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## TEND MY LAMBS

Jesus fixed breakfast on the beach for the disciples, reminding them of His calling to be "*fishers of men*." Sitting around a charcoal fire with fish and bread, deeper conversation ensues, recorded in John 21. "**Simon, son of John, do you love Me?**" asks Jesus. He uses Peter's whole formal name, not nickname. Your mother meant business when she called you that way. Jesus says, pay attention, this is serious.

But what did Jesus mean? Do you love me more than your fishing buddies and all this gear? You know how your toys and friends can take you away from the Lord's work, especially on Sundays or Wednesday "church night." Did Jesus mean, do you love Me more than these other disciples do? They remembered that before his denial, Peter had stepped forward to proclaim, "*Lord, I will lay down my life for You.*"

Peter had sinned publicly, and needed to be restored publicly, for his and the disciples' sake. He has repented and received the Lord's forgiveness. And now in John 21:15, Peter answers, "**Lord, You know that I love You.**" Jesus says to him, "**Feed My lambs.**" Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who gives His life for His lambs, but now He is returning to heaven. Who will care for His sheep?

Jesus says a second time, "**Simon, son of John, do you love Me?**" Likely the disciples recall how often, especially right before His crucifixion, Jesus had told them, "*If you love Me, you will obey Me.*" This time Peter gives an affirmative reply, "**Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.**" Jesus says, "**Tend My sheep.**" Repetition may be painful, but necessary, to affirm Peter's restoration.

The right answer doesn't mean much if you don't follow through with action. In Matthew 16, Peter had confessed Jesus, then rebuked Him for talking about impending crucifixion. And Jesus said, "*Get behind Me, Satan; you are a hindrance to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.*" Saying you love Me but not obeying Me, betrays your true intentions.

Jesus asks a third time, "**Simon, Son of John, do you love Me?**" Peter is grieved about being asked three times. No doubt he ruefully recalls he had denied the Lord three times. Peter replies, "**Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You.**" Jesus says, "**Feed My sheep.**" Twice Jesus uses the Greek word for self-giving "*agape*" love, and once, brotherly "*phileo*" love. These are often interchanged in Scripture, even when English readers might expect a certain one. Jesus also interchanged sheep, lambs and tend, feed. Over-emphasizing Greek obscurities can also obscure the meaning of a text. Cults often do this, as they read too much into a text (eisegesis), instead of reading out what it says (exegesis).

Point is, love involves the heart and head and will. Jesus' words recall Himself as the Good Shepherd of John 10, who is not a hireling who runs away, but who gives His life for His sheep. Jesus restores Peter to do likewise, as he had once declared. Peter is called as an under-shepherd, who feeds the master's sheep, provides good grazing and tends to their care in every respect, to grow the flock.

Jesus says, "Peter, be a care-giving example to others. Love, trust, obey Me and My words, to do the work of making disciples who make disciples, future followers of Me." Peter learned his lessons well. In 1 Peter 5, he writes, "*shepherd the flock of God, willingly, not lording over them, but being examples to the flock. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility.*" Not thinking less of yourself, but of others more.

You are tempted by the world, flesh and devil. But God knows your weaknesses. If you are one of His sheep, nothing can snatch you out of His hand. In Luke 22, Satan demanded to sift Peter like wheat. But Jesus said, "*I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again (repented and been restored) strengthen your brothers.*" Properly humbled, Peter can now both serve and lead.

He writes in 1 Peter 5, "*Humble yourselves, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your cares on Him, because He cares for you. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*"

Peter KNOWS what he's talking about. Then he tenderly tends the Lord's lambs: "*And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!*"