

The Purple Corner

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Do You Love Me? How do I Know?

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these”? He said to Him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” John 21:15

Let's pretend for a moment that Jesus is asking this question of you. Instead of Simon Peter, substitute your own name in the question, _____, son/daughter of _____, do you love me more than these? Would your answer be the same as that of Peter? Would you say to the Lord, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you?” Has Jesus ever asked you that question only to then say to you, “Feed my lambs?”

All of us at some time or another have asked this question of someone we hold near and dear to our hearts because if the truth be told all of us want and need to be loved. We want some proof that the person who says he loves us, really does. Sometimes when we ask this question we get the same response that Peter gave, “Yes, you know that I love you.” But what proof do we have that the statement is true? And why do we find it necessary to ask?

Do we ask just for the sake of asking and how satisfied are we with the answer? Jesus did not ask this of Peter for the mere sake of conversation, nor did he ask because he did not know Peter's true feelings toward him. Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh knows all things. So we can assume that he had another reason for asking. Is it safe to say that the question was more for Peter's benefit than it was for Jesus'?

As we continue our reading in this particular passage of the gospel we find in v.16 that he said to him a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?” Once again Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?” By this time Peter was getting just a little bit perturbed and said to Jesus, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus' response was, “Feed my sheep.”

How can we apply this scenario to our own lives and relationships with our significant others? Do we ask this question simply to get an answer of “Yes, you know that I love you”? Or are we asking because we really don't know if that person loves us?

Are we asking because there is some degree of doubt based on the answer we get versus the action that person shows toward us? It is easy to respond with the same answer that Peter gave but what do our actions show? Do our words align with our behavior or do they somehow and in some way leave us confused? If you come close to me with your mouth and yet your heart is far away, do you really love me?

Before leaving this passage we need to ask ourselves why Jesus asked Peter the question three times. We know from further study that the number of times he asked the question aligned with the number of times Peter denied Jesus so when we ask more than once is it because of some action that contradicts with the words? Do we know that something will happen in the future that will give us reason to ask again? Or perhaps it was something that happened in the past. Umm, it may be both.

In addition to pondering why Jesus asked the question three times we should also examine his response. First he said, “Feed my lambs.” Second, he said, “Tend my sheep.”

The third time he said, “Feed my sheep.” Are we to gather from these responses that there has to be a correlation between the words we declare and the actions we demonstrate in order for the love to be authentic? I would like to take this a step further and say that it may not be enough for us to just ask this question of our loved ones but if we are to follow the example of Jesus, perhaps we must also give that significant other some contrite examples of what we consider proof that they really do love us. Think about it. If we are bold enough to ask, or we honest enough to tell?