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An Equipping Center

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TEXT: Luke 5:1-11 (NIV)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

What a great and encouraging song there. "Before the Throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me."

You know, the scripture tells us that our God is in Heaven and He sits on a throne. He does whatever he pleases. And there's so many correlations and things we can learn about God from the revelation He's given us in his word, but also from the world around us, and the way

he ordered it. It just so happens that both of my children have been greatly involved in sports in their life. My daughter had a good basketball career through high school and college and now coaches basketball. She continues to coach basketball. My son has played football and basketball. A lot of his journey, played football in college and now continues to play professional football and plays for the Buffalo Bills. One of the things I've noticed is how many correlations there are, and even the Scripture uses sports to give analogies to us about life and about God's ways in the world. And as I have been around sports so much, I've seen so many connections. An example would be this: The Buffalo Bills have an owner, there's an owner of the whole organization. And we understand from Scripture that God owns everything. Our God is in Heaven. He sits on the throne. He does whatever he pleases. And the owner purchased the team. As a matter of fact, God has purchased his church, the church in the world, the body of believers in the world through the shed blood of his son. He's the owner of the church and, like an owner of a football team, recruits leaders to help run his team. He recruits a general manager. He recruits a head coach. Then he hires assistant coaches. They do. And then they hire nutritionists and trainers and even psychologists to help the team that they'll recruit be the best team they can. And so, when you read through the scriptures about how God started his church, purchased out the church through the shed blood of his son, and started to have followers come and follow his son Jesus and become disciples of his.

Then we read in the text today that Jesus started to recruit leaders for his team. Luke 6 says "During this time, Jesus went out in the mountain to pray. And all night he continued in prayer to God." And what was he doing in his prayer to God? He was gaining wisdom for the decision-making process of who would be the first key leaders in the church. And it says When day came, he called his disciples. He was growing in popularity. He called all of his followers together and chose from them 12, whom he named Apostles.

Now, this is a very unique word. We don't use this word in our culture too often today, but an apostle is a set aside, specific messenger, a person who's designated for a specific purpose in leadership. And the scripture tells us that he initially chose 12 to be his apostles. And what are these apostles for? You know, this unique calling, this unique purpose. Later, the apostle Paul would be called by Christ to be an apostle, and he would write this in Ephesians 4:11-12. It says, "He, [he Jesus] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds and teachers, pastor-type positions." To do something specific in this specific thing was to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to equip others for the work of God's kingdom in the world, the work of ministry in the world.

This is just like a football team, you know. The owner hires leaders to come and develop a structure and then they have a training center. The first time I walked into it, it's very unquestionably an equipping center. It's a place where the team leadership gathers, organizes things. There's meeting rooms for specific positions. There's training rooms, weightlifting rooms, practice field to equip the players that they'll recruit to be the best football players they can possibly be.

And this is how God has organized the church. He recruits leaders, some apostles, some pastors and teachers, evangelists, prophets to equip others in the world to do the work of ministry. The church is really when we gather to be a place of equipping, strengthening, and encouraging each other to be built up in the faith so that we could do all that God wants us to do in the world. The text goes farther and says He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the Saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, the team, God's team in the world. Until we all attain a unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God into mature adulthood. So, we'll grow to a measure in the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we'll no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine in the world, made up stuff and human cunning, the deceitfulness of humanity, craftiness of deceitful schemes. Rather, as we equip each other and are built up in the body of Christ, will speak the truth in love and grow up in every way into him who is the head (like the head coach, the leader) into Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is properly working, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. It's like a well functioning team. That's what God wants for his people in the world.

And so, as we gather, the church is to be a place of equipping, equipping one another to do the work of ministry. And at a minimum, I would suggest to you at least four ways we're supposed to equip one another. The first would be this: to know and live and share and defend the Christian faith. I mean, how many believers in the world are confident in knowing their faith and living their faith and sharing and defending their faith? But yet this is what God wants for us. 1 Peter 3:15 says we're to always be prepared to give a reason and answer for the hope that's within us. Can you articulate a great hope within you because you're a believer in Jesus? This is God's call to know our faith, to grow in confidence in our faith, to be able to defend our faith, give a reason for it. And the church – we're supposed to build each other up. And how does faith come? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It's why we preach the Word of God, to encourage each other in our faith journey and even as we share our faith. Philemon, it was written there. It says, the sharing of our faith makes it more

complete. You'll never grow to maturity in your faith unless you learn how to communicate it with others. Somehow in the communicating, it grows in us. God didn't give us the faith just to hoard for ourselves.

I've often heard people say "My faith is a private thing," and I get sad when I hear him say this because it's in sharing it that it multiplies and grows and we deepen it, our understanding of it and our confidence in it. And we have to encourage each other and stir each other up to grow in the confidence in our faith and defend our faith and share it more with others. I recently went to a Saturday morning workshop where we talked about how to articulate the Christian faith and the good news of the gospel. And then there was some time set aside for everyone to go out and do some sharing of their faith. And it was just so encouraging to hear about how that went for everyone and what God did in and through them when they took the risk to be salt and light and share their light in the world. So, we need to continue to equip each other to know, live, share, and defend our faith.

But we also need to encourage each other in the stewardship of our gifts, our vocations, and even our financial resources. So much of the Bible talks about how we live our lives and we're to encourage each other. We're all going to be accountable for how we live our lives before God – how we care for the giftings, the talents that he's put within us and how we use them in the world around us and how we serve him in our unique callings. Each of us has been called by God. Ephesians 2:10: we are God's workmanship, created in Christ. And we're there's specific things He's laid out in advance, unique callings for each of us to be a part of.

And then God entrusts with us resources. And those resources are to be stewarded well to honor him well in the advancement of his kingdom here on the Earth, we need to equip each other to know and live and share and defend our faith, and then to steward our lives, our whole lives, while our callings, our resources, our giftings well for the advancement of his kingdom. 1 Corinthians 4 says this: we ought to be regarded as servants of Christ, as those entrusted with the mysteries that God has revealed.

And it's required that those who have been given a trust, we must prove faithful. And we have to encourage each other in being faithful to God, in stewarding each of our lives well before him. For at the end of our days, we all want to hear those words: "Well done, good and faithful servant," and we stand before Christ at the end. And so, this is the church: to equip one another for the work of ministry, the sharing of our faith, the living of our faith, our lives well before God.

And then we should also encourage. When you read through God's way in the scripture, the forging of strong marriages and families. You know, marriage is by God's design, the first social brick laid in human civilizations. It's the foundation of cultures. The marriage between a man and a woman is a unique mystery that God created. He separated his image into two genders. He saw that it was not good the first man was alone. He caused him to fall into a deep sleep. He pulled a portion of flesh from the side of the first man and fashioned together another being and brought this being to the man. And he said, "This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." And then God declared for us what marriage is. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother cleave to his wife and they will become one flesh. The first social institution laid in the history of humanity. It's the foundation of civilization and cultures. As goes marriage, so goes family, so goes civilization. And so, the church, when you read it in the scriptures, is to encourage marriage and to strengthen and build up marriages. For out of marriages come children who are to be disciples and followers of Christ. And the multiplication God has said, you know, to fill the earth and with his image through this plan. And as families go, when we strengthen families, we're doing good for the world. We're being salt in the world; a preservative. Hebrews 13:4 says the marriage bed should be honored by everyone. And Matthew 19:6 says what God has joined together, let no one put asunder. Marriage is under attack. We want to pray for it. We want to pray for families who are working hard. The evil one hates God's way and he hates God's order. And so, the church should be strengthening marriages and families.

And finally, we should continue to equip each other to serve then the community well, to serve the world around us well, not just in word, but also in deed. It's the work of missions, of meeting people's needs, ministering to them as we meet their needs, sharing with them the love of God, demonstrating it through our works, and then also sharing. How can they know unless we tell them about the love of God, about the gift of Jesus? The church is to be an equipping center, friends, where we build each other up and equip each other to grow and mature in Christ and then out of the overflow as we grow in Him, out of the overflow of what God is doing in and through us, then we can we can minister to the world around us, steward our lives well, share our faith, build up one another in our families, in whatever the structure of our family is and the current state, and then be out serving in the world in word in what we share in word, but also in what we demonstrate in service to the world meeting needs. He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some teachers, some pastors, not to do all the work themselves. They're there to be like coaches, equipping people in the world, God's people in the world to do the work of ministry and so that we all build each other up, as

the Scripture says, equipped. When each part, each joint is doing its part, the body functions well, it builds and grows up in love. It's such a great picture. It's like a high functioning professional football team or sports team when the church is working right and everyone stepping up doing their part.

It's a beautiful thing to see. Have you experienced this in your life? Are you a part of a church that's really working well in the world, listening to God's call? If not, can I encourage you today to become a part of the family of God in such a way where people are building each other up to be salt and light in the world? It's God's call for us. He gave some to be apostles, some leaders in the church. You should look for leaders who will strengthen your faith, build you up and equip you to do the work of ministry in your area. I hope you're encouraged by this today. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word which teaches us how you operate in the world, what you're doing in the world, and what your unique call is for each of us as we as we study it. Your Holy Spirit can reveal to us our gifts, can reveal to us convictions about what's true and how you're operating and the gift of your son Jesus. And then our call to share it, to serve, to encourage and strengthen each other and being salt and light. Thank you for your great history in doing this in the world. Help us continue to be those who carry the mystery of God in our faithful, in our generation. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.