

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Chosen and Placed to Bear Fruit

by Dan Trygg

“There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.” John 1:6-8

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you that you should go forth and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain...” John 15:16

When you gave yourself to Christ, you joined a team of people, ...a wide variety of people from various circumstances. You may not have been aware of this, at the time, but when God calls us, He directs us into relationship not only with Himself, but with others He assembles together for His purposes. The key is that *we are to be co-workers with Jesus in the kingdom.*

When you study the list of names in Romans 16, and what those people were doing, you can get a better picture of what possibly could be our place and our function. **Those folks were getting the word out, making disciples, hosting home meetings, carrying and delivering support to the poor, ...choosing to make their lives all about Jesus, not just about themselves.** Both men and women were prominent in doing ministry and influencing others. Some were wealthy people, while others were poor. There were persons of nobility, and also servants and slaves, using their gifts and abilities side-by-side to help one another mature, and to reach other people. **Each person was a connection to a network of other people.** Some were connected to other families, ...some were fellow tradespeople, ...some had access to the households of people of note and importance, ...while others had access to the cooks, cleaners and slaves that served in the kitchens and back rooms of such households. As you look down the list, you see that **God has His coworkers in all kinds of places, with all kinds of abilities, and creative ways of serving Jesus.**

They had opportunities, but they also had challenges. Their ministry efforts cost them. It cost them in time, and money. Some of them traveled long distances to bring the message of Jesus to a new place. Some of them took a risk to share their faith with others. Many are described as having “worked hard” for the Lord. **Following Jesus was not a popular, or widely accepted choice. It was frowned upon by many, ...or at least regarded with suspicion.** Often people had formed opinions regarding what Christ-followers were about from misinformation or misrepresentation. I guess things haven’t changed much, have they? Remember Jesus’ words, “In this world you have tribulation (oppression, affliction, trouble, difficult circumstances, ...literally, ‘pressure, squeezing-together, tight-and-narrow places’), but take courage (cheer up) I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33). **God knows your struggles, and will help you to overcome (to conquer or prevail over) your circumstances and the opposition.**

I was writing to someone the other day, who had expressed some frustration at having to deal with some of this. I wrote, “Thanks for sharing your heart and your thoughts with me, as well as your passion for truth and for living an authentic faith. Part of what comes with that is frustration with those who are *not* living authentically, ...or who have mixed motives, ...or simply are spiritually immature. Unfortunately, they have become part of the spiritual ‘pressure’ against which we must stand strong. **I think of you as a ‘team member’, ...or, more accurately, I consider myself to be part of your team, ...if that is acceptable to you. I want you to see yourself as part of a spiritual movement that God desires to expand from your life to reach others in your network, ...and beyond.**” The apostle Paul did not see those he worked with as pawns to be utilized to help him fulfill *his* ministry vision. **THEY were the vision!** He was there to serve *them* (2 Cor. 4:5), ...to help *them* discover and become all that God intended for *them* to attain to.

The list of names in Romans 16 is a testimony to the strategy of Jesus and the early church. The church in those days was not just focused on filling seats in an auditorium. **It was not about gathering a crowd.** Following Jesus was not just about attending a meeting. There was no movement called “Spectators For Jesus”! In fact, Jesus often “thinned out the crowds” by saying some very challenging things. **Jesus didn’t just want attention; He wanted intention. Jesus was always moving beyond attraction to devotion.** He was looking for those who were willing to pay the price to get engaged in the work of the kingdom (Lk. 9:23). **Choosing to follow Jesus was about taking ownership of the mission and calling. It was training as an apprentice to do the work of ministry.** They were the front line of the kingdom. They were the ministers of the gospel. They were co-workers. Everybody had an important role, ...and they *knew* that. They *owned* that. **Jesus’ commission was not to “build a ministry”, ...it was to “train people to train people to do all that He said”** (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). It was learning to discern God’s leading, and obey! **Paul was not just planting churches, he was building and developing people, ...and turning them loose to obey God.** He taught them to expect God to be personally involved in their lives, and to lead them to do things that they would not have done on their own. **The Holy Spirit would produce dramatic changes within them, as they responded to Him.**

In John 15:16, Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, in order that you might go forth and bear fruit, and your fruit might remain (abide, live, persist, endure), in order that whatever you might ask the Father in My name He might give to you.” The word for “appointed” literally means “placed”. **God has placed YOU there in your circumstances, surroundings and possibilities, ...because He intends to produce Jesus’-fruit through you right there.** Take that word picture to the bank of heaven. “God, ...YOU said!”

But note that **this calling is not limited to that initial situation you may have found yourself in when you came to Christ.** Jesus said, “...in order that you might go forth and bear fruit...” Look at this list of names in Romans 16. They were all “placed” in circumstances, families, neighborhoods, communities where they were exposed to the gospel and began to bear fruit. But their stories did not *end there!* That was a *starting point* from which they were to expand their outreach and influence. They were to *go forth* from that initial beginning.

Timothy was exposed to the gospel as a child, and, when Paul met him, he already had a ministry in two different towns miles apart (2 Tim. 1:2-5; 3:14,15; Acts 16:1,2). He was an overcomer. He overcame circumstances, and even his own timidity, to organize and minister to groups of people in these different localities. He went on to travel with Paul, ...from Lycaonia, through Asia, to Macedonia, to Achaia, and to Judea. In each of these places, he met and worked with many people, establishing them and getting them started in their faith.

John the Baptist knew God from his earliest days. His parents were devout people. As he came of age, his lifestyle took him out into the wilderness. (I can relate to that. When I was a young man, I wanted to live in the woods [not the Judean desert, like John]. I wanted to be *away from* people, society, politics, the “rat race”. I felt close to God in nature, in the lonely solitude of the woods.) A day came, however, when the word of God came to John (Lk. 3:2). God sent him forth to be a witness, ...to testify concerning the Light of the world. He was sent strategically to stand at the fords of the Jordan, where people on their way to Jerusalem had to cross, in order to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand. He was to testify about what he *already* knew of God, and what God *was about to show him*. He was to point to Jesus.

When Jesus called **Saul of Tarsus** (who became the apostle Paul), He told him, “...for this purpose I have appeared to you, to select you to be a minister and a witness not only to the things which you *have seen*, but also to the things in which *I will be seen* by you...” (Acts 26:16). He was to go forth and testify from his own experiences.

When God came to me, He said, “Dan, I want you to give me your future.” I knew it meant that I was choosing to be totally at His disposal, ...to do whatever He had in mind for me to do. **What did He direct me to do? To go forth and talk about what I knew and discovered about God.** It probably wasn’t very profound or deep, at the time, but a group of young people responded, and God used me to build them up and turn them loose. God brought my life alongside of others who gave me clearer understanding as to how to teach and invest in still other people.

In my ministry, I have worked with people in many surrounding neighborhoods and communities. Some have come to meet with me, others required that I go to them. The point is: ***we saw a spiritual connection, a desire to grow, and chose to meet regularly to help one another in our journey.*** In this process, many have gone on to bear fruit in countless ways in the lives of others in their families and networks of relationships.

YOU can do that! You probably already are. I want to encourage you to ***do so more and more, ...with clarity, intention and enthusiasm.*** Just think of all the people that go in and out of your life! Think back over the years about old friends, co-workers or family members you have known and spent time with. **Trust that God has or will place you, so that you can meet and interact with those people or situations where you can have impact.** Be praying and watching for what God is doing to open conversations about Him, ...or to bring up a need that will open a door into someone’s life. **As you invest in people, your passion, vision, and desire for God and living with integrity will be implanted in others.** They will “catch” some of what you have. You will “rub off” on them. Your heart for God will warm theirs. They will see Jesus in you, and be stirred. You will begin to discover like-minded co-laborers and co-supporters who will “be the church” in informal and relational ways that will express the reality of Jesus to others. **Then, as they are awakened and start on the discipleship journey, you will help them invest in others.**

Be of good cheer, ...take courage, ...be an overcomer, as Jesus was, ...as Paul was, ...as Timothy was, ...and as all these others were. **Overcome the fear, the awkwardness, the ignorance, the tentativeness.** Look for God ***RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE!*** He has “placed you there”. God chose YOU for this! **This is His calling!** The rest does not matter. He will help you through the pressures and constricting circumstances. As you press through, your faith will be purified and matured, ...and you will come out as gold refined by the fire. You may have heard this, ...but when they purified the gold, they would heat it up in the fire, add some flux to hasten the process, and scrape off the impurities as they floated to the surface. The refiner knew when the process was completed, when he could clearly see his own reflection in the vessel of gold. God is doing that in you. **As you choose to live with intention and devotion to God, ...to grow in Him and serve Him..., He is purifying your life.** You can see how much you have changed. Be sure of this, ***...others can see it too!*** Others will be drawn to the image of God seen in your life. **Your life will produce fruit in their lives, ...moving them from attraction to intention, ...from being hearers to becoming active disciples.**