Do You Love Me?

**15**When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” **John 21:15**

As we wrap up this Midwest Summer Bible Conference, we’ve been learning what it really means to follow Jesus. Through our first sermon with Dr Spencer, we heard Jesus’ invitation for us to be with & have a relationship with him. On day two, Steve Stassino spoke about God’s call to one unlikely sinner, Matthew, who was changed through Jesus’ shepherd heart. Then in Dan Bockenfeld’s message yesterday we learned that to follow Jesus is not just about words, it’s about a lifestyle of denying oneself and picking up our crosses.

In our final segment today, we’ll discover that the last thing Jesus requires of us if we truly want to follow him is to feed his sheep. It is a difficult command to obey and I know many of us have probably heard this passage at multiple UBF conferences. So you may feel as sense of burden to hear these instructions again. But I want to challenge you to accept it newly and remember…. that the prerequisite of feeding sheep … is love. To live as a shepherd like Jesus, requires that we first accept his love before we can love him back. Then once we receive this unconditional love, we have the power to love others and feed his sheep as well. We start to have God’s great hope and vision to be used as shepherds & see this world as the flock under our care. But without that foundation of God’s love, feeding sheep and living a life of mission is not possible.

So as we go through today’s passage, let’s think about this question that Jesus is asking each of you very personally: … “Do you love me?“

Jesus isn’t asking how many sheep did you bring to this conference. Rather he’s asking you how much do you love him? So let’s deeply reflect on God’s unconditional love for us. And once you deeply experience & remember this love, may you learn to love him back through feeding his sheep.

Let’s look at the beginning of chapter 21 at verses 1-3: **Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26900a)**] It happened this way: 2Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26901b)**]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.**

This passage takes place with Jesus appearing to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Prior to this event, Jesus was crucified and resurrected appearing to his disciples 2 other times. Once while they were in hiding in the upper room and the second time specifically to Thomas. Jesus had also given them instructions that he was eventually going to send them out to do his gospel work. He said in **John 20:21. “As the Father is sending me, I am sending you.”** In other words they were meant to go and preach the good news of who Jesus was and his resurrection. This was an amazing miracle that Christ had performed and it was reason to celebrate!

But instead of obeying Jesus & waiting for his direction, we see in **verses 3** how they went out to fish by the Sea of Galilee. Also note how Peter in particular was instrumental in leading these men astray. He and the other disciples had completely forgotten about Jesus’ instructions and went back to their old life as fishermen. After seeing the Messiah risen from the grave, you would have thought there would have been some dramatic change. You would have expected brave new men to tell others about what they had seen and heard. Maybe they grew impatient waiting for Jesus since his last appearance. Possibly they were hungry and started looking for food to sustain themselves. Either way it shows that these disciples were lost and had no life direction. Therefore they resorted back to their old profession of just being mere fishermen.

It’s easy to look down on these disciples but in the same way WE also have this natural inclination to lose our way in this life. We get distracted by our everyday wants and needs, not realizing we have a higher purpose and calling in this world. We see this often reflected by how we go to church on Sunday, but when Monday rolls around, we go back to just eating, sleeping, working and surviving….. but nothing more.

So Jesus wants to redirect these disciples and us to our real purpose in life. Let’s look at verses 4-5 to see how Jesus does so. It says: **4Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.** **5He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.** First of all, we see that Jesus doesn’t get upset or rebuke the disciples. He doesn’t start all over and find new followers, ones with a better long-term memory. Even though they had completely turned away from Jesus, he comes to them first and he calls them… friends.

How amazing is that? How beautiful was this scene with Jesus standing on the shore watching over his disciples. Even though they didn’t even recognize him, even though they abandoned him on the cross, he came to them first at their lowest point. Jesus never gave up on them. / He was faithful when they were not.

Then in verse 6, he shows even further love to these disciples saying:  **“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”** And when they did so verse 7 says: **“They were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”**

**/** In the midst of their failure, in their blind state of not seeing Jesus, he pours out even more love on them. They must have felt like complete failures catching nothing all night. But Jesus wanted to restore them as fishermen in order to experience his great and unconditional love for them.

Finally look at verses 10-12 to see how he does something even more amazing**: 10Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” 11So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”**

Just when you think Jesus is done loving them, he tops it off by making.. breakfast. Any other rational person would have welcomed them with whip and a stern rebuke. But it revealed that Jesus loved these men to the very end. He was showing such a generous and warm display of affection through this intimate fellowship with them. Jesus even praises them in verse 10 by saying “BRING some of the fish YOU have just caught” He didn’t say…. bring THAT fish that I just caught for you. Then in **verse 13** it said heserved them one by one only like a loving mother would. So we can see here that Jesus’ love is personal. It’s more than just saying I love you. It’s a love that says I know what you want and I’ll meet all your needs. It’s a love that comes to them first when they should have taken the initiative.

So it shows us here that true discipleship requires that you accept Jesus' love before you can actually love him back*.* It’s not about what you do but about how much… HE loved YOU first unconditionally.

1 John4:19. **We love because he first loved us.** Without knowing this love of Jesus, we can’t help but lose our life direction & just resort to surviving in this world. But in the love of Christ, you find real purpose and mission in life. Following Jesus becomes meaningful & is no longer out of duty, but out of love.

So think back when God first loved you at your lowest point. ….. When was it? Was it a failure in school, a broken relationship, losing a job or a major health problem? When was that moment when you were lost and didn’t even recognize Jesus?

For me it was when I was a college student and so fearful about the future. Like these disciples I was struggling just to feed myself and get through my premed studies. But I didn’t really have in mind what God wanted or what his greater will was for this world. But through UBF, I came to know the deep love of Christ through many shepherd and shepherdess. They fed me God’s word, loved me unconditionally and taught me that I was meant to live for something greater than myself. With time, seeing their sacrificial lives made me want to live that same life of being a shepherd and feeding God’s sheep. That’s why I’m still doing campus ministry to this day. It was that initial love poured out to me that motivated me to keep showing his love for college students.

In the same way, I believe many of you have experienced that love in UBF or during your college years through someone who reached out to you. Maybe you weren’t eagerly searching for God, but he sought you and brought you to himself. He loved you…fed you…. and watched over you even when you didn’t recognize it.

So we should remember those people and moments, knowing how Jesus was there for you despite whatever you were going through. Even now when you may not feel loved, he is here carrying you through all your life struggles.

Let’s look at verse15 now to see what Jesus calls you to do after you receive his unconditional love. “**When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter,  “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”**

What Jesus was doing here was reinstating Peter by asking him if he loved him and to demonstrate that love through feeding his sheep. In fact he asked Peter this same question two more times in verses 16-17. It was to restore Peter’s failure as a disciple after he had denied Jesus three times.

Peter in particular must have felt like the biggest failure among the disciples because he was the one who said he could lay down his life for Christ. But through Jesus’ visit to him and restoring his failure in fishing, Peter had to face the fact that he was nothing but a sinner and yet Jesus still loved him. He could now taste God’s grace of forgiveness like never before. But after experiencing this great love, it wasn’t over. Jesus asked him to do something in return, which was to feed his sheep. He had hope and vision for Peter to be more than just a petty fisherman. Jesus wanted him to also be a great shepherd & fish souls for God’s kingdom. … Ultimately he also wanted Peter to live like Jesus lived and to die like Jesus died.

Let’s look at verses 18-19 now to see how Peter would do this. **18Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” 19Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”**

Peter couldn’t really love Jesus like Christ loved him…..at least not yet. Eventually a time would come when he would mature to that level of love & even give his life up for Jesus. But in order to get to that level, he would have to give up his own way of life and be lead where he didn’t want to go and do things he didn’t want to do. In other words, Peter would have to completely surrender his will in order to follow Jesus. Ultimately he would learn to do this through dying to himself and living the shepherd lifestyle that Jesus lived.

So how do we really do this? How can we feed Jesus’ sheep? ….. It is when we feed them God's word in the Bible and help them to hear the voice of their good shepherd Jesus. Feeding his sheep also requires us to care for people's practical needs and take their problems as our very own. It involves humility…patience… sacrifice …and self-denial. Such a life of feeding Jesus’ sheep can seem like dying, but it is the most beautiful and blessed life we can obtain in this world. It is the life that our shepherd Jesus lived and it is the life he wants you to practice if you really want to love him in return.

Finally let’s look verses 20-22 to also see what feeding sheep and being a shepherd requires: **20Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) / 21When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” 22Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”**

After hearing about all the hardships that feeding sheep and following Jesus involved, Peter….. turned around and looked at John asking, “what about him?” It’s very cute. My children are like this. When they don’t want to do a chore or something I ask, they say: what about so and so? But Jesus responds by saying don’t look around at what others are doing. Don’t be so concerned about where they are at in life. Even if no one else is following, even if all will fall away, YOU must follow me! / In other words to feed God’s sheep and live as a shepherd is a personal decision of faith. These words were originally meant for Peter but they’re also meant for us. Jesus is asking each and everyone of you to follow him and to live that life of discipleship. Even if none of your friends are following Jesus, even if your whole family isn’t living that lifestyle, it’s up to you to take that call personally.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

When my family moved to Springfield 7 years ago, it was a great opportunity to take up that calling personally for me to feed God’s sheep. I was starting my residency at SIU medical school and I knew it was going to be the busiest time of my life. I didn’t really have any intentions of staying long term and was focusing more on feeding my own family & myself. But Pastor Mark Vucekovich, who was my campus pastor at that time, challenged me to plant a church in Springfield. I thought it was a crazy idea and was scared to attempt it. But at the same time I couldn’t help hear Jesus speaking through him saying …“John Lee, son of Missionary John Byung Lee, do you love me more than these? Feed my lambs.” So my family made the decision to plant a church and try our best to serve him here.

It wasn’t easy at first. I thought right off the bat God would really bless our decision and he would make our ministry fruitful. But it didn’t happen that way, at least not in the beginning. For the first 4 years we met in my living room with just Alex Foster & Ison Hong, two of the most faithful and hardworking brothers in Christ. But despite how much we reached out to college students, God only brought many broken and lost people to us: people with learning disabilities, mental illnesses, & even criminal records. But whoever God sent, we just tried our best to love them and open our home to them.

My wife had an even harder time because she had the extra cross… to care for 3 children, serve college students and bear with a husband full of weaknesses. Many times I was ready to quit ministry, my medical training and move back to Chicago. But she patiently encouraged me, prayed for me and loved me unconditionally. She has really been by suitable helper during all my ups and downs.

Then at the end of last year our family faced our greatest test when I almost lost my job with the hospital I work for now. Tensions were rising with my employer because I was inviting patients to church and having Bible studies with students in my office after hours & during my lunch break.

So my boss felt that I was more dedicated to ministry than to him and he wasn’t happy. / He told me to step down from what I was doing at UBF and put all my efforts into my job. Otherwise I would be let go and have to move out of Springfield due to a non-compete contract I had signed with them.

I was given two options: either I would be fired at that moment but they would pay me for 6 months as I transitioned into a new city and job. Or they would give me that 6 months to show my complete dedication to them. But if I didn’t measure up, I would be fired suddenly without any pay.

During this time, Becky and I also just got the news that we were having our 4th baby. So we were not in a state where we could suddenly be cut off financially. It seemed the smart thing to do was to move away and seek a better life somewhere else. Our family and friends were all up in Chicago. There was very little to see and do in Springfield compared to bigger cities. So there was nothing holding us here except the ministry.

But after much prayer, we chose the second option to stay in Springfield. We felt that to follow Jesus wasn’t necessarily to go somewhere but to stay put where we were & feed the sheep that he entrusted to our care. So we decided to stay and risk everything in order to love God’s sheep with everything we had.

It was a scary 6 months for our family but by the end of it all, a miracle happened. My boss reversed his decision and allowed me to keep my position. My job was secure and we didn’t have to pick up and leave Springfield. / But the thing we were most happy about was the fact that we didn’t have to leave the students and the ministry here.

I believe God blessed our decision to stay because right after that, this past school year was our most fruitful year. By God’s grace we met more students, then we ever did since starting our ministry. Many of the sheep God brought came through their own friends and nothing we did through our own efforts. They only heard about our love and how much we were willing to serve and sacrifice for them.

Also the Lord granted us a healthy new baby, Noah Lee, right after the school semester was over. / By the way, Noah in Hebrew means “comfort” & that was exactly what God showed us through these events.

…………………………………………………………..

At the beginning of our 7 year ministry, like the disciples I couldn’t really see or recognize what God was doing. I didn’t have his vision and hope for such a small and ordinary place like Springfield. But now, when I look back I see God had a greater plan for my life and the people here. Our ministry could experience and participate in changing young people, helping them grow as disciples and commit their life to Christ.

For example, Mike Jones who is a senior now, came to us when we first became a club at UIS 3 years ago. Originally he joined because he likes music and just wanted to play drums at our church. But with time he became our President and has helped us register as an organization every year. Mike has invited the most members out of everyone since starting as a club. Last year he gave the Easter sermon and helped to bring 75 people to our Sunday service. He faithfully serves music, acts as our presider, gives the message twice a semester, works full time & goes to school. He is a real shepherd now who is practically following Jesus during his college years.

Also Elise Dismer is a faithful shepherdess who was baptized & finished her graduate studies last year. Most of our students leave after finishing their education to pursue their careers. But she chose to stay in Springfield because of the ministry despite being offered a lucrative job to move elsewhere. Elise has been loving and serving our students with her whole heart since coming to us. She also plans to be a missionary in the future to wherever God calls her.

The Lord also used our ministry to send out students to be a blessing to other UBFs like Ben Main who graduated last year and is in medical school at Kansas City. He is faithfully studying the Bible with Missionary Martin Moon and serves as the presider for the Sunday service at Kansas City UBF. / Also Michael Lanier who is a native of Springfield left our ministry about a year ago to the St Louis area for his graduate studies. He is studying the Bible with Pastor Paul Choi who loves him so much & helping him in many ways that I couldn’t when he was in Springield. Michael is the presider at St Louis UBF, has several Bible students & is engaged to be married soon to a godly woman in Philippines UBF.

Finally God also used us to send out people not just to America but around the world like like Ison Hong. / As you heard from his report last night, God is doing a great work in Malaysia & Muslim people through him.

God could also bless our ministry with our first international house church last year with the help of Pastor Sam Lee in Champaigne UBF. Despite tensions between Russia and the U.S., God allowed Alex to marry the most godly & beautiful Russian shepherdess, Victoria. They have one handsome boy name Vladik and are faithfully serving our ministry and opening their home to students.

In addition to all this outward fruit, God also blessed me to grow spiritually and bear fruit from within. Despite my selfish desires of wanting to become just a petty doctor and family man but nothing more, God helped to broaden my heart and love others like he loved me.

Before I used to be a church kid who grew up in UBF only doing things out of a sense of duty. But after moving to Springfield, I was now learning to do God’s mission out of a relationship. It no longer felt like an obligation but it became a labor of love because Jesus first loved me. He taught me to have hope and vision for not just my own family and close friends, but for the college campus, the Midwest and the whole world. By God’s grace he is using ordinary people like me in an ordinary place like Springfield to do extra-ordinary things for God’s kingdom.

So before I conclude my message today, let me ask you a few questions:

Do you truly love Jesus from than the things of this world? If so, how are you demonstrating that love? Are you really feeding Jesus’ sheep…. or just yourself and maybe your family?

I want to encourage everyone here to have this same hope and vision to live as shepherds if you’re not doing so already. Know that feeding sheep is not only a command from God but also one of his greatest rewards. It is not meaningless and lonely like a self-centered life of just surviving. It is the life that Jesus lived and he wants you to share in that great joy when you also live to feed his sheep.

Therefore as you conclude this conference, let’s remember God’s unconditional love for you. When you were lost and had no direction, how did Jesus pour out his grace on you like these disciples? May that love be your guide when you lose your life direction or grow weary of following Jesus. I pray that you may learn to have God’s hope and vision to be shepherds as you go back to your mission fields today. Most of all may you follow Jesus to the very end of your lives through feeding his sheep.