



10/5/26

I really appreciated getting a deeper understanding of the role of elders from the message on Sunday. A true elder models the love and care of Jesus to the church. I pray that we will always encourage that in our elders, and that we will pray for them regularly and consistently. The enemy of our souls knows that if he can take down a leader of the church, he can hurt a ton of people in the church. So, the biggest way we help support our elders is to pray for them. And I pray for all of us, that we will live in such a way that we could lead those in our care in the same way we pray our elders will.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

John 21:15-23

It's pretty cool to see Peter's transformation from selfish, arrogant fisherman to humble, servant hearted fisher of men. The man who wrote 1 Peter was very different from the man who Jesus first called to follow Him in the gospels. It gives me a lot of hope for my own heart. Jesus called me, a very selfish, prideful (veiled by shame) young girl who just wanted to sing. He took me as I was, but He didn't leave me there. He's changing me. Praise His name. Now the only singing I want to do is for His glory... and when my flesh rears its ugly head to fight for its own glory, the Lord has changed my heart from embracing that desire to being repulsed by that desire. I look forward to the day when it's completely gone.

Today's passage is a second calling on Peter's life. The first was to follow Jesus at the start of His three year ministry. The second call was after Jesus had been in the grave for three days and then rose from the dead. Everything changed.

In this passage, Jesus met Peter and some of the other disciples by the Sea of Tiberius (also known as the Sea of Galilee). They had breakfast together, courtesy of Jesus, and afterwards Jesus and Peter had a talk.

Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" Some scholars say that there's no significance to the fact that Jesus used the word "agape" for love... sacrificial, unconditional love... and Peter responded, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You" using a different word for love, "phileo" which means... brotherly love, affection. I can't help but think it's significant. When they were speaking to each other, they were using different words for love.

Why did Jesus ask if Peter loved Him more than the other disciples? On the night Jesus was arrested, He told the disciples that they would abandon Him. Peter scolded Jesus and said, "Even if all these guys fall away from You, I never will! I'll die for you!" And it was after that that Peter, as prophesied by Jesus, denied that he knew Him three times... and then a rooster crowed. So Peter, do you love Me more than these guys as you said you did?

Here, Peter said, "Of course I phileo You." Jesus answered him, "Feed My lambs." Who were His lambs? Did Jesus have a pasture of sheep somewhere Peter didn't know about? Did He want Peter to stop fishing and become a shepherd? Kinda. Yeah. But not of animals. The Lord has called His people sheep all the way back into the Old Testament... Psalm 23, 95:7, 79:13, 100:3, Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34, and the list goes on. Jesus was telling Peter that the way to show his love for Jesus was to take care of Jesus' people, His lambs and sheep.

Jesus asked Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agape) Me?" Peter answered Him, "Yes, Lord. You KNOW that I love (phileo) You." Jesus answered, "Tend My sheep."

The word for tend is "shepherd." First Jesus said to feed them, and now shepherd them. Care for their needs. Lead them. Be active, care, protect, provide just like Jesus did.

Then Jesus asked Peter a third time, but this time He didn't use the word agape. He said, "Simon, son of John, do you phileo Me?" Now, I don't think Peter was saying that he didn't agape Jesus and Jesus changed the word because he lessened the power of the love. Phileo is a pretty powerful love, too. But I think Jesus was about to make the point that loving Him WAS going to be sacrificial and unconditional.

When Peter heard Jesus ask him if he loved Him the third time, it grieved Peter. Scholars say Jesus asked Peter three times because Peter denied Him three times. That makes a lot of sense. It must have been so painful for Peter to know how much he had hurt Jesus on the night of His betrayal. It wasn't just Judas who betrayed Jesus. This was a moment for grieving, but it was also a moment for restoration. Jesus was giving Peter a mission. He wasn't rejecting him, even though He had been rejected. He was restoring him! That gives me a TON of hope!

Our God is so merciful!!! Who else could be treated so poorly by those who were supposed to love Him the most and not reject them for rejecting Him? Jesus knew that He was going to die for the sins of the whole world INCLUDING the sins of the people who were supposed to be His closest of friends. That's amazing. Genuine love holds no grudges.

Well, Jesus asked, "Do you phileo Me?" And Peter answered, "Lord, You know EVERYTHING. You KNOW that I phileo You!"

I wonder if Jesus emphasized different words every time He asked. "Do you love ME?" "DO you love Me?" "Do you LOVE Me?"

"Feed My lambs. Shepherd My sheep." And now the third time, "Feed My sheep." But this time Jesus added how Peter would GLORIFY Him, by dying for Him. Peter had said he was willing to die for Jesus, and then he denied Him three times. But Jesus knew that Peter WOULD be willing to die for Him and He WOULD die for Him and he DID die for Him.

Let me not miss something really important here. This was a deep, emotional conversation between Jesus and Peter... but Jesus wasn't just asking Peter if he loved Him, He was asking Him to let his love for Jesus be poured out onto others. That's the call of God. He NEVER calls me to love Him and not others. There is always for every believer someone God puts in our path to care for... not just to care for physical needs, though He DOES call us to do that, but much more, to care for our spiritual, eternal needs. God wants us to feed others in our path of influence with His word. Jeremiah 15:16 says, "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word became to me a joy and the delight of my soul. For I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of Hosts." Feed them with His word that gives delight to our souls.

God also wants us to shepherd those in our sphere of influence. A shepherd doesn't whip the sheep into submission. A shepherd leads with genuine compassion and care and truth so that the sheep know that the shepherd is safe." A shepherd is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. And that's exactly what Jesus did. That's exactly what Peter eventually did. That's what God calls me to do.

That's a high calling, a supernatural, divine calling. It will not happen unless I'm motivated by my love for Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "The love of Christ controls, compels, motivates us." O Lord, let that be my heart.

Back to the story. Jesus didn't wait for Peter's answer. He knew Peter's heart. He already knew his answer. But Jesus did say, "Follow Me." Now, they did take a walk at that point. But I think there's deeper significance. First, those were some of the first words Peter ever heard Jesus say to him. But also, Jesus was saying, "See the sacrifice I made by laying down My life? Follow Me. You're going to lay down your life for the joy set before you in glorifying Me and seeing many sheep give their hearts to Me." O Lord, I want to have that same willingness! I know if I think about it, I will get scared. But I know if or when a time comes for me to sacrifice myself on the altar of faith, You'll give me the grace and strength to do it. You ALWAYS give grace in my time of need, but not before I need it. Your grace is for the "what is" not for the "what ifs".

Anyway, Jesus and Peter did take a walk. And John followed them from a distance. I love what happened next because it just shows that Peter was a real person. Jesus had just made it clear

that Peter was going to glorify Him by dying for Him. So Peter pointed at John and said, "What about him?" Haha.

How many times have I compared myself to another person and said, "What about that one???" "Why me???" Jesus' answer for Peter is the same answer He has for me. What is that to you? "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

Now, Jesus wasn't saying that John would live until His second coming, but I do think it's interesting that John was the only disciple who was never executed. They tried. Scholars of history even say they threw him into a boiling pot of oil. But he survived. God had different plans for John.

The point is, just because my story looks different than someone else's story, it doesn't mean that God thinks less of me (or more).

I also don't want to miss that Jesus didn't shame Peter at all. He could have reminded him of how he had failed and denied Him. But He didn't. It's such a great example of how God knows that our story doesn't end with failure when we belong to Him. Because my transformation is dependent on the Holy Spirit changing me and not dependent on me changing me, I have the assurance that the end of my story is perfection because God cannot fail. If He's declared it, it absolutely will be. That's why when I mess up along the way, He doesn't shame me. He knows my sanctification is a process. He knows the end from the beginning.

As Jesus talked with Peter, Peter didn't know what would come next, but Jesus did. Jesus spoke without judgment and with confidence. Notice, too, that Peter never had to ask Jesus if He loved him. He already knew. Jesus proved both agape and phileo love to him over and over again all the way to the cross and beyond. He does the same for me. So Lord, because of who You are and all You've done for me, I pray that You'll help me to love You by caring for and actively loving whoever You put before me to love. Let my love for them be based, not on how they treat me... just think of what Your love for me would be if You based it on how I've treated You. 🥺 Let my love for them be based on how You've loved me... with deep affection and unconditional sacrifice. O Lord, I want to feed and care for Your sheep well. May it be so.