



IT'S YOUR JOB

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It's pretty important, when you first begin to work with a company, to have a clear understanding of what's expected from you. Why does that company exist? What are your boss' most important values? And what did they hire you to do?

Without clear answers to those questions, you'll flounder, you'll get confused, you'll be frustrated, you'll feel insignificant.

It's pretty much the same with your faith. If you're unclear about your purpose as a Christ-follower, you'll become confused and make trouble, or you'll isolate, or just give up. What does the Lord expect from you? By what values are you to live? And what is God up to in the earth today?

In order to answer such questions today, we're going to explore the words of Apostle Peter. Peter was a headstrong Jewish fisherman, who followed Jesus impetuously and boldly and (mostly) faithfully.

He had a clear revelation of who Jesus was: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"* (Matthew 16:16).

Even though Peter stumbled emotionally, Jesus renamed him "a rock." Peter was the first public evangelist (Acts 2), and became a leader of the Early Church. His two New Testament letters are addressed to saints (God's faithful people) *everywhere* (the whole church).

Jesus introduced His disciples to a new covenant with God, based on a new (renewed) commandment, and a new connection with God.

His covenant was based on God's grace, rather than man's religious performance.

His commandment was based on receiving and sharing God's abundantly gracious love.

And the new connection with God was established by giving the Holy Spirit to everyone who made this covenant with Him.

Jesus' commandment was to love one another as He has loved us. Well, how has Jesus loved us? Among other things, He has been our Forgiver, our Comforter, our Encourager, and our Exhorter. We have been urged to follow in Jesus' steps.

Apostle John summarized this theme in his first letter, when he recalled: *"He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers"* (1 John 4:21). That's our job as followers of Jesus Christ.

And John was not alone in presenting us with this job description. His fellow fisherman and apostle, Peter, also proclaimed it. Let's take a look at what Peter had to say, and get to know our real job better.

1 Peter 1:22; NIV Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Peter's words help us to apply the truth that John repeatedly emphasized.

The Greek language, from which the original New Testament was translated, offers four words for love, each with a unique application.

Eros is the word for sensual or romantic desire. Although it is a word that doesn't appear in the New Testament, it's not a bad word—unless it's applied outside of a marriage covenant, because that twists it into a sport, or worse.

Storge is the word for familial love (love of family), like the devotion and protective affection among parents and children. This, too, is a good word, unless it stands in front of love for God.

Philia describes the emotional bond of deep friendships—expressing mutual respect, patient and watchful care, and human compassion. It's the love of best friends.

Agape is a word almost unique to the New Testament. It distinguishes God's love toward us, and the love that He plants in us, as devoted, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure.

In the passage I just read, Peter used two different words for love: "sincere love" is *philia*, which is "brotherly love," and "love deeply" is *agape*, which is godlike "sacrificial love." Following the new birth of the Spirit, it's necessary that we share both kinds of love.

Please give your attention now to a powerful lesson that Jesus gave Peter concerning the *distinction* of these two loves and also their *partnership*.

In John 22, Jesus appeared to His disciples a third time after His resurrection, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. After a fruitless night of fishing on their own, Jesus directed the men to cast their net one more time and find a miraculous haul of fish, and they shared breakfast together on the beach.

John 21:15; NLT After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

¹⁷ A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

The first two times Jesus questioned Peter, He used the word *agape*. Each time Peter answered with *philia*. It’s as if Jesus asked, “Do you LOVE Me?” and Peter answered, “You’re my best friend.”

The third time, Jesus asked, “Do you *philia* Me?” Peter was not hurt that Jesus asked him the same question three times. He was hurt that the third time Jesus downgraded His question from “love” to, “Peter, do you really *like* Me?”

In light of his recent denials, the only honest answer Peter could give Jesus, was, “You know I like you a lot.”

“Do you love Me more than these?” Generally, there have been three interpretations proposed as to the meaning of “these” in Jesus’ initial question.

The first is, “Do you love Me more than the other disciples do?” I dismiss this possibility because it would promote the kind of comparative ranking among the team that Jesus had previously rebuked.

The second is, “Do you love Me more than you love the other disciples?” This could work, since Jesus had already told them that if they loved anyone else more than Him they were not worthy to be His disciples. But I dismiss this too, because I see no evidence of this kind of preference from Peter. On the contrary, his love for Jesus was clearly greater, and something in him wanted to be *first* in Jesus’ eyes.

The third possibility (which is where I land) is, “Do you love Me more than you love such a successful haul of fish?” This seems most fitting because Peter was a fisherman by trade, and a competitor by nature. What would a fisherman love more (in the natural) than a huge haul of fish?

Had the conversation been expanded, I imagine Jesus might have explained, “Peter, you labored all night to acquire nothing. Then, at my word, you caught more than you needed. Now, if you love Me more than the ‘win,’ give your life away for Me, for I have given you all that you have and I will provide all that you ever need.”

What has Jesus done for you? What love has He shown you? How great is His salvation in your eyes?

Are you sorry that He keeps asking if you love Him? Are you annoyed that He keeps testing your loving response? Or, are you ready to move into this dimension of Kingdom-living?

If you love Jesus Christ more than all the world has to offer, then you should commit to give your life away in His name through acts of love, trusting that He will keep you supplied with all you need, just as He promised when He said:

Matthew 6:33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.

Now, look once more with me at Peter’s words...

1 Peter 1:22; NIV Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love (philia) for your brothers, love (agape) one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

We share *philia* (sincere) love because our shame has been washed away and our sinful ways of thinking are being dismantled. We are brothers and sisters in Christ; our likenesses create a natural bond, while our diversities expand our potential.

We share *agape* (deep) love because we belong to God by an imperishable bond and, therefore, we should overlook annoying differences and unintentional injuries. This is not optional; it is the product of our supernatural bond with the Holy Spirit.

Peter guides us to grow from natural affection to supernatural commitment. There is a distance between these two loves (the natural and the supernatural)—based on our natural inclinations and our level of spiritual maturity. That distance must be bridged by our obedience to God’s Word.

Obedience will take you from the natural to the supernatural.

Sometimes, the supernatural looks altogether different than the natural (that's why we call it "miraculous"). But most times, the supernatural looks just like the natural, *but on steroids*. And many times, the miraculous results from pushing the natural to the tipping point (reaching a critical mass).

Here's how Peter expressed that:

¹ Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. ⁹ Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will grant you His blessing.

The responses Peter called for are not unusual—each is a normal, natural response. But, taken together, layering one upon another, they reach a tipping point. Climb the ladder with me...

"One mind." This is the unity of commonality—shared beliefs, shared expressions, shared community.

"Sympathetic." Awareness and consideration for each other—sensitivity to someone else's feelings, instead of dismissing them.

"Love as brothers." Recognize and appreciate what Christ has done for each one of us and regard each other respectfully as family.

"Tenderhearted." Not hard, but soft—capable of being moved by others' stories and experiences. Eager to support and help.

"Humble." Not proud, or "better than others." Treating others as equally valuable and potentially fruitful.

"Don't repay with evil." Once I poked fun at a Board member from the pulpit. Clearly, I thoughtlessly crossed a line in our friendship, for he shot back at me from his seat, "I don't get angry, Will, I just get even." I thought about that years later when he orchestrated a movement to have me removed from the church for ineffective ministry. Fortunately, others didn't share his view. But I had wounded a brother. So, no tit-for-tat. Instead, we are to "overcome evil with good."

"Don't retaliate with insults." Drop the sarcasm and veiled threats. Instead, esteem each other highly for Christ's sake. If you can't say something nice, say nothing at all.

If we push all these simple, natural responses over and over again, climbing all the way to the top of this ladder, we'll reach the tipping point, where something supernatural begins to happen: *Instead...* pay them back with a blessing!

The natural, when compiled and pushed beyond normal limits, often *becomes supernatural!* *Philia* becomes *agape!* And then we're loving like Jesus loved!

This is what God has called you to do. This is your job description as a Christian. Pay back misunderstanding and mistreatment with blessing! And Christ will reward you with His blessing.

I conclude by reading the same two verses from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*:

1 Peter 3:8–9; MSG *Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.*

That's your job, my friends. Accept it. And learn to excel at it.

Questions to Consider

Have you failed at being a good friend? Have you failed at loving unselfishly? Do you have the Holy Spirit's help, or are you still trying to do supernatural things in your own power?

Perhaps it's your time to acknowledge God's grace for you in Jesus Christ. Today, you can surrender your claim to the mastery of your life, and embrace God's loving providence by entrusting yourself to Jesus as the Lord and Leader of your life. If you're willing to do that, I want to pray with you in just a minute.

Have you failed at love as a follower of Jesus? (Who hasn't?)

Don't fume angrily at others, pointing the finger of blame in their direction. And don't wallow in your own shame. Instead, repent of your mistakes and ask God to help you make it right.

"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

How kind is that?!?!?

If you want to become one who loves God, and one who loves others like God does... If you're prepared to make Jesus the Lord and Leader of your life today—whether for the first time, or for the last time—call on the Father and tell Him so. Not later... now.