

John (So That You Might Believe) (Week 12/12) Do You Love Me?

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Identify 5 people on your frontlines who don't yet know Jesus. Plan a time to pray for them each day.*

Warm-Up

1. A lot can happen in two weeks! What has the past fortnight been like for Jesus and the disciples?
2. How would it have been like an emotional rollercoaster? How would Peter have likely felt?

Read John 21:15-17

3. What has just happened prior to Jesus' and Peter's conversation? Who was present?
4. What does Jesus ask Peter? How many times does he ask? How did Peter *feel* about this?
5. If a loved one asks you 'if you love them' how would that make you feel? *What if they asked three times?*
6. How does the repetition point back to another event involving Peter around a fire?
7. What name does Jesus use with Peter? What is significant about the use of Peter's 'former' name?
8. Why was the denial of Jesus particularly pertinent for Peter? What had Peter previously claimed?
9. Are we ever at risk of also 'denying' Jesus? In what situation are you most tempted to 'deny' Jesus?
10. Why is *loving Jesus* the most important priority for every follower of Jesus? How is Christ's forgiving love the basis and the springboard from which we love him? How can we be secure in God's love?
11. Every time Peter declares his love for Jesus, how does Jesus respond? What does he mean by this?
12. By addressing Peter's threefold denial, how is Jesus actually restoring Peter to ministry?
13. Whilst Peter had a very particular call in the life and leadership of God's church, how do we all share in the ministry of loving God's people? How do you express this week-to-week?
14. How could you grow in your serving of Jesus by loving God's people and church?

Read John 21:18-25

15. What is Jesus referring to in verse 18? How can we give thanks for Peter's faithfulness?
16. What was Peter's concern about the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'? How does Jesus respond?
17. As we seek to follow Jesus, how can comparing ourselves actually take our eyes (and heart) off following Jesus? Does that mean that we can't be inspired by the example of others?
18. Are there any areas in your life in which you are finding it challenging to follow Jesus?
19. What is the most helpful 'life advice' that you've ever received? What do you think is the best possible advice that you could give to a follower of Jesus?
20. What has *stood out for you* or how *have you grown* through our time looking at John's Gospel together?

Apply *What most helps nurture your love of Jesus? Does anything in your life inhibit your love for him?*

Pray *Gracious Father, thank you that Jesus is our crucified and risen king! Please help us everyday with all that we have to love Jesus, serve Jesus, and follow Jesus. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

John (So That You Might Believe) (Week 12/12) Do You Love Me?

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

Who are 5 people on your frontline who don't yet know Jesus? Commit to praying for them each day.




For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Feed My Sheep” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/feed-my-sheep/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Peter - Feed My Lambs” by John Stott:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=51790&show_file=53978
- *Listen (sermon):* “A Spiritual Failure” by Vaughan Roberts:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/a-spiritual-failure/#sermons>

Series Resources

- *Read:* “John: An Expository Commentary” by R C Sproul.
- *Read:* “The Gospel According to John” by Don Carson.
- *Read:* “The Message of John” by Bruce Milne. 
- *Read:* “John for Everyone: Part 1” by Tom Wright. 
- *Read:* “Can We Trust the Gospels?” by Peter Williams. 
- *Watch:* “John” by the Bible Project: <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-john/>
- *Previous Series* from St Bart’s (including Children’s Resources):
<https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/jesus-is>
<https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/i-am>
<https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/truth-glory>

 Available to borrow from the St Bart’s Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

JOHN (SO THAT YOU MIGHT BELIEVE)

Week 12/12 “Do You Love Me?”

by the Rev'd Adam Lowe

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Bible Passage: John 21:15-27

Heart of Sermon: *When we come to belief, the purpose of our lives
is set about to love, serve, and follow Jesus..*

*Gracious Father, thank you that Jesus is our crucified and risen king!
Please help us everyday with all that we have to love him, serve him, and follow him.
In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

It's been two weeks since we celebrated Easter,
and as Jesus cooks breakfast on the beach for his disciples (in John 21),
it's probably been about two weeks since his death and resurrection.

- A lot can happen in just a couple of weeks:
You can sell a house, move country, start a new job. *Go from having no kids to being a parent.*
From being a school student to being a graduate. /
- Shift *from* joy to grief. Or grief to joy. /
- But the last few weeks for Jesus and the disciples, are some of the most pivotal weeks—
or I would claim the most pivotal weeks—in all of human history.
- Jesus had entered Jerusalem triumphantly.
Was tried, flogged, and then crucified.
Dead — he was buried. But on the third day he rose victoriously.
And since then he has appeared to the disciples three times. //
- The disciples have gone from: *Elation to confusion. Fear to sorrow. Grief to joy.*
They've had all the 'feels'. *It's been a rollercoaster and no doubt emotionally harrowing.*
But — now — it's a bit of a strange in-between time.
- *In just 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the disciples inhabit a thin slice of time,*
between a three-year chapter of their lives following Jesus around, *and*
a new chapter of their lives of being sent out to tell the good news about Jesus.

- They've just experienced a series of *dramatic* and *world-shaking* events in quick succession. *But now on the beach, everything slows down as the risen Lord Jesus meets with them, privately, readying them for what is next.*

Remember, the whole purpose of John recording the signs in his Gospel: *is in order that people might **believe** that Jesus is the Messiah and God's Son.* That's his goal!

- But John lands his account, by showing us what happens next for those who do believe. Of the implication — *that the Messiah and God's Son — has risen from the dead.* /
- We live in light of the same reality. //
- *One of the features I love about John's Gospel is that it is full of personal encounters with Jesus.*
- Last week we looked at what happens when Jesus tags along on your fishing trip. *They had caught nothing before Jesus showed up but things changed when he did!*
- This week, we zoom in on a conversation with Peter that *really* needed to happen. *It's been a big few weeks for him. Peter has probably experienced every emotion imaginable.*
- Excitement. Optimism. Confusion. Fear. Grief. Regret.
- And as the familiar smell of a charcoal fire burns, Jesus is preparing him for what's next.

So what does Peter need to do with the rest of his life? *Just three things which are also true for us.*

- **Love Jesus; Serve Jesus; and Follow Jesus.**
- Sounds simple, but let's take a look!

LOVE JESUS | VERSES 15-17

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First, Peter needs to *first-and-foremost* **LOVE Jesus**. Verse 15...

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."*

If you've ever had someone *whom you love* ask *if you love them*, it's usually not a good sign!

- We can feel judged — *that our love is not enough.*
We can feel insecure — *that what we thought was sure is not that certain.* We can feel sad — *because just asking the question suggests the person doesn't feel loved or our love is not evident.*
- And note Jesus doesn't just ask Peter once. *He asks him THREE times!*
Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?
- Jesus isn't needy — *desperately hanging for the affirmation of Peter's love.*
Jesus isn't gaslighting Peter — *trying to get him to doubt the state of his own heart.*
And he's probably not even making a distinction between different types of love.
- Perhaps you've heard that idea before? That's because...

- In the original language of John's Gospel, the word for 'love' that Jesus uses in the first two instances — is *agapē* — which can mean a self-sacrificial and unconditional type of love. But the word that Peter responds with is *phileō* — *which is more like a brotherly affection*. So Jesus asks: Simon "Do you *agapāō* me?" Peter responds: "You know I *phileō* you." Jesus asks again: "Do you *agapāō* me?" Peter still responds "You know I *phileō* you." So then the third time, Jesus asks, "Do you *phileō* me?" Peter says: "You know I *phileō* you."
- *Some have suggested that Jesus just lowered the standard because he wasn't getting anywhere!*
- But that's probably not what is happening here.
Not only would they have been speaking in Aramic which doesn't have the same distinction. But John tends to use those two words of love pretty interchangeably in his Gospel.
- *The emphasis is probably not a distinction between types of LOVE, but the obvious repetition!*

Jesus asks Peter if he loves him three times, *likely* because Peter denied Jesus three times.

- It's the elephant in the room or by the beach. *Jesus asking Peter three times if he loved him, must have caused the memory of his threefold denial to resurface.* How could it not have?
- Surely Peter was thinking about that from the moment he encountered the risen Jesus! [?]
- **The SMELL of the charcoal fire** that Jesus used to cook the fish, *must have taken him back to him warming himself around another fire, as Jesus was being tried. A fire around which Peter was asked if he was one of Jesus' disciples: And he responded: I AM NOT. I AM NOT. I AM NOT.*

- **When Peter is questioned by Jesus if he loves him more** *more than the other disciples, that must have caused him to recall his claim that even all fall away, that he never will.*
- **Even the NAME Jesus used to address Peter would have brought his denial to the surface.**
- Jesus doesn't call him 'Peter'.
The name Jesus gave him — *meaning the rock on which I will build my church.*
But Jesus addresses him as *Simon son of John. Simon, son of John. Simon, son of John.*

Jesus isn't just trying to make Peter feel bad and rub it in. But he's also not going to ignore what happened and sweep it under the carpet. This is a reset moment!

- *Jesus is facing Peter with the reality of his failure so that he would entrust himself anew to his Lord. Jesus is pressing Peter — as Don Carson puts it — to restore him not to crush him.*
- And the only way that Peter can be restored is on the basis of Christ's *forgiving love*.
- That's why Jesus is bringing the failure to the surface. / We need to know that, too!
We may have not been asked if we're followers of Jesus as we're warming ourselves around a fire, but of course, we can end up denying Jesus — by word and life — everyday.
Through our **silence** *in the workplace when we dare not mention the name of Jesus.*
Through our **words** *when we speak in a way that does not reflect who our Lord is.*
Through our **lives** *when the priorities of how we live are disconnected from our Lord's priorities.*
- / If we are aware of the ways that we do fall short, of our failures, we can sometimes feel like God is done with us or that we somehow have no role to play. /

- Sometimes we just don't know what to do with the ways in which we have fallen short.
- But take heart, that the foundation for all that Peter will do next, is not: his strength, nor his performance, not even an unwavering faithfulness. The foundation for stepping forward is a love for Jesus in response to Jesus' forgiving love for him.
- Jesus' forgiving love — not Peter's failure — has the final word. //
- One of the things that I love about having a corporate confession every time we gather, is not only that it's *just* being real and acknowledging we're all in the same boat, but also that we're together rehearsing the Gospel over-and-over again so that it will increasingly take a grip on our heart. *We're being reminded, and are being invited to rejoice*, that it is *only* because Jesus died for us and because he rose again, that when we bring our failures to him in repentance, we're welcomed with forgiveness.
- As Jesus readies Peter for the mission and ministry which lies ahead, Jesus' primary question for Peter, is not about having all his doctrine lined up. It's not a mission plan for what he'll do next. / But a question of where his love lies. What we love the most is what will shape our life the most.

The 4th century North African bishop, Augustine, put it like this:

“my weight is my love; wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me”

- Augustine is saying just as the physical weight of our bodies will pull it in a direction, what we love most will have a gravitational pull determining where we orient our life.

SERVE JESUS | VERSES 15-17 (again)

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- See why Jesus' question to Peter is so important? //
- If we make career, money, or success our primary love, then everything in our life will move in that direction. But being a disciple of Jesus, means making him our primary love, so that everything moves toward him. That's what Peter needs to know.

Love Jesus. / Second, disciples need to **SERVE Jesus**. /

Notice that each-and-every time that Jesus asks Peter *if* he loves him, *and Peter kind of says yes*, Jesus responds in the same way.

Feed my lambs. / Take care of my sheep. / Feed my sheep.

Once again, people have made much of the variations in Jesus' three response, but what's important to note is the **repetition** of what Jesus is saying!

- *Jesus is making a connection between how our love for him should be expressed in serving him. Not to earn his love — of course not! But in response to his sacrificial love for us.*
- As Jesus is restoring Peter, he's saying, *if you love me, then you need to love my people.*
- You'll want them to be cared for and to be growing. [Two *really* simple questions as we seek to love people: how can I care for them? How are they growing as a follower of Jesus?]

- That's a priority, because: *to love Jesus is to love what Jesus loves! (as Christopher Ash puts it.)*
- *If we love Jesus, then each of us also has a responsibility to love his bride — the church!*
- It's a packaged deal! You can't say, I'll love Jesus but have nothing of his people.
- That doesn't mean it's easy! But it also doesn't mean it's optional.
It's not like ordering a meal at a restaurant and asking them to drop the cabbage.
- It's critical: because being described as sheep isn't the greatest compliment in the world!
We wander off. We're defenceless on our own. We can't feed ourselves.
And occasionally, just occasionally we do some pretty daft things!
- Jesus is our shepherd, of course! Praise God for that!
He's also given us under-shepherds to help with that work.
(Peter will have a very particular and important role for the benefit of God's sheep.)
But in a way — we all share in that work. / Christ shares his work with us. //
- The night before Jesus died, one of his primary concerns — by word and prayer,
was that those who follow him would love one another.
Not just because it's 'feel good'. / Not just because that's the fruit of grasping his love for us.
But remarkably, because *how we love another is how others can now that we follow him.*

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

- Loving others is not just a way that we serve Jesus. *It's a way we share the Good News of Jesus.*

- The one to whom we belong. [TL] /
- One of the great joys of being part of *this* Christian community,
is witnessing the myriad of ways that God people nurture God's sheep.
- That happens in *big* ways and *small*. / In ways are *seen* and *behind-the-scenes*.
- When people visit St Bart's, one of the most common comments I hear is that people are
amazed by the diversity of people who serve *and the ways that people do serve*.
- More personally, I'm profoundly grateful to God for the way in which my own kids,
are lovingly served and disciplined in the more obvious ways, but also the informal ways.
- One of the reasons we show up is so that we have the opportunity to love one another. /
- Of course, serving Jesus by loving his people doesn't just mean at church.
And it also doesn't mean that it's always easy. *It's often costly and hard.*
- But why would we think it would be easy?
If Christ called us to love one another as he loved us,
the way we serve one another is sacrificial by its very nature.
- It's a cross-shaped love.
- Jesus doesn't minimise the cost to Peter. Not at all.
He lays it out.

FOLLOW JESUS | VERSES

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And calls Peter to **FOLLOW him**. *Picking up just before verse 20...*

¹⁹ [Jesus] said to him, “**Follow me!**” 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?” ²² Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must **follow me**.”

It’s extraordinary that in response to Jesus calling Peter to *love, serve, and follow* him, Peter’s first inclination is to turn around, and ask “how about that guy?!” *How about John?!*

- *This sounds like a scene from the Lowe Household when someone is asked to do something, like hang out the washing, put the dishes away, you know some extraordinarily sacrificial act of service, and the immediate response is, but what about so-and-so (insert the sibling’s name), what about them?*
- There’s no doubt that Peter faces an extraordinarily challenging road ahead. When Jesus says to Peter, “that when you are old you will stretch out your hands,” that’s likely an allusion to how Peter will die — by crucifixion like his Lord.
- But the moment that Peter just cracks open the door of comparison, Jesus closes it. Follow me. What about him? What is that to you? YOU MUST FOLLOW ME.

Jesus isn’t saying that we’re all meant to be a bunch of hyperindividuals.

He’s also not closing the possibility of being inspired or spurred on by the example of others.

- But Jesus doesn’t want Peter to go down a road of comparing himself with John. The only road that Jesus wants for Peter, is one where he’s keeping in step with him.
- *Jesus has just dealt with Peter’s denial, now he’s circumventing his potential to be distracted.*
- When we get into the business of comparing ourselves to other Christians, our eyes are focusing on them instead of our Lord.
- And a bit like skiing, whatever you fix your eyes on, that’s kind of where you end up going.
- If Peter develops a preoccupation and unhealthy comparison with John, it is going to derail him from where the Lord is leading him. Imagine if Peter had become obsessed with John? It could have been disastrous.
- Miroslav Volf in his book “The Cost of Ambition” makes the point that whilst we can have a healthy appreciation of other people which leads to no envy or loss of self, remaining confident in Christ. There also exists a pernicious type of comparison, in which we become preoccupied with measuring our worth and their worth.
- If we think we’re behind, it can lead to envy, dissatisfaction, even anxiety. If we think we’re ahead, it can lead to pride, complacency, and superiority.
- Either way we’re trapped. *Either way, we’ve unintentionally made someone else our master.*
- We’re running the same race, but in different lanes. We need the whole body at work.

- We just need to be faithful where Jesus has put us. / *I love how one commentator puts it:*
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There are many others on the road with us, as truly Christ's, as surely commissioned, as deeply loved, as greatly valued. Their calling and gifts may be different; their instincts, even their convictions in certain matters, may not coincide with our own; but we can thank God forth and at times be inspired and challenged by their examples. In the end however, our focus must remain on Jesus himself.

- If you've ever found yourself trapped by comparison, perhaps you need to hear the words of Jesus: *what is that to you? //*
 - *One of my favourite podcasts asks the question to each guest: what is the worst life advice you've ever received? Well, there's no short of bad advice. But I can tell you some of the best life advice we'll ever receive as disciples, because it comes straight from Jesus. Love me. Serve me. Follow me.*
 - *And that's what the disciples did. They didn't set up a shrine - because the tomb was empty. They didn't appoint a successor to their Lord- because Jesus lives. AND: They didn't shy away from proclaiming the Good News - because Jesus sent them out.*
 - *They got up, one day after the next, to love, serve, and follow Jesus, even unto death.*
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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 recorded all these signs so that we might believe that Jesus is God's Son and King.
And once we do, our lives become a signpost to the one who was raised, who reigns, and will return.