

After that final miraculous catch of fish and the disciples' flashback to when they were first called, their minds must have been going a mile a minute. Try to stand in their sandals and wonder in awe with them. Was Jesus going to now establish the Kingdom? (Acts 1:6) Was He going to gather an army here in Galilee and get those guys that crucified Him? What did He mean when He met with them the last time and told them they were now sent like He was sent by the Father? (John 20:21) And by the way, where did He get those fish and loaves He already had on the fire?

The disciples had drug the net ashore. Jesus had invited them to join Him for breakfast and served them what He had prepared. It must have been so surreal. Last week He was dead. Now He's serving breakfast! They are all back where it started. Everything is so familiar, and yet it couldn't be more different. He died! God raised Him! He's physical, but He appears and vanishes. (Luke 24:39) The wounds are there, but He's so full of life, joy, and utter confidence. (Matthew 28:18) Yet, they are doing something so mundane as having breakfast.

I have to tell you of an experience that made me think of this story. One morning at a hotel on the shore of Galilee, our Christian Palestinian guide, Wissam, joined us for breakfast. He grabbed a half a loaf of bread, made a hole in it with his hand, filled it with fish, and began munching away. I thought to myself, "Some traditions never change, even after 2000 years."

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." The conversation began while they were sitting around a charcoal fire. (anthracia- John 21:9) The only other time that word was used was when Peter was in Caiaphas' courtyard and three times denied that he knew Jesus. Now, around a similar charcoal fire, warming themselves from the cool of the early morning (19:18), Jesus is giving Peter three chances to reaffirm his love.

Jesus asked Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" I don't think Jesus was asking if Peter loved him more than the other disciples. Jesus had rebuked them for comparing themselves and wanting to be superior to the others. (Luke 9:46-48) He can't be starting a "who loves Me most" competition. He had to be referring to the fish. Do you love me more than these fish, the security they bring, the smell of the lake, the thrill of a big catch? And Peter said, "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked, "Do you agape me more than the fish?" Agape is God's kind of love, a love that is a choice, a love that doesn't demand anything in return. (This paragraph from my sermon The Last Breakfast)

Recent commentators downplay the difference in the words used for "love" here in this passage (agape and phileo), pointing out that John seems to use them almost interchangeably. I side with the older commentators in this instance. I can't imagine that John, who has chosen his words so carefully to this point, would just casually use two different words for "love" in the same verse without having some purpose. He's

Commented [notes1]: 6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." John 20:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." Luke 24:39 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Matt 28:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. John 21:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. John 18:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. 47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest." Luke 9:46-48 (NIV)

recalling the actual conversation that must have been recounted to him by Peter. Peter backslid around a charcoal fire and now Jesus is helping him "forward slide" with that memory fresh in his mind around a similar fire. The two events were just a little more than a week apart.

"So, Peter, do you agape me?" Jesus asked. Peter had been quick to make claims. He was the one that said that if all others deserted Jesus, he would never desert Him (Matthew 26:33), but he did. For us to understand the anguish Peter was feeling, we have to understand the relationship of a disciple and his rabbi. A rabbi was said to be like a father to his disciples. One teaching declared that if your rabbi and your father were both held for ransom, you should ransom your rabbi first. Such was the first century relationship between a rabbi and disciple, which gives us insight into the turmoil Peter felt as he had to honestly answer his Rabbi's questions about his heart. When Peter failed, he went out and wept bitterly. He isn't as confident as he once was.

Jesus is asking if Peter's love goes beyond selfish demands to an unconditional choice. Peter humbly responded, "You know I *phileo* you." In other words, "You know I love you like a brother." It wasn't so much a choice as it was their time together had bound them like brothers, was the sense of Peter's reply. You are stuck with your brothers. Peter knew he couldn't just walk away and go back to his old life. It wasn't the same. Nothing was the same, especially his self-confidence.

We often wish we could go back to a time when things were easier, less complicated, but time marches on. God is moving us forward, stretching our faith, and this often happens through difficulty and pain. Peter could never go back to the old days before Jesus' call on his life. Truth had been revealed. Commitments had been made. It is impossible to turn back the clock. It's impossible to forget the denials.

Jesus responded, "Feed my lambs." Jesus just fed them physically, but with spiritual significance. Now, He is asking Peter to express the brotherly love he has for Jesus by feeding the young believers spiritually. This is a beautiful picture of the grace of God. After three denials of a relationship with Jesus, one of those with cursing, and unable to say that he loves Jesus with an unselfish, intentional love, Jesus calls Peter again to serve Him as His disciple. "You failed! Okay, now let Me work through you!"

You see, it's not when we get our seminary degree that God calls us. It's not when we have a certain amount of experience. It's when we realize we can't do what God asks of us. It's when we realize that we don't deserve to be chosen, and when we see we are incapable of living out the mission. When someone gives a ministry their own name, a big red flag should go up. Yes there are a few good ones, but it is contrary to this principle. Simon Peter did not respond by starting The Simon Peter School of Shepherding.

I knew I was called from the time I was a youth, but I was re-called after I had miserably failed and had lost all confidence that I could serve God. It was when I felt that I shouldn't be called that the "re-call" came loud and clear. (Isaiah 50:10) If I start a web site called Paul Wallace Ministries, please rebuke me!

Commented [notes8]: 33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."
Matt 26:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.
Isaiah 50:10 (NIV)

Don't think that you have to be a missionary or a pastor to be called. God calls people to represent Him in every walk of life. The call always includes feeding lambs in one way or another. It may be a distraught co-worker than needs a shoulder to cry on and verse from Scripture to cling to. It may be a business contact who you can befriend and share how Jesus has made a difference in your life. It's being Christ like in your business dealings or the way you serve others until someone asks why you are different. It's offering to pray when you see the hurt in someone's eyes. It's being available for God to touch a life through you anywhere you happen to be.

You might say, "Lord, I just can't do that." Then you are ready to be called. Congratulations! That is right where you should be. It has to be His life in you. It has to be the power of the Holy Spirit. You have to be totally dependent on Him. If you said, "Oh yeah! I can do that!" You aren't ready! That is confidence in the flesh and it won't bear fruit that lasts. (John 15:5)

The first time Jesus called Peter, Peter asked Jesus to go away because Peter recognized his own sin and Jesus' holiness. (Luke 5:8) This time Peter is aware of the limitations of his love, and yet, Jesus' grace and mercy invite him to be one who feeds the lambs. Do you see the character of Jesus? He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

The second time Jesus asked the same question, and Peter responded in the same way. This time Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." Feed the lambs and care for the more mature ones, the sheep. He is asking Peter to be a shepherd. Jesus had referred to Himself as a shepherd. He is asking Peter to be like the Lord to them for "the Lord is my shepherd." (Psalm 23:1) Jesus is reiterating the call, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you!" (John 20:21) Grace calls the ones that fail, to feed and lead, because they will be totally dependent on Jesus and therefore most like Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

Finally, Jesus asked if Peter loved (phileo) Him like a brother. Peter answered, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus acquiesces to Peter's commitment level. If your heart can only say your love commitment comes to this point, fine. Jesus will accept that, but thank God He won't leave it there. As we see His love more clearly, the love in our heart will grow into His kind of unconditional love. The question is still, "Do we love Jesus more than things?" If we love Him, we will focus on serving others. We'll care for lambs and feed the sheep. We'll be Jesus to others that desperately need Him. (1 John 4:12)

This was not a new teaching from Jesus. Before His death He told the disciples that if anyone loved Him, they would obey His teaching. (John 14:23) What did He teach? Love God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:30) What was His command? "A new command I give you, love each other as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34) The "as I have" should catch our attention. He loved us to the point of laying down His life for us! That isn't the very contemporary American culture, "What's in it for me?" It's the costly, messy, self-denying, time

Commented [notes10]: 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Luke 5:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." [James 4:6 (NIV)]

Commented [notes13]: 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. Psalms 23:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." John 20:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 1 Cor 1:27-29 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 John 4:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. John 14:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. John 13:34 (NIV)

consuming job of getting involved in others lives to love them with God's love, not a slam, bam, superman.

Three denials from Peter were given three opportunities to confess his love. That came with three reminders from Jesus that He will work through him to meet the needs of those around him. Doesn't He do the same with us? (Ephesians 6:9) How many times have you denied Him in some way? And yet, He graciously gives us the opportunity to confess our love for Him and serve others. He just won't give up on us! Thank God!

18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Peter had lost confidence in his ability to stand with Jesus when the going got tough. Jesus is now telling Him that it's okay. Jesus will help him to the end. *Then he said to him, "Follow me!"* Just follow and you will be able to face what you failed. "Follow me!" It's the call of a rabbi to his new disciple. Start afresh. His mercies are new every morning!

Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. The apocryphal book, *The Acts of Peter*, tell of Peter fleeing the persecution after Nero's fire in Rome. He is said to have met Jesus on the road as he fled Rome, but Jesus was going into Rome. Peter asked where He was going (Quo vadis). Jesus answered, "To be crucified again." This gave Peter the courage to continue his ministry and face martyrdom. The account is a legend, but it may have some basis in truth.

None of us can honestly say if we would stand up for Jesus if it meant a painful death. We'd like to think we would, but we can't be sure. And yet, just as Jesus helped Peter to do what he had failed at before, He will surely help us with as well. Sometimes the dying daily can be harder than the final decision. (Matthew 10:38) Jesus will help us glorify God in that regard as well if we will look to Him alone for the strength and direction we need.

Peter used to do what he desired and go where he pleased. That would no longer an option. No more fishing trips on a mere whim. The Master is back. He is a disciple, a servant. He thought that was true the first time the Lord said, "Follow me!" It wasn't. There was still a little, "What's in it for me?" in Peter's heart. Now with this "re-call", so to speak, this "forward slide", Peter will give up his plans, dreams, even desires and truly follow Jesus. The ultimate expression of that will be his death.

We can all be like Peter, giving up our freedom, our grip on the steering wheel of life and let God take over. It is the beginning of a fantastic adventure filled with joy, meaning and purpose, along with many a trial. (Acts 14:22)

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Apparently Jesus and Peter had walked off to have this one on one, but John tagged along. It's wonderful how Jesus deals with us personally, and yet we are part

Commented [notes20]: 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. Eph 6:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Matt 10:38 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Acts 14:22 (NIV)

of a community. I'm glad John felt he couldn't leave Jesus' side so that we could have the details that follow. (Romans 14:4)

Peter heard that he was going to die a martyr, so he asked about John. ²² *Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."* Peter! Snap out of it! This is YOUR 're-call' notice. Forget about other people and competition and focus on what is happening right here and right now. You must follow me! Did you get it? Do I need to repeat it?"

Someone always has a word for someone else. Their life is a mess but they need to be the voice of God to you. Here is the voice of God for you, "Follow Jesus!" That is what we really need to hear! "What about that other guy, that para-church ministry, or that strange person that has been coming to church?" No, what about you and me doing what is most important, following Jesus, and let Jesus deal with the other person in His good time. (Romans 14:4) Let's follow Jesus!

²⁴ *This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.* Dear brother John, the Beloved Apostle, lived to an old age. If tradition is correct, the Romans tried to boil him in oil, and when it didn't bother him, they exiled him to an island, Patmos. His last years were spent in Ephesus as an elder. Because he followed Jesus, we have this wonderful Gospel that is so rich with detail and revelation of Jesus, his letters, and the Book of Revelation.

He is giving testimony, like in a court of law, but actually in the court of the world. You and I are like jurors that have heard his testimony. He swears to have told us the truth. Now we must decide. Everyone must decide what they believe about Jesus.

He has one more thing to tell us. ²⁵ *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.* John is saying he had to pick and choose because there is so much material. He picked from his memory the things that would help us believe. I think that is why we love this gospel so much.

Jesus is still at work. He's still doing things in your life and mine. The book of Acts is really the acts of Jesus in the lives of believers. The history of the church is the acts of Jesus over the last 2000 years. Think of all the little and big acts of Jesus in your life. Multiply that times millions, even billions. The world would not have room for the books that would be written, the testimonies of all those saints who have each been met individually, called and "re-called", humbled, blessed time and time again, witnessed a thousand God-incidences, wondered at His care and yet we each probably miss most of His gracious working in our lives. No, the world couldn't contain incredible work of Jesus during His earthly life, and even more, in the lives of His own.

This is John's good news. It calls us to be like his rabbi, Jesus. It calls us to love one another. It calls us to see Jesus as the eternal God incarnate, who demonstrated the greatness of His love for you. It calls us to go out into the world and be like Him!

Let us close this incredible book with the same question in our hearts. Hear Jesus ask you, "Do you agape Me?" What's your answer? What's His response?

Commented [notes23]: 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
Romans 14:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
Romans 14:4 (NIV)