

# Discipleship

by Doc Greenway

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*The sermon emphasizes the essential question of love in discipleship and the responsibilities that come with it.*

**Duration:** 24:49

**Scripture:** Matthew 14:30, John 6:66-69, John 21:15, John 21:18-19

**Topics:** "Discipleship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on John 21:15 where Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him more than the others. The preacher emphasizes the reality, response, and responsibility of discipleship. He shares a story of a little girl who lost her faith in God during a storm, highlighting the importance of unwavering faith. The preacher also discusses the encounter between Jesus and the young ruler who failed the test of discipleship. He concludes by addressing the courage and cowardice that can exist within believers, reminding them to keep their focus on Jesus and not be swayed by circumstances.

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## Transcript

I have to clear the decks for action, you know. Is this thing on? Am I switched on? I hope so. Excuse the preparation, but we don't want dry sermon again.

John chapter 21, verse 15. And I'm reading now from the authorized version, John 21, 15. So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He said unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.

He said unto him, Feed my lambs. The reality of discipleship, do you love me more than these? The response to discipleship, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. The responsibility of discipleship, Feed my lambs.

It's all there, isn't it? The reality of discipleship, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? And this is a very personal question. Simon, son of John. Simon, why not Peter? Oh, Peter was the strong, rock-like name, Petros.

But Simon, because Peter had failed to live up to his new name, he hadn't shown the characteristics of the strong, rock-like man. So Jesus says, Simon, son of John. Simon is so very human.

Maybe this is why he is so representative. The extremes seem to meet in Peter. Courage and cowardice in the same man, for instance.

In Matthew 14, 22 to 23, you remember how the disciples were alone in a little boat at night, and Jesus was praying on the hilltop. During that night he came to them walking on the sea, and they were terrified, crying out in fear. It is a spirit.

But he said, take heart, it is I, have no fear. And then Peter, impetuous as usual, called to Jesus, Lord, if it is you, let me come to you on the water. And he said, come.

So Peter got out of that boat and actually walked on the water and came to Jesus. What courage. I wonder whether we would have done what Peter did.

Stepped overboard and began to walk to Jesus. I remember as a young man being told by my pastor of an occasion during the great Welsh revival when some of the Christians were very firm and decided that they would try to emulate Peter's example and they would walk on the water themselves. So they rode out in the Cardigan Bay, in an old rowing boat, and they decided, well, they had better have a prayer meeting.

And by this time, you know, they realized what they were going to do, so it was a very long prayer meeting. And eventually, they decided to draw lots. And the lot fell upon one man of a company.

He was the only one who could swim, actually, which was quite a good idea. And so after a little bit of prayer on his own account, he stepped overboard and promptly disappeared beneath the water. Well, they hauled him back on board, and then they had another committee meeting.

And they decided in the end, after they had put him to the boat, you know, that, well, it was true that Simon Peter did walk on the water. He usually went by boat, and perhaps it was much safer to do it that way. And so they rode back home again.

Yes, it took a lot of courage, didn't it? Peter had that kind of courage. But when he saw the effect of the strong wind, then he was afraid. And he felt himself sinking and cried out in alarm, Lord, save me.

I suppose that's about the shortest prayer in the Bible. I was the eldest in our family, and we had sisters in between, but the youngest in the family was a boy like myself, 40 years younger than I was. And when he was quite a youngster, we used to sleep in the same bedroom.

And it was my turn, usually, to say the prayers before going to bed. I can remember this particular night, and my brother Jim was kneeling there waiting for me. And he said, now, brother, before you begin, he said, go straight to the throne, will you? I'm tired.

Well, this was the prayer, straight to the throne. Lord, save me. And Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying, O man of little faith, why did you doubt? Courage and cowardice.

They meet in Peter, and I think you'll agree, they meet in us, too. We are so courageous when there's no cloud in the sky. We can fight any battle at all when there's no fighting to be done.

But when the battle is really on, then giant despair gets all of us, and we're all locked up in doubting castles. We don't know what to do. That's how we are by nature.

We forget sometimes that courage is the deep-seated scar of outlived fears. When we forget that, then cowardice takes over. And so, we are like Peter in whom the extremes meet.

Jesus said to him, why did you doubt, O man of little faith, why did you doubt? Well, he had taken his eyes off the Lord, of course. He had taken his eyes off Jesus, he had lost his vision, and he saw only the circumstances. Years ago in Wellington, a real southerly gale on a Sunday.

The children were coming out of Sunday school and going into the bus that was to take them home. And they had these little squares of cardboard with a text printed on. Each had a different text, God is love, and so on.

And one little girl had the text, have faith in God. She got on the bus, and the bus started to go on the journey. And then the wind came swirling in, and away went her car.

And Jesus said, stop the bus, I can't go on. I've lost my faith in God. And girl, when that happens, everything seems to stop, doesn't it? Wherefore didst thou doubt? Then in the same person there is selfishness and spirituality.

Remember when Jesus dealt with the young ruler who failed in the test of discipleship? Because he put his goal before God? It's in Matthew 19, verses 60 to 27. It was Peter who said to Jesus, Lo, we have left everything apology. What shall we have, therefore? What then shall we have? That surely is the essence of selfishness.

Wasn't it for us? We've done this, we've forsaken everything, we are following you. What are we going to get out of it? That's Peter. That's the Jacob spirit, the bargain, counter-religion type.

Selfishness, the dark dungeon of warped souls. Selfishness, but there's so much of it about, isn't there? Dr. Harvey Ironside tells of a convention which is held in a tent. It's a very exclusive convention.

And on the outside of the tent they had put some lettuce cut separately out of cardboard. Jesus only. But in the night there was a storm.

And the thirsty lettuce came away from the tent. And all that was left was us only. And Harvey Ironside said that that about summed it up as far as he could see.

Exclusive, selfish, self-tempted. That's how Peter was. But in the same persons of his spirituality, John 6 verses 66 and 69, when Jesus had identified himself with the bread sent down from heaven, many of his disciples ceased from following him.

When he put the pest into the twelve, will you also go away? It was this same Peter who answered, Lord to whom shall we go? You only have the words of eternal life. And we believe and assure that you are of Christ, the Son of the living God. To whom shall we go, Lord? To whom shall we go? Yes, we may well ask the question this morning.

To whom shall we go for comfort in the storms of life? For cleansing from the sins of life? For courage in the battles of life? To whom shall we go if we go not to Jesus? Selflessness and spirituality, the extremes meet in Peter. Presumption and penitence. John 13, 3 to 10.

When Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet after supper, he came to Simon Peter and Peter said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you shall understand. And Peter said, You shall never wash my feet. What presumption! Why didn't he let the Lord get on with his own work and do it in his own way? Not Peter.

You aren't going to wash my feet. He said, Never, never, ever. You won't wash my feet.

But then when Jesus said, If I do not wash you, you have no pardon. Then he promptly swung to the other extreme in penitence. He said, Oh Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

Wash me all over, Lord. That's Peter. The extreme, not in penitence.

A new missionary, a returned missionary who failed on the mission field. She fell into sin. Had to come home to this country where the baby was born eventually.

And although she knew that God had forgiven her, she couldn't forgive herself. And her penitence was so marked and so deep and so long-lasting, it turned into bitter remorse. It was no use at all.

The extremes, they meet in Peter. They meet in us. They meet in us too.

We are like this by nature. So presumption and penitence in the same person. And this is not only a personal question, it's a very persistent question.

Do you love me more than these? It's not a question of theological comprehension. Not at all. He didn't say to Peter, do you know the difference between the church and the kingdom? Or, do you understand the doctrines of predestination and election? He didn't say to him, well, what are your views on age-end events? What do you believe in? What's your interpretation? Is it pre-millennial or post-millennial or historicist or futurist or poetical or literal or what? Symbolic? No at all.

Simon, do you love me? Do you love me? That was the main question. That was the essential thing. Do you love me more than possessions? More than this boat, these nets, this equipment, these fish? Do you love me more than these things? What comes first in your life, Peter? Do you love me more than the material things of life? And that question can well be asked of each one of us this morning.

Do we love him more than things? Things can never satisfy us. Things can never meet the deep need and hunger in our hearts. Things won't do this.

But Jesus himself and he alone can do it. Love us about me more than these things. How many men have been challenged on this basis? Where their work is concerned, where their friends are concerned, where the things of life are concerned.

Do you love these things more than you love me? How many women too have been challenged in the same way? Yet God comes here to Peter, Simon Peter, so full of extremes and contradictions. Do you love me more than these things which speak of material security? More than these? But those words more than these could easily have meant, just as easily and just as correctly, more than these people, more than these other disciples. Jesus knew how Simon Peter had compared himself with the others.

Matthew 26, 33 you have it. Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away. I will never deny you, Lord, he said.

Jesus may be saying, Simon Peter, you have said more than they have said. You have done more than they have done. You have claimed more than these have claimed.

But do you really love me more than these people? The reality of discipleship lies just here. In the quality, the sincerity, the loyalty of your love for Jesus Christ. That's where it lies.

That's where it rests. And this is the test. This is what Jesus asked of each one of them.

Now the response of discipleship. He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. First of all, this response was truthful.

Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Peter doesn't take up the challenge of comparison. Do I love you more than these do? He doesn't take that up at all.

He doesn't measure the depth and intensity of his love in relation to others. Because he knows his failure, he knows his weakness. When we fall into this trap, we invariably choose someone who is lesser, lower down in the scale than we are.

If we're going to make any comparison at all. Because you see, there's always a bit of the Pharisee in us all, isn't there? Wherever wholly we may appear in our own eyes, it's always there. The Pharisee and the publican who went to the temple to pray.

The Pharisee who said, oh God, I thank thee I'm not as old as men are. Not like this publican here. Ah yes, we may never say them as many words.

But down deep inside, it's there lurking, if we're honest. Peter wisely makes us appeal to the Lord who is the way and the truth and the life. Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

It is something between the disciple and his Lord here. Something that they know and their own know in reality. If you truly love him, then thank God he knows all about it.

And in the end you know that's the only thing that really matters, isn't there? What he knows. Because he never makes a mistake. The response of discipleship was truthful and it was careful.

The first time Jesus asked, do you love me more than these? He used a strong love word. Agathast me. Even though it was used comparatively.

But Peter is careful to use the weaker love word when he replies. The word philan. So when Jesus asked him, do you love me with an absolute love that prizes me? Peter answered, you are my friend Lord.

That's as far as he would go. The second time Jesus still used the strong love word. Agathast me.

Do you love me with an absolute love that prizes me? And Peter replies as before. Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. You are my friend.

But the third time Jesus used the same word as Peter. Philast me. Am I your friend? And that's why Peter was grieved because the third time the Lord came down to his level.

And seemed to doubt that Peter considered him even as a friend. And Peter couldn't stand that. Peter's response was careful indeed.

Not arrogant and boastful. But humble. Very, very careful in his answer.

And yet the passage shows it was trustful. Verse 17. Lord, you know everything.

You know that I love you. The others may know my failure, my denial, my weakness, my shame. But I trust your judgment, Lord, because you know everything.

These others don't, but you do, Lord. You know. And I trust your judgment, Lord.

You know that in spite of my failure, in spite of my denial, in spite of my weakness, O Lord, of which I am thoroughly ashamed, you know, Lord, that I really love you. Can you say that this morning? From your heart. It's the thing that really matters.

One of the really vital lessons we have to learn is that although others may think of us in certain ways, and this is important, the all-important thing is what Jesus thinks about us, because he knows us all together. The response of discipleship. Yes, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love you. So on the basis of this response, here is the responsibility of discipleship. Feed my lambs, feed my sheep, care for my flock.

In Peter's case, the responsibility of discipleship is clear. It involves a calling. Be a shepherd to my flock.

Although in an official sense we may not all be called to this task, if each one of us is responsible for others, and we can't evade it, we can't avoid it, every one of us has something we can do for the Lord. The salvation of God's service is a contradiction in terms. It's part of discipleship to serve him.

I knew a man in the church where I was called to the Lord in Wales. He didn't have any official position, but he said he had one task the Lord had given him, and he had a very smiley sort of face. He said, my job is to smile them in, and then to smile them out again.

And he did that very, very effectively and successfully. You see, if salvation means service, then surely it is our responsibility to ask the Lord what it is he wants us to do, and when we know what he wants us to do, to go ahead and to do it. Don't waste time explaining why it can't be done.

Just ask him, well, how does he want you to proceed? And you'll find that he's very, very willing to explain himself if we're willing to wait for his answer. It's an important thing to realize. It involves a calling.

This is discipleship. Then it involves the cross, verses 18 and 19. When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would.

When you were old, you would stretch out your hands, and another will gird you, carry you where you do not wish to go. This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God. And according to legend, Peter at his own request was crucified upside down.

He felt he wasn't worthy to be crucified as Christ had been. Well, we're not likely to face literal crucifixion in this country, but we cannot avoid the cross in principle if we're going to be his disciples. If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.

Isn't it wonderful that from the timbers of the cross, God fashions the steps to the throne? If we accept the crucifixion sign, we shall know that the glory sign is assured. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him. We have to remember all the time as we follow the Lord, as disciples of his, that the cross is not in the way, but that the way is in the cross.

The way is in the cross, every time, without exception. Responsibility of discipleship. It involved a calling, it involved a cross, and it involved a committal.

Verses 20 to 23. When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? And Jesus said, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me. What is that to you? Literally, mind your own business.

That's what Jesus said. Mind your own business. What about this man? Mind your own business.

It's nothing to do with him. You leave him to me. What is my business, Lord? Follow me, Jesus.

That's it. Commit your life to me. Surrender your will to me.

Submit to my direction. Accept my control. Dedicate your whole being to being my disciple.

Do this work for me. This is your business. This is what I require.

Follow me. It should be our chief concern, shouldn't it? Personal discipleship is not small. It's the biggest thing, the biggest issue in this world that we are concerned.

How we respond to it will determine our destiny for time and for eternity. And you cannot afford to treat it lightly. For nothing, nothing is more detrimental to spiritual life than to undervalue the things that last and to overestimate the things that perish.

We have to learn, see that our priorities are as God intended. This, then, is discipleship. Part of it anyhow.

It's reality. You love me more than me. It's response.

Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And it's responsibility. Feed my lambs.

Feed my sheep. May God bless His Word to our hearts and help us to do just that. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, there is so much we do not understand about our discipleship and about our walk with you. But there is one thing about which we are perfectly clear. We have to love you with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength, because you will not settle for less than this.

Teach us, Lord, what this means in experience and give us grace to be obedient to you in this realm, in this area of life, so that our eyes shall behold the King in His beauty all the time, all the days of our lives. And we may journey towards your own purpose and plan, day after day, moment by moment, not being diverted from the path of your choosing, but following you as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant us this experience, we pray, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

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