

Learning to Care for Others in Jesus' Name

We've looked recently at the three questions that Jesus asked Peter which were designed to prepare him for a life of service to the church of Jesus Christ. Was it harsh for Jesus to use these *three penetrating questions* to seemingly drag Peter back through the memory of his *three denials*? (John 19:15-27) The short answer is "No." There is a right and good reason for everything that Jesus does in our lives. We must continue to learn to trust him. What can we learn from Jesus' lesson to Peter?

—Genuine love for Jesus should be our motivation for ongoing repentance for our sins.

It is true that there are a number of ways that we can be motivated to repent of ongoing sin including fearing God's discipline. And yet, because God is so gracious, patient and loving, Christians can often fall into patterns of ongoing sin with the assumption that God will just continue to forgive us, "because that's what God is supposed to do. After all, others are worse than I am." It's at times like these that God may choose to make our lives very difficult as a means of disciplining us out of his Fatherly love; that is to say, getting our attention and redirecting our thinking toward the right path once again (Hebrews 12:7-11). The apostle Paul says it this way in Romans 2:4: "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Jesus was not being harsh to Peter he was being kind. It's a blessing when God does *whatever is needed* to bring us to repentance for our sins. When Christians look on the blessings of God in our lives; when we're reminded of how much he loves us and how much he loves our children; how can we not, by grace, love him who loved us first? This love is a powerful motivation for ongoing, genuine repentance.

—Genuine love for Jesus should be our motivation for service to others.

Remember that a major portion of what we're seeing in John 21:15-17 is Peter's *restoration to service*. We're all called to serve others, beginning in the home and then extending to the church and beyond as we have opportunity. We should prioritize our lives in order to take every opportunity to use our time, talents and treasures to serve others. Serving others in Jesus' name is not only a great honor; it's a great blessing to us in many ways. We want to learn—not merely that we should serve others—but we want to seek to have the proper *motivation for service*. We want our children to be rightly motivated. When they disobey, we want to teach them that they're disobeying God first (Psalm 51:4). We want to remind them that it was God who gave them to us to care for. So, we teach them that their lives are not meant to be completely self-focused and self-centered. This is a lesson we all need to continue to learn.

—Genuine love for Jesus should be our motivation to depend on the Word of God to guide and guard those in our care. This moves us now from motivation toward acts

of service, along with guidance from and conversation about Scripture. Jesus' commands in this passage are directly connected to Peter and others who have a *formal* call as shepherds. This points directly to a formal call to the minister and other formal leaders in the local church (1 Timothy 5:17). "Feed my lambs." At the very minimum, this connects to the covenant children of the church; times of teaching; times of having conversations and encouraging with God's Word. "Tend my sheep." The word translated "tend" carries the idea of to lead, guide, nourish, or even to rule. It's a word that's often translated by a verb which means, "to shepherd." This is also strengthened by the third command to "Feed my sheep." The ministers and other leaders in the church must serve others guided by the Word of God in Scripture.

In addition to the *formal call* on the ministers and other church officers, this also points to an *informal call* for every Christian to guide, guard, and care for others *according to the Word*. This begins in the home and includes gospel conversations with our children; conversations about God's creation and the blessings he pours out in our lives daily (Deuteronomy 6:7). This also extends to the church; we want to place a priority on guiding and guarding those in our care. This includes being aware of the harmful things in the secular culture around us and guiding them according to the Word. The Bible teaches us clearly that our lives are not our own, but we're bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20), and we're to live lives of obedience and service that glorify God in every way.

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