppressive-circumstances on the bottom, OVERFLOWING-JOY in the middle, and deep poverty on top. **What happened? JOY OVERCAME all natural resistance!** They gave what they were able, and even *beyond* what they had on hand. Somehow, they voluntarily sacrificed to give *beyond* their normal limits, even begging Paul for the opportunity to help meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in far away Jerusalem. **JOY was the secret ingredient that added the spice, the flavor, the zip to overpower the dry crusts of their circumstances and motivate them to go above and beyond!** This was well beyond even Paul's expectation. **Where did this OVERCOMING, TRIUMPHANT JOY come from?** "They gave themselves *first* to the Lord, and then to us, through the *desire/will* of God." **They offered all that they were and had to the Lord, and listened for His heart. Then they did as He directed them to do.** This was the immediate inspirational example Paul used to provoke the Corinthian Christians to do the same, ...to give themselves *first* to the Lord, and listen for His desire/leading for what He would have them do.

Then, he further buttressed his point by using the example of the Master: "For you experientially-know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that on account of you, **being rich, He became poor, in order that by that poverty you might become rich**" (vs. 9). This brings us right back to Philippians 2. **We are to have the mindset, the same thought process that Jesus had,** who being in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be held onto, but *emptied Himself*, taking the form of a slave, and did what needed to be done on our behalf. **He was not looking out for His own interests, but also the interests of others, ...us.** We are not often called to lay down our lives in this extreme fashion, but **we probably will be faced with many occasions where we can put aside our own convenience and comfort, and make a sacrifice to help someone else. This is the way that the body of Christ is meant to work.** Back in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul wrote, "**This is not for the ease of others, and your affliction, ...but that your present abundance might be for their need, ...and that their abundance might be for your need, ...that there may be equality**" (vss. 13,14).

As stewards of God, we are to apply our minds and hearts to discern what God desires us to do with what He gives to us. God gives us the ability to work, or has provided for us in other ways, so that not only can we meet our own needs, but also the needs of others. We see that in the passage above, from Acts 20. **Paul worked with his hands,** making tents. He must have been very good at this, because he was able to easily ply this trade wherever he went. **Note what his interests were, ...where he spent his money.** Aside from paying for his own expenses, he also supported the other members of his ministry team. **There are two places that the scriptures consistently indicate that we are to be offering help and financial support. (1.) We ought to support people who are called to do ministry work,** especially those who are called to leave other work and devote themselves to proclaiming or teaching the word of God. In the OT, the tithe (10% of the increase of one's produce in agriculture, or profit in business) was to be offered to God, before anything else. He, however, designated that this entire tithe was to go to the support of those designated to serve Him in ministry (Num. 18:21). In the NT, there was not a legalistic figure that was required, but the principle is clearly taught. God wants those who preach the gospel to be supported in this work, so that they could be freed up to do as He has called them to do (Lk. 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:1-14; 3 Jn. 1:5-8). **(2.) We are to help those in need.** There are many ways in which God provided for the poor in ancient Israel, and His heart for the poor is also clearly expressed in the teachings of Jesus, and in the ministry of the church. This was the other area that Paul identified as a place where he offered support. Note that this was "to help the weak". This was a well-known part of the ministry of the early church. Those who had become disciples of Christ saw themselves as stewards of God. They no longer considered what they had as their own (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-36; Tit. 3:14). They were willing to help and share with one another, when people were in need.

Back in 2 Corinthians 9:6-14, **Paul encourages us to stretch in this area of giving. It is important to act in accordance with the leading and instruction of the Lord.** We are not to presume upon God, or think we can force Him to cover us if we get out ahead of His leading. Some have misused this passage in this way, teaching that we can expect and almost demand a multiplied return for our giving. The passage does not say that. It says that God will increase the harvest of our *righteousness*, not the amount of our *bank balance*. **We are to learn to walk with Him, recognizing His leading, and taking steps of faith so that we can see how He is working in our lives.** Again, this is a discipleship skill. **God can give us everything we need, and an overflow for every good work, ...for doing His work, not for making us rich.** As we are faithful, He will give us more to work with and will enlarge our faith (Lk. 16:9-13). **God wants us to be joyful, faith-filled givers, ...His stewards, carrying out His will with what He provides.**