

LOVE: THE GREATEST PURSUIT

These messages on love are based on an outline for a book the Lord gave me during the winter of 1998 while I was in India, teaching for three months at a new Bible School. In the next two years I wrote 60 chapters. This series is based on some of those updated chapters.

People pursue many things in life: power, peace, pleasure, prosperity, longevity, freedom, security, success and sex etc. However, the greatest pursuit is love, for that is the nature of God. His love is agape love: selfless, sacrificial, perfect, pure love. 1 Corinthians 13 is Paul's reminder to the church of its many qualities, which will be covered in a later message.

'Eagerly pursue and seek to acquire [this] **love** - make it your aim, your great quest.' - 1 Corinthians 14:1 AMP

The apostle Paul wrote those words to the Christians at Corinth, a city of 400,000 that was familiar with other types of love, especially sexual love (eros). As a major port city located where east met west, it had a voluminous amount of traders and sailors passing through. A temple there was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, which also had 1000 priestesses who served as temple prostitutes. They were frequented by ship captains, sailors, traders etc, but others were sex slaves purchased by wealthy Greeks as offerings to Aphrodite. Much like seaport cities today such as Amsterdam, Bangkok, or San Francisco, it was a Vanity Fair of sexual aberration and indulgence. God gave man the gift of eros, but its pleasure was only to be expressed in the confines of a marriage between a man and a woman. Many people confuse lust with true love.

***Lust seeks to benefit self at the expense of others.
Love seeks to benefit others at the expense of self.
- Edwin Louis Cole***

Lust defined: 1. Intense sexual desire
2. A strong wish, craving, desire, compulsion for something
Merriam- Webster Dictionary

People not only lust for sex, they also lust for power and other things we mentioned in the above list of things that people pursue. Many politicians lust for power, not to serve the people, but to enrich themselves financially and to promote their own agendas. When we celebrate America's Independence Day each July 4th, we should remember the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence. They had a strong desire for freedom and were willing to lose their lives, fortunes and sacred honor. Some did lose their fortunes, but their love for America was greater than their love for themselves and what they possessed.

When news of the Declaration of Independence reached New York City by July 9, 1776, it started a riot! While 100's of British naval ships were in the New York harbor, George Washington read 'The Declaration' aloud in front of city hall. A rowdy crowd of

onlookers cheered and later tore down a nearby statue of King George III. Later the statue was melted down and formed into more than 42,000 musket balls for the newly formed colonial army!

America's founders would be ashamed of the current crop of self-serving politicians who proclaim love for country and yet ignore their oath of office to defend this country from enemies both foreign and domestic. They ignore our founders advice to avoid 'entangling foreign alliances'. They promote endless, useless wars and godless policies which will eventually incur God's wrath, while they vainly speak the words 'God Bless America'. Several years ago, I told one of my paint customers that we should stop saying 'God Bless America' but instead say 'God Forgive America'. Leroy took those words to heart and printed up a bumper sticker that read: 'God Forgive America'.

Back to the apostle Paul and the city of Corinth

Paul appreciated God's love, for he was once Saul (his Hebrew name), a man filled with hate, who persecuted believers in Jesus. However, one day he was on his way to Damascus and had an encounter with God's love. He met Jesus. Immediately he went blind, and for the next three days he lived in darkness. God then restored his physical vision, but He did something even greater, He delivered Saul from a lifetime of spiritual darkness and opened his eyes to the reality of Jesus and a new kingdom.

As a Pharisee, Paul was proud of his religious zeal and Jewish spiritual pedigree, his extensive training and his great devotion to the righteous requirements of the law. However, after his encounter with Jesus, his boasting was in the Lord. Paul had been his Roman name and since his commission to preach the gospel message was to Gentiles, he used the name Paul, which meant 'little or small'. It revealed his desire to walk in humility as a servant of God.

The Greeks were proud lovers of knowledge and wisdom, but Paul let them know of something even more important.

'Knowledge puffs up but love builds up' - 1 Corinthians 8:1

How do we get this love? How did Saul get it? He had a God encounter. Most of us will not have such a dramatic experience like him or like that of the many Muslims in the Middle East that are having dreams and visions of Jesus. We are more likely to encounter God's love through his written word, from hearing a message or from the influence of others. True love is like a sweet fragrance that people are drawn to. Jesus is perfect everything. He had more knowledge and wisdom than anyone who walked this earth, but he also had more love per square inch in his human body than any other person who ever walked this earth. People were drawn to Him not only for his teachings and miracles, they also sensed his love for them. Love has emotions and feelings, but above all, love is an action. Someone has said that love is a verb, not a noun.

One book that impacted me greatly before I became a missionary was 'Shadow of the Almighty', written by Elisabeth Elliot, the widow of the missionary Jim Elliot, who was murdered by Auca Indians in Ecuador as he sought to share God's love with them. His

amazing passion and pursuit of God was gripping, and so are many of the Jim Elliot quotes.

'We should remember that while knowledge may make a man look big. it is only love that can make him grow to his full stature. For whatever a man may know, he still has a lot to learn, but if he loves God, he is opening his whole life to the Spirit of God.' - Jim Elliot

'I have had to make a cross of two logs and lay down on it, to show the Indians what it means to crucify a man.'

'Missionaries are very human folks, simply a bunch of nobodies trying to exalt somebody.'

'Surely those who know the great passionate heart of Jehovah must deny their own loves to share in the expression of His.'

'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.' - Jim Elliot

The greatest pursuit in life is the pursuit of God, for God is love

'As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, Oh God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.' - Psalm 42:1-2

Full of hate, Paul once pursued Christians in order to persecute and even kill them. God pursued Paul and turned him from hate to love. Paul was born again / born of God from above. **To be born of God** is to be **born of love, for God is love.** Paul would spend the rest of his life in pursuit of lost sinners who needed to know the living God, who is also the loving God. His words to the carnal church at Corinth also apply to us. He had just finished giving them the descriptions of love in 1 Corinthians 13 and now he writes these instructions. (Chapter 13 will be explored later as: The Greatest Way)

Pursue [this] love [with eagerness, make it your goal] 14:1a AMP

Let love be your greatest aim. 14:1a Living Bible

Eagerly pursue and seek to acquire [this] love, make it your aim, your great quest. 14:1a AMP Classic

Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it - because it does. The Message

Let love be your highest goal ! 14:a New Living Translation