

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Ability To Love Comes Out Of Safety And Fullness

by Dan Trygg

“Beloved, we might love one another because the love is out from God, and everyone loving has been begotten out from God and experientially-knows God. The one not loving did not experientially know God, because God is love...”

“Beloved, if in this manner God loved us, also we are indebted to love one another. No one formerly has beheld God. If ever we might love one another, God dwells in us and the love of Him is having been fulfilled in us.” 1 John 4:7,8,11,12

This whole subject of agapē love seems to be somewhat mysterious. We have seen that only those who are born from above are capable of such consistent, ongoing self-giving. The reason: God Himself is agapē. To be able to express agapē, you must be able to be a channel by which the character, nature, and life of God can be expressed. Jesus Himself commented on the principle that **you cannot give what do not have, ...and you cannot produce something other than what is consistent with your nature**. He said, “Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit” (Matt. 7:16b-18). **The entire purpose for being “born from above” is so that we could receive a new nature, one that is fit for heaven, one that bears fruit consistent with its heavenly nature**. In His explanation of this to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1-8), Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”

In Galatians 5:19-23, the apostle Paul contrasted what the flesh produces, versus what the Spirit can produce in a person’s heart and life. These two natures, two forces or “sources of orientation” for our lives are opposed to each other, and produce very different kinds of fruit. “Now **the deeds of the flesh** are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery (Gk. = pharmakeia - one who takes drugs to induce a spiritually-sensitive state), enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousings, and things like these...” When compared to the standard of agapē (1 Cor. 13:4-7), it becomes very apparent how self-centered and self-interested these behaviors and attitudes are. **They are either trying to get something to make themselves feel better, ...or they are expressing their feelings without regard for others, ...or they are defending something that they think is theirs**. The contrast is very striking when you read the list of what comprises the single fruit produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit, “love (agapē), joy, peace, patience (distant-anger), sensitive-kindness, goodness, trust, gentleness, and self-control...”. While the works of the flesh reveal an inner orientation of self-seeking, self-expressing and self-contending, **the outworking of the Spirit in a believer’s life produces characteristics and attitudes that indicate that the person is not feeling a need to compete for self**. He or she seems to **be at a place of fullness and contentment** whereby he or she can freely give to others.

The bottom line is that **it is very difficult to sustain a self-sacrificing choice to prefer someone else, if we feel like our own needs are not going to be met**. The power of self is very strong, and the instinct to protect our own interests is very deep.

Apart from God, we are like cisterns (Leaky ones at that!). We draw out of the water *we have stored up within*, water gathered during the good times, times of positive experiences and affirmation. **When we are full, we tend to be generous with others**, and willing to share freely, **...but when we near the bottom, we begin to feel desperate**. We begin to ration, and to look for ways to **renew** our supply. We begin to look to **others** to fill us. We will often *attempt to manipulate positive attention* from them (because it feels more genuine when it is “unsolicited”), or we will come right out and ask (or *demand*) some positive input, or we will seek to be restored with some “feel good” kind of experience. And when we are dry, there is nothing more to give. **We become listless, and feel empty inside**. We **may get depressed**. We also often become very short with others, speaking to them out of *our* pain. Our tolerance tends to diminish, and we *snap* at people who make requests of us. Things that we may be glad to do when we feel full, now seem to require great effort. **Something inside of us tells us that life should not be like this**, and we can even become enraged or embittered at God, or at life in general. **We are depleted**, and seemingly must wait for the rains of blessing to come, or at least for some groundwater to seep in overnight, to renew us.

In the “cistern approach”, at best, we learn to live life responsibly by managing our resources more effectively. We learn to *budget* our water usage, to *not give away too much*, to *not waste it* frivolously. We learn to find relationships that do not drain us excessively, ones that are mutual give-and-take relationships, or even to find people that seem to consistently give us a cup of cold water. **We learn to reduce the stresses in our lives**. We learn

to take time to be renewed. **We learn about our *limits*, our *boundaries***, and attempt to modify the way we live so that the demands for our precious life resource do not exceed our supply. **These are good *psychological skills of self-management* which are wisdom, and are not to be despised or rejected.** When you become aware of how this all works, you begin to see that Scripture is full of wise counsel in this regard. Men and women of faith practiced these life-skills (the Biblical definition of “wisdom”), as did Jesus Himself.

There is another way to live, however, another source of life (water) which belongs to those in Christ, which is *not* available to those who do not know Him. **This provides the basis for *agapē* love, if we can learn to tap into its resources in a consistent fashion.** It is the birthright of every Christian, but most of us do not learn to drink from it nearly as much as we could. It is the love, strength, affirmation, and empowerment that come from our relationship with God, provided for us by Jesus Christ, incorporated in us at our new birth, and mediated to us through the Holy Spirit. **The indwelling Spirit of God has come to be a fountain of the water of life within us**, ...a continual, unending stream of supply into our life-energy and experience. In order for us to develop our ability to love in the *agapē* way, we must expand our grasp of the adequacy of God’s love and provision for us.

Let me hasten to say, however, that **the possibility of “fountain life” does not dismiss the need for many of the life-skills required by the “cistern life”**. The fountain supply is to be a steady, consistent source, but *it still requires stewardship*. It is not limitless, in the sense of overwhelming all our natural boundaries. It is limitless, in that it will keep flowing. It “bumps up” our natural abilities and capacity, enabling us to do *more* and *better*, ...but **it does not gush forth in a way that overwhelms our creaturehood, or overrules all semblance of wise dealing**. Let us not ignore the obvious. Jesus, though a perfect, Spirit-led human, still required sleep, food, retreat for rest and renewal. He still desired human companionship. Furthermore, He also experienced the pains which accompany a lack in these areas. The pain was an indication of overuse, of coming to a limit, and of the need to re-provision oneself. We know that He experienced hunger, thirst, exhaustion, sorrow, and loneliness, to name a few experiences which we would call “negative”. Whatever “fountain life”, or Spirit-empowered life, might be, we can know that it does not exclude these experiences, nor are these experiences necessarily the result of sin, for Jesus was without sin. They are simply the reality of our human existence, and **God apparently does not desire that we escape the limits of our creaturehood** by injecting us with some kind of spiritual drug that would numb us to all pain and would heighten our energy and activity level past all natural human levels. The Holy Spirit is not an amphetamine. **There is to be a qualitative change**, if not a quantitative one, as a result of walking in the Spirit, **but one that still requires that we learn wisdom in monitoring and managing our limits**. We ignore this to our own pain and peril. **It is an overcoming life, not a foolhardy one**. It remains true that He is God, and we are not. *He* is limitless, but *we* continue to be creatures with the boundaries and limitations of His desire and design. Our redemption has not transformed us into gods, each possessing his or her own individual, limitless divine nature. Instead, **God has allowed us to share in His nature, to experience the flow and supply which comes only from Him**.

“If ever we might love one another, God dwells in us and the love of Him is having been fulfilled in us.” What this verse is saying is that **any time we might flicker into expressing real *agapē* love, we are seeing the result of God’s life in us**, as well as the outworking, or fulfillment of the working of His *agapē* in us. The verb, “having been fulfilled”, indicates a type of action completed in the past, but with ongoing impact or result. The verb itself means to “bring to an end, to fulfill, complete, or mature”. Put all this together, and what it says is that **God’s act of love, which we received by faith, has grown up like a seed to full maturity. The fruit of this is that we are able also to express *agapē*. We cannot give what we do not have. We do have the love of God**. It has been clearly displayed to us in the expression of the commitment of His love toward us in sending Christ for us. **It has been poured into our own souls by the indwelling Holy Spirit**, who testifies to us of His affirmation, esteem and desire for us, motivating us to draw near to Him as our Daddy (Rom. 5:5; 8:14-17). He is the One who will be with us until the end of this age. **He has made us new, with hearts that are naturally inclined to do the will of God. He is our guide and instructor, who will lead us in the path of the Father’s will for our lives. He is also the “life-maker”, ...the One who energizes and “quickens” us, invigorating us with new life and vitality** (Jn. 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:5,6). He is that very water of life which flows out from within our inner being when we go to Jesus with our inner thirsts (Jn. 7:37-39). **These are facts, objective realities, whether we accurately perceive them or not**. If we are true, born-from-above Christians, **this is our birthright**.

As we begin to internalize and process these truths, a new freedom begins to emerge within us. **Because we know and are secure in the Father’s love, we can begin to share more of who we are and what we have with others**. Because we are fulfilled by the Giver, we no longer rely on the things we used to look to for fulfillment, and can give to those who have need. Because we have a steady, continual inflow of life and grace, we discover that we can afford to give more of ourselves to those around us. Actually, **to keep the flow going, we must give to others**.