

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Rediscovering Love – Fostering an Environment Where Love Can Grow

by Dan Trygg

“Beloved, we-might-now-love one another, for agapē-love is from God; and everyone who loves has-been-born of God and experientially-knows God.” 1 John 4:7

“...may the Lord increase and abound y'all in agapē-love for one another, and for all people...” 1 Thessalonians 3:12

“...you yourselves are taught by God (‘God-taught’) to agapē-love one another; ¹⁰ for indeed you do practice (are doing) it toward all the brothers and sisters who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers and sisters, to excel (abound, overflow) still more, ¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business...” 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11

In our first segment on “Rediscovering Love”, we introduced the different Greek concepts of love. This was to help us clarify the distinction between the agapē-love that comes from God from the perceptions of love that we might have from our own culture or experience. Agapē-love comes from God. **Agapē-love is different from what we typically think of when we talk about “love”. It is not rooted in our emotions.** It is a God-prompted desire to act on behalf of another person, regardless of any self-interest or expectation of return for myself. Often agapē-love is expressed at cost to myself. It is grace-in-action. **It is rooted in the will.** It is the choice to serve, act or give in order to benefit that other person. **It is a grace-investment in that person’s life,** to meet a need, to bring a blessing, or to express value to that person.

Jesus said that agapē-love would be a notable characteristic of those who are effectively following Him (Jn. 13:34,35). Paul said that it was the goal of his instruction (1 Tim. 1:5). **It is not something that just “happens”, ...it is something to “pursue”** (1 Cor. 14:1; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). We are to pray, seek to become aware of, grow in, and even excel at loving in this fashion. It is to become a key characteristic of our own lives, clearly and vividly expressed in our interactions with others. **As a Christian community, it is to become visibly and tangibly expressed among us, and also spill over to others.** Again, **it is grace-in-action, ...it is not limited to us Christians,** any more than grace is limited only to other believers. The body of Christ should be an interactive learning laboratory for love, but God definitely desires that His agapē-love reach beyond our local fellowship. We are to imitate and demonstrate HIS agapē-love. He demonstrated HIS love toward us, when we were estranged from Him, disinterested in Him and even hostile toward Him. If HIS Spirit is prompting us with HIS love, it should *look like* HIS love!

God has made it possible for us to express agapē-love. This love originates from God. Only those who have been born from God have the capacity to love like this. There is another limiting factor, however. **In order to operate in this unique love, we must be presently experiencing Him.** (1 Jn. 4:7 – “knows”.) There are many who have been genuinely born out from God, who are *not* experiencing His activity in their lives. They are not expecting it, looking for it, or cultivating themselves to *recognize, acknowledge* and *respond to* His prompting in their lives.

In John 5:17,19,20, Jesus let us in on a key insight into how He operated. When He was challenged about healing the man who had a bodily weakness that had incapacitated him for thirty-eight years, because He had healed him on the Sabbath, Jesus said two things:

(1.) “My Father is working until this present moment, and I am working.”

(2.) He said that “the Son is not able to do from Himself anything (lit. ‘nothing’) if ever He might not see (or ‘perceive’) something the Father is presently-doing. For whatever things That One might be doing, these things also the Son likewise does. For the Father loves (*phileō* – enjoys, delights in, has affection for) the Son and shows (points out, makes known, indicates) to Him all things which He is presently-doing.”

Jesus knew and expected that His Father was at work around Him. He was attentive to see and perceive what the Father may be initiating, ...so that He could partner with Him in that activity. The word “likewise” means “in like manner” or “in the same way”. In other words, Jesus did not just go around doing things on His own, from His own mind or understanding, or according to His own preferences. He said that He did “nothing” from Himself.

Instead, Jesus was *looking for God*. He was expecting the Father to indicate to Him, in some fashion, that He was “up to something”.

You might think, ...well, God loved Jesus in a warm, affectionate way. He had a relationship with the Father that was different from mine. Wait a minute, ...*that* is precisely the point! *This* is the very crux of what we need to recognize and begin to expect. This is where “repentance”, or a “change of perception”, needs to take place! In John 16:27, Jesus said, “the Father Himself loves (*phileō* – enjoys, delights in, has affection for) *you*, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father.” Do you love Jesus? Do you have affection for Him? Do you believe that He came forth from God? Then, **Jesus said that the Father *delights in you*, ...and if He delights in you, you can expect Him to show or point out to you the things that He is presently-doing, ...just like He did with Jesus!**

The Christian life is an active partnership with the living God. **Learning to love in the power and leading of God's Spirit is an important discipleship skill.** We are told three times in the NT to "*pursue agapē-love*". **We have everything that we need** (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3; Col. 2:10). God has poured His agapē-love into us by His Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). This is not a commodity; it is a living Person. **God is agapē-love! He produces agapē-love! He will prompt us and lead us in agapē-love.** This is at once the deepest and highest calling of our spiritual lives, ...the very goal of our discipleship training, ...learning to walk in agapē-love. **Recognizing the present activity and prompting of God, and embracing it! Partnering with what God is doing!**

Arranging ourselves, ...our time, energy, resources, schedule, preferences..., to agree with what God is doing, and doing what He is doing in a way that corresponds with His action.

The point of this is that **we must come to expect that God wants to reveal what He is doing to us, and He desires for us to partner with Him in His work.**

In order to develop a mindset, or a church environment, where agapē-love will become a growing part of our experience, there are some practical steps to implement.

1.) Embrace the vision for agapē-love. We need to emphasize the importance of agapē-love. We must learn about and meditate on what agapē-love is, ...that it comes from God, and it is what He desires to produce in our lives. It is the ultimate goal that we are to be pursuing in our life together as members of the body of Christ. We are to learn to walk in the love that comes from God. It is both our birthright and inheritance, as well as the goal and mature fruit of our relationship with God. It is to be the mark of Jesus in our lives. The success of our spiritual walk is made evident by the degree to which we learn to live and operate in love. God's word says, "Let *all* that you do be done in agapē-love" (1 Cor. 16:14).

2.) Embrace the vision for discipleship. We are called to become like our Master, Jesus. We are to be doers of the word, not just hearers or intellectual learners. Our lives are to be transformed as we draw closer to God, and learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. In order to effectively discern His leading, we must "discipline ourselves for godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7,8). The word for "godliness" there is not talking about behavior, it is talking about devotion and attentiveness to God. A better translation would be "good-devoted-ness". Being "well-devoted" requires purpose, resolve and priority decision making. We are to put aside the sins and the things that entangle and hinder our walk with God, or keep us from fulfilling our calling (Heb. 12:1). **Learning to recognize God at work around us, ...and learning to be led by the Spirit..., are discipleship skills that require intentionality and focus. The goal of the disciple is implementation. We are to be learning in order to do.** We are developing skills to *engage with* and *express* the power of God!

3.) Be the "first leader". Lead by example. Make agapē-love the burden of *your* heart. Ask God to deepen *your* awareness of Him, ...and *look for* Him! Ask God to lead *you* by His Spirit, ...and *go and do what He is leading!* Ask Him to teach *you* to agapē-love, and *do what He is prompting you to do!* Recruit others to join you in this quest. If possible, get the entire body of Christ where you are to rally around this focus. *Share the stories of what God is doing!*

a.) Clear the static. There are so many distractions. The enemy will attempt to interfere with our best intentions. He will try to pull us away into other things. We must be very self-aware and evaluate our thoughts and how we spend our time. The "good" is often the worst enemy of the "best". So called "good things" can steal away our time, so that we never get to the most important, "best things". One of the things that has become very apparent to me is the danger of arguments, speculations, controversies and conspiracies. They are like whirlpools that will suck us into a world of chaos and disorientation. They are designed by the enemy to cause us to lose sight of what is important. They can easily get us upset and agitated. It is difficult to be attentive to the Spirit, when you are upset and agitated. **Jesus set apart times to get alone to pray, and clear His mind to listen to the Father. We need to do the same.**

b.) Look to God as the Initiator, Source and Multiplier of Agapē-Love. Don't ever lose sight of Him. Don't focus on love for "love's sake", ...and don't ever think you can "do this" on your own. You can't. Like the branch that is disconnected from the Vine, your "love" will quickly wither, fade and be seen to be life-less, apart from Him as your Life.

c.) Be a brave and bold implementer and "risk-taker" to discover and deepen agapē-love. Love is not a feeling. It is *grace-in-action*. It will be *seen* by what you *do*. If you don't get around to "doing", you have not implemented agapē-love.

d.) Give all the glory to God. It is all about Him. It is what He is doing in and through you. It is meant to draw the attention of other people to recognize that there is something more going on with you than what is typical. *Love is meant to lead to testimony.* Don't be surprised if someone asks you "Why do you do these things?"

e.) Ask God to make your agapē-love not only *increase*, but to *overflow!* This "love quest" starts out as "baby steps", ...grows to increasing consistency and familiarity, ...and is meant to "abound" or "overflow"!

May your agapē-love stimulate others to become pursuers of the agapē-love of God, ...and may people see that we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ!