

THAT'S YOUR JOB

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It's pretty important, when you start work with a company, to have a clear understanding of what is expected from you. Why does that company exist? What are your boss' most important values? And what did they hire you to do?

Without clear answers to those questions, you'll flounder, you'll get confused, you'll be frustrated, you'll feel insignificant.

It's pretty much the same with your faith. If you're unclear about your purpose as a Christ-follower, you'll become confused and make trouble, or you'll isolate, or you'll just give up. What does the Lord expect from you? By what values are you to live? And what is God up to in the earth?

In order to answer such questions today, we're going to listen to the words of Apostle Peter. Peter was a headstrong Jewish fisherman, who followed Jesus impetuously and boldly and faithfully. He knew clearly who Jesus was: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"* (Matthew 16:16). Even though he stumbled emotionally, Jesus renamed him "the Rock." Peter was the first public evangelist (Acts 2), and became a leader of the Early Church. His two New Testament letters are addressed to saints (God's faithful people) everywhere.

But first, let's review what we learned. Last month, I introduced you to Jesus' new covenant, new commandment, and new connection with God. And since Jesus' commandment was to love one another as He has loved us, we explored how Jesus has loved us—as our Forgiver, Comforter, Encourager, and Exhorter. More than any other New Testament writer, John's words urged us to follow in Jesus' steps.

John summarized this theme in his first letter:

1 John 4:21 And He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

But John was certainly not alone in heralding this message. His fellow fisherman and apostle, Peter, also sounded the trumpet. Today, let's take a look at what Peter had to say, and get to know our job better.

1 Peter 1:22; NIV Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Peter's words help us to apply the truth that John emphasized.

Love Like A Greek

The Greek language, from which the original New Testament was translated, offers four words for love, each with a unique application.

Eros is the word for sensual or romantic desire. Although it is a word that does not appear in the New Testament, it is not a bad word—unless it is applied outside of a marriage covenant, because that twists it into a sport, or worse.

Storge is the word for familial love (love of family), like the devoted and protective affection among parents and children. This, too, is a good word, unless it stands in front of love for God.

Philia describes the emotional bond of deep friendships—expressing mutual respect, patient and watchful care, and human compassion.

Agape is a word almost unique to the New Testament. It distinguishes God's love, and the love that comes from God, as perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure.

Here, Peter used two different words for love: "sincere love" is *philia*, which is "brotherly love," and "love deeply" is *agape*, which is godlike "sacrificial love." It is necessary that we share both kinds of love.

Jesus gave Peter a powerful lesson concerning the *distinction* of these two loves and also their *partnership*.

In John 22, Jesus appeared to the disciples a third time after His resurrection, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. After a fruitless night of fishing on their own, Jesus directed the men to a miraculous haul of fish, and they shared breakfast together on the beach.

John 21:15; NLT After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you."

"Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him.

¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you."

"Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said.

¹⁷ A third time he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep."

The first two times Jesus questioned Peter, He used the word *agape*. Each time Peter answered with *philia*. It's as if Jesus asked, "Do you LOVE Me?" and Peter answered, "I really LIKE You."

The third time, Jesus asked, "Do you *philia* Me?" Peter was not hurt that Jesus asked him the same question three times. He was hurt that the third time Jesus downgraded His question to, "Peter, do you *like* Me?"

The only answer Peter could give Jesus, in light of his recent denials, was, "You know I like you a lot."

"Do you love Me more than these?" Generally, there have been three interpretations proposed as to the meaning of "these" in Jesus' initial question.

The first is, "Do you love Me more than the other disciples do?" I dismiss this possibility because it would promote the kind of comparative ranking among the team that Jesus had previously rebuked.

The second is, "Do you love Me more than you love the other disciples?" This could work, since Jesus had already told them that if they loved anyone else more than Him they were not worthy to be His disciples. But I dismiss this too, because I see no evidence of this kind of preference from Peter. On the contrary, his love for Jesus was greater.

The third possibility (which is where I land) is, "Do you love Me more than you love a great haul of fish?" This seems most fitting because Peter was a fisherman by trade, and a competitor by nature. What would a fisherman love more (in the natural) than a huge haul of fish?

Had the conversation been expanded, I imagine Jesus explaining, "Peter, you labored all night to acquire nothing. Then, at my word, you caught more than you needed. Now, if you love Me more than the 'win,' give your life away for Me, for I have given you all that you have and I will provide all that you ever need."

How Much Do You Love Me?

What has Jesus done for you? What love has He shown you? How great is His salvation in your eyes?

Are you sorry that He keeps asking if you love Him? Keeps testing your loving response? Or, are you ready to move into Kingdom-living?

If you love Jesus Christ more than all the world has to offer, then commit to give your life away in His name through acts of love, and He will keep you supplied with all you need, just as He promised:

Matthew 6:33 *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.*

Now, look again at Peter's words...

1 Peter 1:22; NIV *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

We share *philia* (sincere) love because our sins have been washed away and we are brothers and sisters in Christ; our likenesses create a natural bond.

We share *agape* (deep) love because we belong to God by an imperishable bond and, therefore, should overlook differences. This is not optional; it is the product of our supernatural bond.

Peter guides us to grow from natural affection to supernatural commitment. There is a distance between these two loves (the natural and the supernatural)—based on our natural proclivities and our spiritual maturity. That distance must be bridged by our obedience to God's Word. Obedience takes you from the natural to the supernatural.

Reaching the Tipping Point

Sometimes, the supernatural looks altogether different than the natural (miraculous). But most times, the supernatural looks just like the natural, *but on steroids*. And most of the time, the miraculous is a result of pushing the natural to the tipping point (reaching a critical mass).

Here's how Peter expressed that:

1 Peter 3:8 *Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. ⁹ Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will grant you His blessing.*

The responses Peter called for are not unusual—they are normal, natural responses. But, taken together, they reach a tipping point. Climb the ladder with me...

“One mind.” This is the unity of commonality—shared beliefs, shared expressions, shared community.

“Sympathetic.” Awareness and consideration for each other, sensitivity to one’s feelings, instead of dismissal.

“As brothers.” Recognizing what Christ has done for us all and regarding each other respectfully as family.

“Tenderhearted.” Not hard, but soft—capable of being moved by others’ stories and experiences. Eager to help.

“Humble.” Not proud, or “better than others.” Treating others as equally valued.

“Don’t repay with evil.” No tit-for-tat. Instead, we are to “overcome evil with good.”

“Don’t retaliate with insults.” Drop the sarcasm and veiled threats. Esteem each other highly for Christ’s sake.

If we push all these natural responses repeatedly, climbing all the way to the top of the ladder, we’ll reach the tipping point, where something supernatural begins to happen: *Instead... pay them back with a blessing!*

The natural, when pushed beyond its limits, *becomes supernatural! Philia becomes agape! And now we’re loving like Jesus loved!*

That is what God has called you to do. Pay back misunderstanding and mistreatment with blessing! And He will reward you with His blessing.

I conclude by reading the same two verses from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*:

1 Peter 3:8–9; MSG Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

That’s your job, my friends. Accept it. And excel at it.