



March 29, 2009

John 18–21

“Do You Love Me?”

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John seems to have concluded his Gospel at the end of chapter twenty, but then he added something of an epilogue to his account of Jesus’ life and ministry. In the twenty-first and final chapter we read the account of Peter’s failure. It’s interesting to note that all four Gospels include the details, however, John is the only writer who includes the rest of the story! All four include the fact that Jesus predicted Peter’s denial that he didn’t even know who Jesus was, not once, but three times. Peter was distancing himself from the Lord at a time when Jesus appeared to be an extreme liability. John is the only one to give the details about the way Jesus restored and reinstated Peter.

There was a hit song in 1962 by The Contours, one of the “one-hit wonder” groups of the 60s, titled *Do You Love Me? (Now that I can Dance)* that speaks about conditional love. It’s a song about a guy’s attempt to get a girl to take him back and love him again because he’s learned to dance. In this account, which shows the antithesis of conditional love, Jesus asks Peter three times, “*Do you love me?*” There is no hidden meaning attached to Jesus’ questions and there is no condition in place whatsoever. He didn’t ask, “Do you love me,” now that I’ve risen from the dead or now that I’ve cooked breakfast for you? He just wanted to know the answer to one simple question: “Do you love me just for me?”

To understand more about why Jesus pressed Peter about this, it’s important to remember the details of the night Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples in the Upper Room. In [Mark 14:27, 29–31](#), we read that Jesus predicted the disciples would not remain with him. Peter said, “*Even if all fall away, I will not.*” Jesus’ responded to Peter’s rash statement that in just a few hours Peter would deny he even knew Jesus three times. Peter, for whatever reason, boldly declared and “*...insisted emphatically¹, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’*” In [John 13:37](#) we read that Peter even went so far as to say, “*...I will lay down my life for you.*”

¹ The KJV uses the word vehemently. The Greek word, found nowhere else in the New Testament, means to speak with great emphasis again and again and again.

So, Jesus brought that night to Peter's remembrance, and asked Peter if he really loved him. It's no coincidence that Jesus asked him three times. The Lord gave Peter an opportunity to redeem himself, and an opportunity to right a wrong. It's as if the Lord was saying, "You denied me three times, maybe you'd like three chances to tell me how much you love me?" Jesus, extending grace and mercy to Peter, accepts Peter's honest answer: "*Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*"

Okay, so Peter was restored, what does that mean for us? Well, if you've ever made a promise to God that you did not keep or if you've ever felt too ashamed for past sins and thought the distance between you and God was too great or if you've ever denied knowing God or downplayed being a Christian because you were too embarrassed or too afraid of what other people would think, this is a timely teaching!

Peter, Do You Love Me?

1. About 99% of the time you read the Bible in English, the language is sufficient to draw out the meaning of the text. This is one of the rare cases when only the original language expresses the full meaning of the text.
2. The English language only has one word for love, but the Greek language has four different words for love, depending on the person and the situation.
 - a. Eros – Romantic, sensual love
 - b. Storge – Family love, like that of a parent and child
3. The conversation between Jesus and Peter uses two different words for love: agapao and phileo.
 - a. Agapao – Unconditional, supreme love
 - b. Phileo – Brother love, friendship
4. Jesus, in [John 21:15](#) asked, "Peter, do you love me with the most supreme, unconditional love more than these?"
 - a. It's not known whether Jesus was asking Peter if he loved him more than the fish, his fishing business, or the other disciples, when he said, "*...more than these.*"
5. Peter answered, "Lord, I love you like a brother," which is much different response than what Jesus asked.
6. It seems like Peter never lived up to his definitive claims in the past, but now it looks as though Peter has learned not to overstate his devotion, especially after making over-inflated statements and failing so miserably.
7. Peter, perhaps for the first time, simply answers in a way that is honest with himself and the Lord.
8. The Lord didn't chastise Peter and say, "Well, if you can't love me with the most supreme love, then you are no disciple of mine!"
9. The Lord, with incredible grace said, "*...feed my lambs.*"

Peter, Do You Love Me?

10. Jesus asked the same question again, which Peter answered with the same “lesser love” answer: “I love you like a friend.”
11. The Lord said, “Pastor my sheep.”

Peter, Do You Love Me?

12. The third time Jesus asked this question he dropped the highest form of love and said, “Do you love me like a friend?”
13. Peter replied, “Lord, you know all things. You know I love you like a friend.”
14. The Lord said, “Feed my sheep,” and Peter did just that, considering that less than 40 days later, he preached the first evangelistic message of the New Testament church, with about 3,000 people receiving salvation! ([Acts 2:14–41](#))

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [John 21:10–17](#) to provide an overview of today’s study.
3. Spend some time talking about the people, places and things you *love*.
4. Do you think Christians sometimes get the feeling that the bar is too high?
 - a. Spend time talking about experiences you’ve had when you felt that you weren’t able to love enough, obey enough, serve enough, trust enough.
 - b. Do you think non-Christians, at least the ones who’re open to the things of the Lord, have the opinion that it’s just not possible to “make it” as a Christian because they’re imperfect and have a checkered past?
 - c. How can Christians get the message out that the Lord freely forgives sin and wants to start the process of life-change from the inside out?
 - d. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 5:17](#).
5. Read and discuss [Mark 14:27, 29–31](#) and [John 13:37](#).
 - a. Spend time talking about times when you made a promise to someone, maybe even to the Lord, that you did not or were not able to fulfill.
 - i. What was the level of tension between you and the offended person?
 - ii. Was there an intentional conversation or confrontation about the failure to keep the promise?

- iii. What happened to the relationship?
- iv. Was there forgiveness and restoration?

6. Read and discuss **Deuteronomy 1:30–31**.
 - a. What experiences have you had that demonstrate the Lord came down to your level to meet you where you were?
 - b. How has the Lord carried you through the times when you felt like
7. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: praise the Lord for his faithfulness to love them unconditionally; thank the Lord for his willingness to reconcile and restore to right relationship; ask the Lord to help them recognize that they may not be what they ought to be, but by his grace, they are not what they used to be.