

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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There's More: Learning to Love Effectively in the Power of the Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“...the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” 1 Timothy 1:5

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11

We have been talking about learning the skills of a disciple of Jesus, ...becoming effective at discovering how to think and act as He did. We are apprentices in training, learning to walk as He walked by the same Holy Spirit that was operating in His life. **He is the One who has called us to this.** He purposefully chose the “apprentice” word, “disciple”. He called the original twelve to spend time with Him, so that they could learn, observe and put into practice the skills He was teaching them (Mk. 3:14,15). Then, He instructed them to “disciplize all nations, ...teaching them to keep all the things I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19,20). **This would only be possible because He Himself is with us, in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.** He did what He did, because He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38), and because the Father who was abiding in Him was performing His works (Jn. 14:10). The amazing thing is that Jesus said that He and the Father would send this same Holy Spirit to be in us, and that He and the Father would also come and abide in us themselves (Jn. 14:16,17,23)! The potential vitality, power and holiness are already placed within us. **As apprentices, we are to be learning to operate as Jesus did, ...doing nothing from ourselves, but always watching for the initiative of God at work within and around us** (Jn. 5:19).

The key to living the Spirit-empowered life is to develop the ability to recognize the prompting and inworking of the Spirit, and then *partnering with Him by expressing outwardly what He is doing inwardly*. This is how Jesus operated, joining what He recognized that the Father was doing. **We are to apply this same methodology for learning to walk in victory over sin, becoming skilled at being led by the Spirit, discovering and operating in the gifts of the Spirit, as well as living a life that produces His fruit.** This is where *the boldness* for sharing our faith comes from, as well as *the words* to speak. They are prompted, supported and supplied from within us, as we engage with the Holy Spirit *as partners*. *He* bears witness, and *we* bear witness (Jn. 15:26,27). *He* gives us the words, but *we* must open our mouths and use our voices to speak.

Learning to express the love of God follows the same process. **The kind of love that is uniquely produced by the Holy Spirit is described by the NT Greek word, *agapē*.** This is a specific kind of love, which people cannot produce on their own. The apostle John wrote that **this kind of love comes from God.** Those who express this love are only those who have been born of God, and who experientially-know Him (1 Jn. 4:7). **People who are not born of God cannot do this, ...and even born-from-above Christians cannot do this unless they have experienced God in a deeper, more personal way. Why? Because it is produced by the Holy Spirit.** The person who is engaged in this kind of love *must have a personal relationship with the Spirit of God, and they must be able to recognize and respond to His promptings and leadings.* Those who do not know God, and who do not have the Spirit, are generally oblivious to His leading. The things of the Spirit seem foolish to them (1 Cor. 2:14). And **many immature Christians are more attuned to their old, fleshly nature, and are not able to discern the movement of the Spirit** (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14).

It is clear that learning to love with this unique, Spirit-produced love is a discipleship skill to be learned as we grow deeper in our walk with Christ. Paul said that **“the goal of our instruction is *agapē-love*”** (1 Tim. 1:5). The word translated as “goal” here implies the end point of a design, or the fulfillment of a process of growth. **We don't start out there, but that is what we are heading toward.** This is the culmination of our training and discipleship process. We are to become proficient at discerning and engaging with the leading of the Spirit so that we can express this kind of love toward others. **This is so different, so unusual, that Jesus said it will stand out like a sore thumb, ...or, more accurately, it will shine like a light in the darkness.** “By *this*,” Jesus said, “all people will experientially-know that you are My apprentices, if you have *agapē-love* for one another” (Jn. 13:35).

Let's talk a little more about what this kind of love is like. **When we hear the word “love”, we tend to think of emotion.** When we say, “I think I am falling in love”, or “I love someone”, **we think of emotional attraction or**

enjoyment. This would be like the Greek word, *phileō*. It refers to enjoying someone's company, or strongly liking someone. This is a friendship love, usually a mutual back and forth positive emotion. *That* is not what *agapē* is.

Another common idea of "love" is a strong lustful wanting. *The attraction is a physical/emotional desire to "have" that person.* There is little emotional or relational depth to such a desire, at all. In fact, there is often an "objectification" of that person. The attraction has little regard for them, at all, other than what pleasure or fulfillment they may represent to you. Sometimes this is expressed by the phrase "making love" when it is purely a physical tryst. There is little depth of relationship at all. **This is more lust than love**, and that strong lust is purely self-seeking. **This would be like the Greek word, *eros***, from which our English word "erotic" is derived. *Agapē* is not like *that*, either.

There is yet another Greek word, which refers to a bond of loyalty and protection between members of a family or other social group. This describes the old adage, "Blood is thicker than water". Sometimes members of a group like this are *not* really close friends. They may not even particularly *like* each other. But, if you were to criticize or seem to be a threat toward any of the members of that group or family, all the members of the group will come to the defense of that person. **There is some kind of emotional loyalty and identity that binds members together in this bond. This would be like the Greek word, *storgē*.** *Agapē* is not like *that*, either.

While these other words for "love" are mostly emotional, sensual, or relational in some way, ***agapē* is centered in the will. It is a "will to bless or benefit" someone else.** It has no agenda and expects no "payback" as a condition. While these other kinds of love are based upon pleasure or affinity to be gained or protected on behalf of the one who loves, ***agapē* is the choice to give away, invest in or even sacrifice for the benefit of the other person, without regard for any self-benefit from that person. *Agapē* is a choice, not a desire or an emotion. But its source, ...the fountainhead of this choice is the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit. While the other loves are self-fulfilling and self-protecting, *agapē* is self-giving and self-sacrificial.** While the other loves are descriptive of an inner experience, *agapē* is an outward expression. *Agapē* is an action. **It is the responsive, partnership-choice to give, serve, help and benefit someone else, because of the prompting of God,** ...not for self-benefit or self-fulfillment.

Because God is full of this *agapē*-love, He consistently expresses it toward others. It is His nature to give, bless and benefit others. When we come into relationship with Him, He desires to infuse us with the fullness of His life and include us in the delight of sharing His blessings with others. He puts within us His Holy Spirit to guide us to partner with Him in the expression of His heart toward others. ***Agapē*-love is one of the characteristics of His working in our lives. It is listed as the first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. It is who He is and what He does.** To the extent that we learn to recognize His prompting, and respond to Him, we will give expression to the *agapē*-love of God. **This is a discipleship skill, ...an ability and proficiency that begins very modestly, but is intended to grow and mature as we walk with God.** Obviously, God wants us to become responsive and competent in this. Jesus said that this was to become the signature mark that would demonstrate that we are following Jesus. **Paul said that we are "taught by God to *agapē*-love one another"** (1 Thess. 4:9). The original language says **we are "God-taught"**. Paul actually coined a word to describe the process of learning to love in this way. **God Himself is the initiator and teacher,** who will train us in how to recognize His prompting, and learn to effectively express His heart. **Because we are partners with Him, however, part of the learning curve has to do with the opening of our own minds and hearts to fully, wisely and accurately convey His heart in our actions and words.** Obviously, a crucial part of this process is believing that God wants to do this in our lives, and our active pursuit of learning to love in this way.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 is a prayer that God may cause you to increase and overflow in *agapē*-love for one another in Christ and for all people. **God has the ability to enlarge our capacity to love, and to make it flow abundantly from our lives.** In Philippians 1:9-11, the apostle **Paul prays for the Christians in Philippi that their *agapē*-love might more and more overflow in "true-knowledge and all discernment"**. The word translated as "true knowledge" refers to a personal, revelatory flash of insight or recognition that something is true. It is a further product of the Holy Spirit, as is discernment. The word for "discernment" refers to one's faculty of perception. In Hebrews 5:14 a related word describes those who are mature, ...those who have "trained their faculty of discernment through conscious practice and training to be able to recognize what is good and beneficial from what is evil and unhealthy". In Philippians 1, **Paul prayed for the ability to recognize and discern so that we might test out by experimentation to discover and approve the best course of action,** in order that we might be sincere and unoffensive.

Again, there is a partnership between us and God. God will supply the *agapē*-love, the insight and discernment, as we seek and pray and step out at what we perceive to be the promptings of the Holy Spirit. **In the process of seeking and experimentation, God will enlarge our ability to express His love with effectiveness. Our skill at discerning His leading, and our ability to perceive what would be effective will become sharper and clearer.** Our capacity to love will increase and overflow. **God Himself is the Source of this love.** In Ephesians 3:14-21, Paul prays that we might come to experience the *agapē*-love of God, so that we would indeed be filled with the fullness that He brings.