

# The Love Motivation (John 21:15-18)

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## Scripture Text:

15. So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus \*said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He \*said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He \*said to him, “Tend My lambs.”
16. He \*said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He \*said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He \*said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.”
17. He \*said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus \*said to him, “Tend My sheep.  
(John 21:15-17 NASB)

## Outline:

- I. Jesus Tells Peter to, “Tend My Lambs.” (v.15)
- II. Jesus Tells Peter to, “Shepherd My Sheep.” (v.16)
- III. Jesus Tells Peter to, “Tend My Sheep.” (v.17)

## Worksheet:

- I. Jesus Tells Peter to, “Tend My Lambs.” (v.15)
  - a. So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus \*said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” (v.15a)
    - i. After they had finished breakfast, having their fill, Jesus asked Simon Peter a question. This question was more than likely made with a hand gesture of some sort by Jesus, making reference to something that was clearly visible to Peter and Jesus. What may Jesus have been referring to when He asked Peter, “...do you love Me more than **these**?” [*discussion*]  

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    - ii. If Jesus was making reference to the \_\_\_\_\_ then He may have been asking Peter about his love for his old profession. Now Jesus wanted him to be a **devoted** \_\_\_\_\_ of men instead of a **professional** \_\_\_\_\_ of fish.
      1. Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother,

casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He \*said to them, “**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.**”

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

(Matthew 4:18-22 NASB)

- iii. Peter and the other disciples who were fishermen, not only fished to feed themselves and their own families, but they fished as a profession and made a living by selling and/or trading their catch for other things that they needed in order to survive. After fishing all night and not catching anything, how do you think the disciples (fishermen) felt about going back to what they knew? *[discussion]* \_\_\_\_\_  
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- iv. Jesus and the disciples were probably still sitting around the same fire that Jesus had made, to cook the fish that He had created for breakfast and to warm His disciples who had been out all night attempting to \_\_\_\_\_ with a net on a boat.
- v. Peter, more than likely remembered being around a similar fire not many weeks before. What may have been going through his mind as Jesus asked him, “do you love Me more than these?” *[discussion]* \_\_\_\_\_  
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- vi. If Jesus was referring to the other disciples, He may have been making reference to the words of Peter and the other disciples recorded in Matthew 26:33-35.
  1. But Peter said to Him, “ Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter \*said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.” All the disciples said the same thing too.  
(Matthew 26:33-35 NASB)
- vii. Jesus uses the word “agapao” which means: to love dearly, with total commitment. This word for “love” was also used in other passages of scripture. Some notable ones are found in the gospel of John and give a sense of the word’s meaning.
  1. “For God so **loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NASB) *[positive]*

2. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men **loved** the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. (John 3:19 NASB) [*negative*]
  3. The Father **loves** the Son and has given all things into His hand. (John 3:35 NASB) [*positive*]
  4. Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they **loved** the approval of men rather than the approval of God.  
(John 12:42-43 NASB) [*negative*]
- b. He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Tend My lambs." (v.15b)
- i. Peter responds to Jesus' question, with an emphatic, "Yes, Lord...", however, he uses a different word in the Greek for "love" [*"phileo"*]
  - ii. When two synonyms are placed in close proximity of each other within a text, the intent is to draw attention to the subtle difference in their meaning. The difference in these words, no matter how subtle, is key in understanding the lesson of the text to be learned.
  - iii. "**Phileo**" is one of five Greek words used for the word "love" in the pages of scripture. "**phileo**" means: to approve of; to like; to sanction; to treat affectionately or kindly; to welcome; to befriend; brotherly love.
  - iv. This subtle, but important distinction is important to make, especially when talking about the important concept of **love**. When a young man is dating a young lady and she wants to know how he feels about her. She wants to hear the "L" word...and it ain't "**Like**" that she wants to hear...it's "**Love**"! Even when using the word "love", she may say, "I know you **love** me, but do you **L-O-V-E** me?" There is a difference and you would do well to know it!
  - v. Why do you suppose that Peter decided to use a different word for *love* than the word used by Jesus in His question to Peter? [*discussion*] \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - vi. Even though Peter used a different word for "love", he did rightly acknowledge the fact that Jesus could search his heart and knew to what extent and to what degree Peter loved Him.
    1. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.  
(John 2:24-25 NASB)
  - vii. Jesus, in this verse, makes somewhat of a conditional statement to Peter. "If you truly say you love Me Peter, you will 'tend My lambs'"

[paraphrase]. Jesus, in this passage of scripture also uses two words that almost mean the same thing, but not exactly. This too, is intended to draw attention to the subtle difference between “**lambs**” and “**sheep**” to illustrate a great spiritual, on-going and progressive truth as it relates to service to Jesus as an undershepherd.

- viii. “Lambs” [**arnion**]: a little lamb; lamb. This refers to a small, or very young lamb, like a ewe lamb.
- ix. These sheep are the ones that cannot be left “**unattended**”, but must be “**tended to**”, because they are like newborns who need milk, nurturing, constant watching and protection from the dangers (physical, mental and spiritual) that are unbeknownst to them.
  - 1. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.  
(1 Peter 2:1-3 NASB)
  - 2. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14 NASB)
  - 3. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NASB)
- x. “Tend” [**bosko**]: to feed; portraying the duty of a Christian teacher to promote in every way the spiritual welfare of the members of the church

## II. Jesus Tells Peter to, “Shepherd My Sheep.” (v.16)

- a. He \*said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He \*said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” (v.16a)
  - i. Jesus ask Simon Peter a \_\_\_\_\_ time, the \_\_\_\_\_ question, using the \_\_\_\_\_ word for “love” [**agapao**] and Simon Peter, once again uses the same word that he used initially for the word “love” [**phileo**].
  - ii. In keeping with the previous analogy, this would be like a young lady asking a young man, “do you love me?” and him responding “yes, I like you!” The young lady would then ask again, “do you love me?” and then

the young man saying in response, “yes, you know I like you...gurl” NOT GOOD!

- iii. Why do you suppose Simon Peter continued to use a lesser word for the word “love” instead of using the same word that Jesus used? *[discussion]*
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b. He \*said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” (v.16b)

- i. Jesus uses the word “**shepherd**” instead of “**tend**” the second time He asked Peter “do you love Me?”
- ii. Shepherd [**poimaino**]: to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep; to rule, govern; to furnish pasture for food; to nourish; to supply the requisites for the soul's need.
- iii. This is a duty and responsibility that would be expected of one who is more than just a casual acquaintance, friend or neighbor. This responsibility is one that would be reserved for one who is totally \_\_\_\_\_ to the one asking or requesting.
- iv. Once again, Peter rests upon the fact that Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ what is in his heart, without him actually committing and expressing with his own mouth, his undying devotion and commitment to Jesus, because of his previous failures with commitment, devotion and dedication when threatened by the world. How does this relate to Christians today?
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- v. In this verse, Jesus uses the word “sheep”, instead of “lamb”, which He used the first time, when asking Simon Peter, “do you love Me?”
- vi. “Sheep” [**probaton**]: any four footed, tame animal accustomed to graze, small cattle (opp. to large cattle, horses, etc.), most commonly a sheep or a goat. This word is one that refers to a larger sheep or goat as apposed to a baby ewe lamb that has just recently been born. This makes reference to one who is more mature than an infant, but not fully matured and still in need of a shepherd guidance and instruction.

III. Jesus Tells Peter to, “Tend My Sheep.” (v.17)

- a. He \*said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” (v.17a)
- i. Jesus, knowing what was in Simon Peter’s heart uses a different word for “love” this \_\_\_\_\_ time that He asked Simon Peter, “do you love Me?”
- ii. Jesus, in this verse, uses the same word for “love” that Simon Peter used for “love” [phileo]. Why do you think Jesus used this lesser form of the word “love”, the same word that Simon Peter used, the third time? *[discussion]* \_\_\_\_\_
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iii. Peter, not ready to fully commit to the extent to which Jesus had asked the first two times, is consistent with his answer the third time as well and uses the same word for “love” [phileo]. Why do you suppose Simon Peter was so apprehensive about using the greater form of the word “love” that Jesus had used the first two times? *[discussion]* \_\_\_\_\_

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iv. Simon Peter was \_\_\_\_\_ because Jesus asked him a third time, “Do you love Me?” Why was Simon Peter so troubled by this one question that Jesus asked three times? *[discussion]* \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Jesus \*said to him, “Tend My sheep. (v.17b)

i. Jesus in this verse, tells Simon Peter to “tend” His sheep. What might this look like as the undershepherd performs his duties and responsibilities in the church, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, according to the Word of God and ongoing communion with the Father? \_\_\_\_\_

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ii. “Tend” [*bosko*]: to feed; portraying the duty of a Christian teacher to promote in every way the spiritual welfare of the members of the church.

iii. Jesus lets Simon Peter know that as an undershepherd, he will be responsible to “tend” to the little ewe lambs (babes), he will also have to “tend” to the older (elderly) sheep in much the same way. At the same time, the undershepherd will be shepherding the sheep (spiritually middle-aged) of the congregation.

iv. There is a saying, “once a man, twice a child”. As the saints mature spiritually, they also mature physically and become aged. In many respects they may revert to the same helpless state of a newborn child that needs constant feeding and nourishing (physically, mentally and in this case spiritually).

v. Looking out for and taking care of the members of the church is something that all spiritually mature Christians should practice. James, in one verse, gives us insight into what true religious commitment and faithfulness is all about as it relates to the responsibility of spiritually mature Christians to the young, the old and everyone in between.

1. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27 NASB)