

Restoring A Wounded Healer

John 21.15-17

John 21 is all about Peter, who became leader of the early church. It isn't a flattering picture – we are reminded that he still had 'feet of clay' – but what we discover is an affirmation of God's love, grace, and forgiveness, something every believer needs today.

The background to this encounter

- Peter is part of the "inner circle" of disciples closest to Jesus
- Jesus famously approves, and rebukes, Peter (Mt. 16)!
- In Jesus' hour of greatest need, Peter denies Him! (Jn. 19)
- In the wake of this, Peter is unconsolable (Lk. 22.62)

Time has passed, but the pain lingers, deep within...

Three Lessons from Jesus' Words to Peter

- *God is interested in restoration, not condemnation (He's not holding our sins against us)*
- *Heartfelt love is what God is looking for (not a commitment to never sin again)*
- *Jesus wants us to 'care for His sheep'*



1. The background to Jesus' dialogue with Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in John 21.15-17 includes not just Peter's denial, but the overall reputation Peter had as Jesus' disciple. Think back over the Gospels' accounts involving Peter. What stands out to you? For a review of events involving Peter, read these sections of Matthew: 4.18-20; 8.14-17; 14.22-33; 16.13-20, 21-23; 17.1-8; 18.21ff; 19.27-30. Now review the setting of Peter's denial (his words to Jesus in the Upper Room, then his words after Jesus' arrest): Matt. 26.33-35, 69-75; Mark 14.29-30, 66-72; Luke 22.31-34, 54-62; John 13.36-38; 18.15-18, 25-27). Do you feel his inner torment, having experienced such spiritual 'highs,' and now falling to such a spiritual 'low'?
2. Let's engage in a little 'sanctified reading-between-the-lines'! John tells Peter that the man on the shore is Jesus, and Peter impulsively jumps into the water and swims to shore. Does his excitement at seeing Jesus wane as he is swimming – remembering his threefold denial of Jesus the night He was betrayed? What do you think he said to Jesus on the shore before the others arrived (we aren't told)? Would he be wishing for some adequate way to express his remorse for his denials of Jesus? Why do you think Jesus waited until all the others were there (and they had finished breakfast) to confront Peter about his love? Why did Jesus, the first time He questioned Peter, say, "Do you love Me *more than these*?" Who or what did He mean by "these"? What had Peter proudly said in the presence of the other disciples in the Upper Room?
3. Jesus addresses Peter as "Simon, son of John" each time He asks His question. The *only other time* Jesus addresses Peter this way in the Gospel is in John 1.42, when they first meet. This is a more formal way of addressing someone – and perhaps less familiar. How would this reflect Jesus' questioning Peter's love for Him?
4. Jesus probably asked Peter His question three times because Peter denied Him three times. What did Jesus ask him to affirm? What did Jesus never mention? What did Peter's love qualify him to do? Do you *love* Jesus? Do you express it to Him? How do you show it?