

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Pursue Love

by Dan Trygg

“But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. ¹¹ Now you, man of God, run from these things; but pursue righteousness, good-devotedness, faith, *agapē*-love, endurance, and gentleness.” 1 Timothy 6:9-11

“Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and earthenware, some for special use, some for ordinary. ²¹ So if anyone purifies himself from these things, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, *agapē*-love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:20-22

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. ¹² For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. ¹³ Now these three remain: faith, hope, and *agapē*-love. But the greatest of these is *agapē*-love. ^{14:1} Pursue *agapē*-love and earnestly-desire spiritual gifts, and above all that you may prophesy.” 1 Corinthians 13:11 - 14:1

There are three occasions in the NT where the apostle Paul tells us to “pursue love”. In two of these incidents, *agapē*-love is mentioned alongside a number of other qualities, but in 1 Corinthians 14, it is presented as the most important, abiding of all qualities. Let’s delve into this a bit, and consider the significance of what Paul is saying, as well as the practical clues regarding the pursuit of *agapē* to be gleaned from these passages.

The first thing that comes to mind is that *agapē*-love **IS something that we can pursue**. Paul’s admonition implies that **our pursuit, ...our focus, effort, and persistence..., could be a key ingredient in bringing *agapē*-love into our experience and character**. A serious quest for *agapē* can lead to enlarging one’s capacity for being able to receive and express the *agapē* of God. In other words, if we want to grow in the *agapē*-love of God, we can apply ourselves to discover and develop this as a part of our lives.

A corollary of this is that if we *don’t* apply ourselves to pursue *agapē*, we may not ever develop this most crucial quality of our potential character in Christ. It may be freely available, but requires conscious effort to obtain. Of course, if *agapē*-love is supposed to be the distinctive mark we are to be known by, as followers of Jesus, and it requires conscious effort to experience and express, then **being a Christian is going to require more of us than a statement of faith**. It is going to require a *pursuit*, ...a conscious, intentional, investment toward growth and maturity. Being a Christian means being a disciple, an active follower, ...and *disciples actively invest in spiritual disciplines that help them grow and mature*. **An undisciplined disciple is as self-contradictory as a non-following follower**.

Speaking of “following”, that is the basic idea of what we are talking about here. **The word translated as “pursue” here is the Greek word, *diokō***. It means to “follow, pursue, seek, run after, earnestly endeavor to acquire, or press toward”. It is not a passive word, at all. **It implies speed, intensity, eagerness or even aggressive effort**. In fact, most of the times it occurs in the NT, it is reference to persecution. Of the 45 times it occurs, 33 times it is about being aggressively pursued, chased, and persecuted. This is important for us to see, because **it helps us understand the intensity and effort we ought to put forward to eagerly obtain *agapē*-love**. **We ought to be chasing it down, ...running hard after it to obtain it**. *Agapē*-love is the prize we are to hotly pursue.

Let’s examine the passages listed above, to see what we can learn. **In 1 Timothy 6, Paul warns us of the danger of materialism**. **It is a distraction, a snare that some have been caught up in**. They want to get rich and fall into temptation, a trap, and many unperceptive and injurious desires. They do not clearly see what is important, any more, ...and they do not see what is happening to them, as they pursue wealth. The love of money, Paul says, is a root of all sorts of evils (sickness and unsoundness of heart). Some, as they have aspired for wealth, have wandered away from the faith, and deeply wounded themselves with many pains (mental anguish, remorse, guilt). **In contrast to this, Paul admonishes Timothy (and us) to flee from these things and run after other things**. **It is not enough to stop our vain pursuits**. **We must get on with the right and productive quest**, ...our eager search for maturity in righteousness, a healthy devotion of the heart, and our earnest pursuit of *agapē*-love.

The next passage, from 2 Timothy 2:20-22, has a similar bifurcation: **We can either choose to be unclean and focus on what is unrighteous, or we can decide to devote ourselves to being dedicated to God**. We can cleanse ourselves from these other things, and choose to make ourselves useful to God and well-prepared for every good work. **Paul exhorts Timothy to flee from youthful lusts and run eagerly after righteousness, faith, *agapē*-love and peace** with the ones calling upon the Lord with a clean heart.

Note the parallel in these two passages. We are to *flee from one thing*, ...the temporal, earthly, tangible thing..., and *eagerly, persistently pursue the character and heart of God expressed in our lives*. We are pursuing either the natural and the temporal, or the supernatural and eternal. We are pursuing what of this world, or we are choosing to disregard these things in order to gain a higher prize, a character that is of God. **Note that we can't embrace both pursuits at the same time. We have to *flee from* the unhealthy pursuit of wealth, the "love of money", and give ourselves *to* chase after righteousness and love. We have to *flee from* a hyper-focus on natural lusts, and instead choose *to* chase after righteousness and love. **And, "flee from" means to "avoid, escape from, run away from". The appeal of materialism, and the appeal of fleshly desires, appears to distract our attention and investment in the things of God.** As James and Peter indicate, earthly pleasures and fleshly lusts wage war against the soul (Jas. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:11). If we are going to run hard after the *agapē*-love of God, we cannot fraternize with what is so often opposed to the things of God. As James said, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4).**

What about the passage from 1 Corinthians 13? Is there an either-or choice to be made there, as well? Yes, in fact there *is*. There it is about "putting away childish things" in order to move on to the things of maturity. What does maturity look like? It looks like *Jesus*. More specifically, it looks like the *agapē*-love of God. If the *goal* or *end point* of the charge that Jesus gave, and Paul passed along in his ministry, was *agapē*-love (1 Tim. 1:5), doesn't that imply that this would be fruit of *maturity*? **If the end point of the growth process produces a character and quality of life that results in *agapē*, then we must move beyond immaturity**, if we are going to experience and produce that kind of love. Maturity in the things of God, ...maturity in the spiritual walk..., is *not* simply the result of a chronological process. **We must make a choice to grow and become mature.** We must move beyond the elementary teachings, and the mindset of the immature Christian. We must choose to set our minds on the Spirit, instead of the flesh or the things of the world (Rom. 8:5-8; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). **We must apply ourselves to study and live out the Word of God.** Those who are immature are dependent on others for spiritual food. They are untested, or unaccustomed, to the word of righteousness. The mature have trained their spiritual faculties to become discerning (Heb. 5:13,14). **We must take responsibility for our own spiritual lives, ...our own spiritual growth..., and purposefully push on into maturity.** If we are going to live at a higher, and deeper, spiritual level, then ***we must do things differently***. We must press in, pursue, eagerly seek after spiritual maturity, and the love that will result from it. If we keep on doing what we have been doing, we will get the same results we have experienced up to this time in our journey. Paul says that we must "put away childish things", and begin to act like spiritual adults.

What can we do to pursue love? There is no specific "laundry list" of activities that are guaranteed to produce a deepening of *agapē*-love, just by cranking them out. It is a matter of our heart, not just some religious activities. But there *are* some key things to keep in mind. The first thing that comes to my mind is that we ought to give ourselves to prayer. **We ought to be intensely seeking God in prayer for the growth of *agapē* in our lives.** We see this in Paul's example in Ephesians 3:14-21. He consistently bowed his knees before the Father and interceded for the Ephesian church, in this regard. Just this morning, I was reading in Daniel, chapter 9. Daniel became aware of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the exile of Jews, and the promise of their restoration. Note the intensity of his prayer: "So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to Yahweh my God and confessed..." (Dan. 9:3-4). We know he already was praying three times a day in his room on his knees and giving thanks to God (Dan. 6:10,11). The prayer in Daniel 9 exceeds even his regular disciplined life of prayer. Now, we don't necessarily have to do exactly what Daniel did, but we can observe the intensity and purpose in his choices. When he became aware of new truth, something that he desired to see God do, he upped his efforts, ...he pressed in, ...he pursued after this objective by more intense and frequent prayer to God. The question is: **What are you willing to do to pursue *agapē*-love? Will the knowledge that you can and should seek and pursue this propel you into action?**

Prayer is one area. **What else would be crucial to pursuing *agapē*-love?** We saw that *agapē* grows out of a clean heart, a good conscience, and an unhypocritical faith (1 Tim. 1:5). These are three more specific areas we can focus on to prepare our hearts for *agapē*. **A clean heart** would require both confession of known sin, and a reception of God's grace in Christ. It means, as we have seen, *fleeing from* the unclean things you know are in your life, so that you can *chase after* the *agapē* of God. The Lord is more concerned with honesty than performance. Don't fall under the condemnation of the devil. God is using this soul-searching process to *set you free*, not *weigh you down* under judgment. This is both *a purposed choice* we express to God, and *a process* in our lives. God looks at the heart. Furthermore, it is the growth of *agapē* within us that will enable us to walk in obedience (1 Jn. 2:5). **A good or beneficial conscience** is when we respond to the conviction of our heart, when we know we have strayed. **An unhypocritical faith** is being honest, ...not pretending to be farther along than we are. *Agapē* rejoices with the truth. **The point is to *flee* those things that are hindering your growth in *agapē*, and *running hard after* maturing in it.**