

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: This is the final passage in the Gospel of John where Jesus continues His Divine and supernatural manifestations after He rose from the dead. Jesus, after showing His glory and purpose, challenges Peter and us, to do what so many have failed to do—love and then take care of and equip the people of God. Jesus asks *do you love me more than your livelihood, more than friends, your possessions, your potentials and yourself?* He challenges us all to find the crux of faith and life—to find God’s kind of sacrificial love, the reason for our being and for the Church and ministry, to share and practice love, to live out true, genuine love so Christ is displayed and glorified, and for our faith to be synergized, our relationships enhanced, and to exercise a life and ministry impact that will echo throughout eternity. To do so, we have to love in a way that brings us out of our complacency, removes our pride, and centers upon Christ as not just our Savior but the Sovereign Lord over me and my deepest wants and needs. So, He is proclaimed, and we say, as Peter did, *yes Lord!*

The call is simple, yet profound; sadly, church leaders rarely adhere to that call—to love the Lord, love one another, and to feed and care for the sheep! More often, we fight the sheep, we starve the sheep, we neglect the sheep, we play tricks with and to the sheep, and we fleece the flock; all we accomplish by this is to present our mint sauce and skewers while the sheep starve and just bite one another! The question to Peter and to us is this: *do we truly Love Jesus? Do we follow Jesus?* If so, then we are to care for, feed (as in train), equip, love, and care for one another as He does for us! We are not to worry about others, wonder what is in it for me, spread rumors, engage our pride, or feed our hurts. We are not to make excuses or wait until it is too late; we are to react to our Lord by putting action to our faith and by engaging our churches and community with His Lordship, precepts, and to call for His glory. The One who wrote the words of the Gospel is God, as testified by John, His human instrument. It is true, accurate, convicting, profitable for faith and practice, and contains what we need to know, but is still merely a snapshot of His work and wonder.

Contexts and Background: This passage shows us more appearances of the resurrected Jesus. The resurrection is the key of Christianity, of who Christ is and what He did! There is no physical description of Jesus in the Bible, because, His portrait is love; we are the only picture of Christ that people see. God is the One who saves; we are the ones who bring to the world the expression of Christianity and these love characteristics, which are God’s attributes of righteousness and graciousness, and His call for us to go and likewise be gracious.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Truly love me.* Two words for love are here—the Greek words *Agapas* (“sacrificial”) and *Philo* (“friendship”). They designate a continuous routine of affection with action all of the time, not just when one “feels” like it. Love is “symbiotic,” as in mutually loving toward one another to build and improve the other’s relationship. It requires our entire personality, including the will. It is both a joyous and a serious matter. There is no mistake about Jesus’ call, to truly and deeply love and befriend those in Him and for Him to be the model to those outside of Him. These are the distinguishing marks of who Christ is and what He has called us to do; they become the evidence of our faith, obedience, and transformation, the mark of a church and the duty and call of all Christians! Giving ourselves to one another takes us beyond ourselves and into the lives of others, as He gave Himself to us! Love is not blind; it sees and showcases the true, loving God who opens eyes to sin and brings restoration, grace, forgiveness, and community (Eph. 2:4-7; 5:21-32; Mark 12:28-30; John 5:20; 11:3-11; 1 Cor. 13).
- *Yes, Lord.* An affirmation of devotion, trust, and obedience. A real, effective Christian will have Love at his/her core; we must be followers before we can be leaders who will follow Him. Love is the spiritual fruit that comes from God’s work in our lives to which we respond to help create real, godly faith, character, and dedication. Love is the engine that exhibits Christ and extends throughout our being, taking on and holding together our relationships. Love synergistically combines with the Fruit of the Spirit that flows from the Holy Spirit, creating a kind, purposeful, and content life. Love will be the prime fruit that will advance our ability to relate to all, to grow in all of our relationships, and to better others as well as ourselves (Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:3-11).

- *Feed my lambs / sheep.* Refers to shepherding the people of God, the Church, and the call to continue to inspire, lead, teach, protect, and equip His flock with love and care. This is our call to service, and the “feed” of the Word of God that contains the voice and prime witness to God and the means by which the Holy Spirit instructs and convicts us. This is the Bible that holds His truth, directions, precepts, and call, and points us to God. Thus, if you reject the Bible, including its precepts, you are also rejecting Christ and disobeying the witness of God in the Gospel and His Word. Yes, this is “ouch” to me too, but also “wow!” Look what we can do in Christ as He offers us a hope for both now and also tomorrow (Jer. 23:4; Ezek. 34; Matt. 16:18, 26-27; John 10:1-18; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)!
- *Take care of my sheep.* Means to shepherd my sheep, as in care for them as a good mother cares for her young and a good father instructs and nurtures. We are His sheep, His children, and His people. God saved us, not to be self-centered, but to be His ambassadors wherever we are and whenever we can! (see John 10: 1-18 for more)!
- *Younger...Old.* This is about control. Babies, as well as the elderly, do not have control of their bodies or the care needed; we are dependent upon our mothers and caretakers. It is the same with faith; we are dependent upon God and one another, so we must be in community. This is also about relinquishing one’s pride, and surrendering to His Lordship. (Matt. 4:10; Luke 9:23; John 3:30; 15:5; Gal. 2:20-21; 5:24; Eph. 5:18-21; Philip. 1:19-21; 3:1-14; Col. 4:2-6; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5: 5-7)
- *Do not want to go.* A real, effectual, purpose-driven life is always about Christ as Lord and our surrender to His Lordship. The call of God is to be on guard so we can still live in a proper, pleasing way to glorify our Lord and so people will see Christ exhibited in us (Psalm 57; 138:7-8; Prov. 19:21; John 15; Rom. 8; Phil. 2:1-18; 2 Tim. 1:8-12)!
- *Kind of death by which Peter.* Peter was destined to execution, but his place is in eternity for God’s glory. He was crucified upside down by Nero, 64AD; John lived to a very old age (John 12:23-27).
- *Glorify God.* Refers to the Sovereignty and Lordship and the Holiness and Supremacy of God as well as the uncreated, pre-existing, primacy of Christ. The application is for our utmost, highest reverence and our call to give Him our praise for His glory by living for Him, which is what our purpose in life is all about. We are holy in Christ; He sets us apart for a reason and a purpose. Our lives have meaning and value; Jesus wants that meaning for our lives to be infused by Him so that our purpose becomes to glorify Him, enjoy grace and fellowship in Him, and share it with others. This is also what the *Westminster Catechism* states, “What is the chief purpose of man? Man’s (all of humanity who proclaims Christ as Lord) chief end (objective) is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” “To God alone be the glory” was a critical and important slogan for the Reformation (that must be held to by any serious believer), that all of life’s purpose is to give God glory (Gen. 24:27; Ex. 34:6; Deut. 6:4; 1 Kings 8:1-11; Psalm 25:10; 26:3; 73:24-28; Prov. 16:6; Matt. 17:1-8; John 1:1-14, 18; 6:25-51; 14:9; 17:5, 17:21-23; Rom. 1:6-7; 11:36; 16:27; 1 Cor. 10:11, 31; Eph. 1:5-14; 2:7; Col. 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 3:11; 1 Pet, 2:11-12).
- *Follow me!* Peter is restored! Here, Jesus gives His Disciples the first and last call to learn and grow in Christ. We are called to live out what we believe and have faith and love through our way of life, character, outlook, and behavior, all aimed at living honorably so we point others to the Lord! We are the mirrors to the world concerning who and what Christ is; He is seen by who and how we are. “Discipling” is a commitment and a process that is reciprocal; when one has learned, we make the commitment to train and equip someone else, requiring our best efforts and consistency (Matt. 4:19; 9:9; 28:19-20; Luke 5:27; 6:39-40; 1 Pet. 2:11-12).
- *What about him?* We are not to look at others; we are to look to Christ and be content with His work in us and others that coincide, converge, contact, and contrast one another.
- *Who testifies.* This is like a legal documentation to its authenticity. A testimony necessitates knowing, eternalizing, and showing one’s faith; it is the active demonstration of the Gospel working. Christ is the One who gives us grace, forgiveness, purpose in our lives, and salvation (Matt. 3; John 1:6-18; 5:31; 8:58; 13:23; 17:1-12; 19:35; Acts 19:3-5; 1 John 1:1-4).

- *Not have room.* Hyperbole speech to announce the eminence of what is written. It does not contain all the details, but we have what we need. God's Word conveys His will; it is His authority, and it is sacred Scripture. Therefore, it is not to be altered or manipulated by our will! God's Word contains His instructions and His covenant to us; it is most sacred and binding. When one seeks to manipulate or distort it, it is more than a slap in the face of God, it is a heinous evil. False teachers and those who use God's Word for their own personal gain insult Christ and deceive others, and they will be heavily judged (Deut. 29:20-27; Prov. 30:5-6; John 1st 1-3, 14; Rev. 22:21)!

Devotional Thoughts and Applications: What is the meaning of life? What on earth are we to do? The answer is to know, grow and live for Jesus! Why? Jesus is God and He creates and saves; we respond by faith, repenting and then growing in Him and making disciples who are like Christ. In so doing, we teach His precepts and ways with His authority and the Holy Spirit's empowerment. However, even though this is our prime call, few Christians and even fewer churches answer it. We do not tend and feed the sheep; we rather seek ways to ignore the sheep, BBQ the sheep, deceive and train the sheep to do tricks, and experiment upon them like guinea pigs, while the sheep starve and bite one another, allowing neighborhoods to go unloved and unreached. At the same time, the sheep are dumb; we are more prone to be entertained and satisfied by seeking fads, needs, and wants and feeling frustrated when we are not fulfilled. The fact is that Church is meant to be so much more—a place for real effectual learning, growth, worship, and a feeding place of His most precious Word! Why do we not do this?

We are given a charge to follow and glorify Christ! Instead of forcing yourself to be a deeper follower of Christ, seek to be the person who would desire to build faith; the "deep" will flow in time. What can you do to be better at surrendering your will to Christ? Our problem is we get in our own way. Our desires, lusts, hurts, and misplaced agendas seek self and do not look up to God and His goodness and greatness. We do not see what we have and can have more because we are so preoccupied with the trivial distractions of the world, a weak heart of faith, and a mind that is not disciplined!

Jesus wants us to have a more "hands on," practical faith—to take ownership of our faith in a deep way and then live it out. He asks us to awake from our lazy minds and open a blind faith to the real wonders of our Lord, not lock it in an ivory tower with the foundation of arrogance and disregard for forgiveness, love, compassion, and evangelism. If the Church truly practiced and taught what Christ did, what He has for us today, and what we are called to do, there would never be a felt need for distractions. We have the true-Truth; we usually lack the follow-through. Yet, the biggest enemy to our faith is not liberalism or secularism; it is our own apathy, pride, arrogance, and the refusal to live out the faith to which we attest. In addition, we refuse to forgive others as Jesus forgave us. Instead, we do what we think is right and then tend not to act right. This comes from the breakdown of the biblical worldview that also breaks down the Church and the faith of its people; it is caused by the breakdown of our thinking that breaks our faith. It is not just about being creative or even philosophical; it is about our disobedience to God's "True-Truth." The barrier that sin should be becomes the ignition for continuing in sin, as synergy, as an out-of-control fire.

If you and your church are fueled only by emotional drama and sensationalism or have no effective instruction, your faith is weak and on a thin bed of ice on a hot day. There is nothing to hold, mold, or shape you; nothing to transform you and build faith, character, or spiritual and emotional maturity. God wants character and Fruit first and foremost and will use you wherever you are. We need to focus on building faith by spending more devotional time with Christ. Start with a few minutes a day and build; pray through the day and monitor how you are to others with attitude and fruit. When you are ready and in His perfect time, the other things will unfold before you. This is what Jacob had to learn to break his pride, put his trust in God, and bring him to patience, which took 14+ years.

God wants us to have an open and active heart; Satan wants our hearts shut down. God wants us fully engaged in Him and to be poured out to others. Satan wants you to shut down and be disconnected from God, His Word, and His precepts, thereby discounting and disconnecting you from your vital relationships, focusing on your past hurts and wounds, and resting in your pride, thus pleasing the prince of darkness. God wants you to give Him your hurts and failures; He asks you to surrender to His Lordship and allow Him to be God and you to be His friend, servant, and example. Life is all about Him—not about us! If your heart is cold or confused, turn it toward Jesus; then, He can use you. You can be set free and you can be fully engaged in your life, church family, and family. If not, your heart will shut down and there is not a tool in the universe that can open it. You will be bitter, disillusioned, prideful, and pathetic, giving in or giving up to pride and darkness. Your relationships will fail, your church will lose out, and, if you are

married, that will fail too; if you have kids, they too will be destined to darkness and removed from you. The solution is this: surrender; open your heart to the One who created and sustains it and open yourself to His empowerment, the tools that will fix, open, and empower you!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How does what you do on a typical Sunday morning glorify God and point to what Christ has done for you? How do you say *yes Lord*?
2. How have you been impacted from this Bible study series? What did you learn?
3. What is sacrificial love? What is friendship love? How do they work? How are they displayed? How can you display them? How does holding grudges dismantle God's call and work in you?
4. What if Jesus asked you personally, *do you love me more than your livelihood, more than friends, possessions, potentials, and even yourself*? How would you respond? (By the way, He is asking!)
5. Do people have to ask you if you are a Christian with puzzlement? Or, do they know even without your having to say so? How is real faith fueled in the crucible of our walk in Christ and His work in us?
6. What do you think goes through a pastor's or a church leader's mind to think it is OK to fleece the flock and not feed and/or care for them?
7. What happens when a Christian and a church fail to love and take care of and equip the people of God?
8. How and why is real faith not about what the trends are, but rather, what Jesus Christ is attempting or doing in you and your church?
9. How can you make sure that you and your church are not distracted from true faith and real Christian living? How can you help spur people on into His Lordship?
10. What can you and your church do to help your people to love in a way that will bring them out of compliancy, remove them from pride and center them upon Christ as not just mere Savior, but as Sovereign Lord?
11. What does it mean to you to make every conceivable effort to put into practice love that is fueled from your faith and applied from your fruit? How is this necessary for your life?
12. How important is Christianity to someone who grew up without love or care? How can your church be the place and community to show the sacrificial kind of love that Christ gave? What would that look like? What will you do now?