

# DO YOU LOVE ME?

## JOHN 21:15-23

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

1. When you were a kid, did you ever get a note asking you if you loved or liked the other person? Or did you send one? (I passed a note to a girl when we were in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and, of course, the teacher saw it and made me read it to the class. Retha never spoke to me again.)
2. What makes asking someone about their love for you dangerous? (You put the other person on the spot. They may give the answer you wanted to hear but their body language may communicate something different.)

Even though this may be a dangerous question, it is an important question. It's really the only way we can judge the potential for any relationship. In John 21, Jesus asked Peter this question three times. In doing so, Jesus helped him move beyond his past failures and reflect on his future ministry.

(Sound of a rooster crowing.)

3. What do you think came to Peter's mind every time he heard a rooster crow?

On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter had denied Jesus three times. The experience devastated him and likely stuck with him after the resurrection. But in today's study we'll see that Jesus wasn't through with Peter—and He wanted Peter to understand that.

Jesus had told the disciples to meet Him in Galilee, so they had traveled, back home. While they were waiting Peter decided to go fishing and six of the others went with him. After fishing all night and catching nothing someone (Jesus) from the shore told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. They did and caught a large number (153) of large fish. John said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So, Peter, true to his nature, jumps in the water and swims the 100 yards to shore while the other disciples drag the net to shore.

Jesus had a charcoal fire going and cooked some of the fish for them to eat. After the meal, Jesus strikes up a conversation with Peter. It might seem strange for Jesus to ask Peter such a personal question in public, but his denial of Jesus was in public as well. Perhaps Jesus asked Peter these questions because Peter thought his ministry was ruined beyond repair.

### Do YOU? Read John 21:15-17

1. Why did Jesus use Peter's given name, Simon rather than the name Jesus had given him earlier, Peter? (Perhaps Jesus was trying to communicate to Peter this was a new and fresh start to their relationship.)

2. What key words or phrases do we find in this passage? ("Do you love me;" and "more than these?") Jesus used the word for love that meant the highest form of love, *agapao*. When Peter responded he used the word *phileo*, which denotes friendship. Some scholars believe these words for love are used interchangeably. Many scholars believe the words are different and denote different levels of love. I believe the latter.

3. What did Jesus mean by the phrase "more than these?" (There are three possibilities. Do you love me more than these, and Jesus motioned to the fish, boats, and nets. **Second**, do you love me more than you love these other men? **Third**, do you love me more than these other disciples love me?)

We really don't know for sure, but I believe the last option. The reason I believe that is earlier on the night of Peter's denials, Jesus had warned that all the disciples would fall away after his arrest—**Matt. 26:31-32**. Peter insisted that he would remain true even if the others did not—**Matt. 26:33**. In a sense Jesus asked Peter, "Do you still think that you love Me more than the others do?"

4. Why did Jesus ask Peter the same question three times? (Peter understood without question that Jesus was pointing to his three denials of Jesus.)

Coming face to face with our sins and failures is the only way we can be convicted and come to a point of repentance.

5. The third time Jesus asked Peter the question He used the same word for love Peter had used. Why do you think Jesus did that? (Jesus was accepting Peter where he was and was willing to help him grow to a deeper love.)
6. What did Jesus tell Peter to do after each question? (“Feed my lambs;” Shepherd my sheep;” and “Feed my sheep.”)

Surely Jesus’ teaching about the Good Shepherd came to Peter’s mind as Jesus commissioned him. God wasn’t through with Peter by a long shot. We see that borne out on the day of Pentecost when Peter boldly preached and 3,000 were saved. When we read Peter’s epistles, we realize what a transformation God made in his life. He was no longer Simon but Peter, the rock!

7. Why do we easily think that if we have faltered then the Lord is no longer able to use us? God’s grace in restoration is so important because people are imperfect and will fail. But even when we fail, Jesus is ready and willing to forgive us and restore us to His purposes.

### **WILL YOU? Read John 21:18-19**

What Jesus meant by Peter stretching out his arms pointed to the type of death he would endure. Church tradition states Peter was crucified upside down because he didn’t feel worthy to die as Jesus did. While we don’t have historical proof of this, we know that Peter died a martyr because of his faith.

1. Would knowing you would be a martyr for Christ cause you joy or anxiety? “Martyr” comes from the same Greek word as “witness.”
2. What would you say is the relationship between the two words? (To stand as a firm witness for Jesus Christ will lead to being a martyr in some countries today and unless things change, it will in our nation someday.)
3. What was Jesus’ command to Peter here? (“Follow Me.” For Peter it meant following Jesus to a cross!) This command was like His initial call to Peter—Mk. 1:16-18 and completed Peter’s restoration.

Sometimes in difficult conversations we are tempted to change the subject. Jesus had given Peter some hard truths, but Jesus would not let him shift gears. At some point in their conversation, they had started to walk along the beach and other disciples followed close behind them.

### **WHAT ABOUT YOU . . .? Read John 21:20-23**

1. Do you find yourself from time to time asking God, “what about him or her, Lord? Why do I have it so hard and they get off easy? (It is easy to allow ourselves to get jealous or envious of others at times. Most of the time that happens when we are having a pity party and our focus is not on the Lord.)
2. What are some dangers of comparing ourselves to other believers? (We take our eyes off the Lord and our mission. We forget we have different gifts and tasks within the body. Satan tempts us by making us think someone else has it easier than I do. We get discouraged.)
3. How do we stay focused on God’s call in our life? (As always, stay in the Word, pray, stay connected to the church worship times and Bible study group.)
4. What was Jesus’ ultimate command for Peter? (After a mild rebuke Jesus repeated “As for you, follow Me!”)

### **SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE!**

God had a personal plan for both Peter and John. Both were important for the kingdom. God also has a personal plan for each of us, and we should focus on personal obedience. As we fulfill our calling, the kingdom grows stronger and other believers are encouraged. What’s more, the world will see our love for Jesus and be drawn to Him.

1. How would you answer if Jesus asked if you really loved Him?
2. How can we become a place to foster restoration with Jesus?

3. Reflect on times when you have failed Jesus in some way. Have you asked Jesus to forgive and restore you?

If not, take a few minutes and ask for His forgiveness.

4. What can you learn from that experience that will help you in the future to remain faithful to Jesus?