



The Gospel of John: Behold the Man

John 21:1-17

Pastor Brad Wood

As we studied this week's passage in John 21, we were reminded of the transformative power of Christ's love and restoration.

The first-hand account of Jesus appearing to His disciples on the shore after His resurrection speaks volumes about second chances and the depth of God's grace. We see Peter—once full of bravado but now broken by his personal denial of Jesus—being gently restored by His Savior.

This interaction teaches us that Christ meets us exactly where we are, accepting our honest expressions of love and commitment, no matter how imperfect.

The distinction between 'agape' and 'phileo' love highlights God's willingness to accept us at our current capacity, while nurturing us towards a deeper, more selfless love. This message encourages us to approach God with honesty about our shortcomings, trusting in His unfailing love and patience as He guides us towards spiritual maturity.

5-Day Devotional and Small Group Guide

Day 1: Embracing God's Unconditional Love

Reading: John 21:1-17; Romans 5:6-8

Devotional: Just as Jesus met Peter where he was—accepting and understanding his limited, human capacity for “agape” love—God meets us exactly where we are. Reflect on how God's love for you is not dependent on your ability to love Him perfectly. Consider areas where you feel inadequate or unworthy of God's love. Do you hide behind those things, unsure of how to fully receive His love for you? Remember that—like Peter—you are accepted and valued by God despite your failures and shortcomings. Imagine Him coming to you, longing to have this same, honest conversation. Can you open your heart to receive more of God's unconditional love today?

Day 2: From Failure to Restoration

Reading: Luke 22:54-62; 1 Peter 5:6-11

Devotional: Peter's journey from denial to restoration reminds us that our failures don't define us in God's eyes...even our repetitive ones. Think about times when you felt as though you had failed God. How did those experiences affect your relationship with Him? Did you pull away, reluctant to talk with Him, impacting your prayer life? Just as Jesus restored Peter, He likewise offers you restoration and a fresh start. Remember that although Peter undoubtedly couldn't help recalling his failures, Jesus never once mentioned them. His goal was to lovingly get Peter restored back to his original intent and moving forward. Choose today simply to embrace God's forgiveness and allow Him to restore you to fuller service.

Day 3: Surrendering All to Christ

Reading: Matthew 16:24-26; Galatians 2:20

Devotional: The hymn "I Surrender All" challenges us to give everything to Jesus. Yet, like the Pastor Brad mentioned, we're not good at this! We either find ourselves mouthing those words while refusing to surrender anything or—having decided to surrender everything in a rapturous moment—we later start taking back what we had surrendered. In reality, we all tend to have hearts that can honestly sing "I surrender some." Or "I'm surrendering the best I can...I think." Reflect on areas of your life that you find hardest to surrender unto God. Why do you think these are difficult? Are you concerned their absence would create a vacuum in your life? What could fill that vacuum? Prayerfully consider that next one thing that God is asking you to surrender? Remember: you're not giving it "up," you're giving it "over"...to God, who is working a deep and wonderful process in you, molding you into the image of Jesus Christ. And He is very patient with your growth.

Day 4: Co-Laboring with Christ

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:5-9; Philippians 2:12-13

Devotional: God invites us to be co-laborers in His work...despite our imperfections. This incredible privilege allows us to participate in His mission while He continues to work on our hearts. Think about ways God has used you—even in your weakness—to impact others. How does knowing that God wants to work through you, not just on you, change your perspective on serving Him? Does it open your eyes to see your life—and how you live it—as vitally important? Could today be a day that God wants to use you for His glory? Ask Him to show you opportunities to co-labor with Him today.

Day 5: Growing in Christlike Love

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 4:7-12

Devotional: Jesus' conversation with Peter reveals different levels of love: from phileo (brotherly affection) to agape (selfless, divine love). God accepts us where we are but desires to grow our capacity to love freely and selflessly...just like He does. He understands that our starting point is a “selfish” kind of love (eros). “I love you because of how you make *me* feel or how you impact *my* life.” This is the love of a small child for his/her parent. Having a brotherly (phileo) love is actually a step up! Where is your love for God on this scale? How does that impact your love for others? Which of your relationships need you to grow in your love? What are steps you can take to allow God’s love to flow through you? Are there things you should do for others or communicate to them? As you start to take action, you will find that the Holy Spirit will expand your heart and empower you to love others more like Jesus does.

Small Group Guide: More Than Just a Breakfast

Key Takeaways:

1. Jesus meets us where we are, not where we think we should be.
2. Honest confession and humility are more valuable than false bravado.
3. God's love for us is not dependent on our ability to love Him perfectly.
4. Restoration comes through acknowledging our failures and accepting God's grace.
5. True love for Jesus is demonstrated through serving others and tending to His flock.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Jesus' gentle restoration of Peter challenge our understanding of forgiveness and grace in our own lives?
- In what ways might we—like Peter—struggle with being honest about our level of love and commitment to Christ?
- What does Jesus' willingness to meet Peter 'where he was at' reveal about God's approach to our spiritual growth?
- How might the two of the Greek words for love (agape and phileo) help us better understand and express our relationship with God and others?
- In what ways can we apply Jesus' instructions to 'feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep' in our own spheres of influence?
- How does Peter's transformation from self-reliant bravado to humble honesty inspire hope for our own spiritual journeys?

- What lessons can we learn from Jesus' focus on restoration rather than rebuke in His interaction with Peter?
- How might recognizing our own 'failures and shortcomings' actually prepare us for more effective ministry?
- In what ways does the image of Jesus preparing breakfast for His disciples challenge our view of leadership and service?

Practical Applications:

1. **Prayer:** This week, practice brutal honesty in your prayers. Tell God exactly where you are in your faith, without trying to impress Him.
2. **Reflection:** Reflect on areas where you might be operating out of spiritual pride or self-reliance. Ask God to help you surrender these to Him.
3. **Scripture Study:** Spend time meditating on John 21:15-17 this week. Journal about how Jesus is calling you to express your love for Him through service.
4. **Accountability:** Think about ways you can "tend the flock" in your church or community. Choose one idea to implement.
5. **Thankfulness:** Thank the Lord for His grace in how He has tended to you in your own personal failures, and reflect on how you have experienced God's grace through it all.

Further Discussion Questions:

- How does Peter's journey from self-confidence to brokenness resonate with your own spiritual experiences?
- Discuss the difference between "agape" and "phileo" love. How does understanding these distinctions impact your view of God's love for you and your love for Him?

- In what ways have you experienced Jesus meeting you "where you are" in your faith journey?
- How does the image of Jesus preparing breakfast for the disciples illustrate His care and desire for fellowship with us?
- Reflect on a time when you felt like you failed God. How did you experience His restoration?
- What does it mean to you to "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," and "feed my sheep"?
- How can we balance being honest about our spiritual shortcomings while still striving for growth?

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