



### John 21

Two weeks ago I reconnected with an old friend from seminary days. John and I served together at the same church and shared the same office for a short while. Then he went off to the mission field and I have only seen him one time in the last 25 years. During the phone call I found out that none other than Don Green was his roommate for three years while they were on CRU staff together at the University of Illinois. That was crazy.

Here is his photo which appeared in World magazine two months ago. John's story has been posted all over Christian news and countless blogs ever since he was unjustly fired from the church he planted in Naples, FL. It has been made public that James

#### WORLD MAGAZINE



### Command and control

Harvest Bible Chapel fires pastor at recently acquired church

by [Julie Roys](#)

Post Date: January 31, 2019 - Issue Date: February 16, 2019

MacDonald, senior pastor of the Harvest Bible megachurch, among other things, had been using the church as a personal ATM machine to the tune of \$2 million per year. It was rumored that MacDonald wanted to take over the church in Naples. John was standing in his way and became collateral damage as a result.

Last year megachurch pastor Bill Hybels resigned in disgrace. This seems to be happening with increasing frequency. But rather than focus on all of the negative associated with these various moral failures, I want to focus on what it takes to be restored to ministry. Unfortunately, most of these high-profile tragedies do not have a happy ending, but some do. Thirty-two years ago, another MacDonald—Gordon MacDonald and no relation to James MacDonald, resigned as the president of InterVarsity due to a marital affair. But with slow, careful and deep repentance, he was restored and has since served as a pastor and seminary president. But of all of the good stories out there, the greatest restoration to ministry of all time has to be that of Peter in John 21.

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." <sup>19</sup> (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me.

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" <sup>23</sup> So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

*25 Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

It's not until verse 14 that John tells us that this was the third time Jesus revealed himself to his disciples. There were more than four appearances, but John is correct—it was the third appearance to his disciples, most of them anyway. The thing that stands out here is that after Jesus appeared twice, Peter decided it was time to go fishing.

1<sup>st</sup> appearance—(Day One) Mary Magdalene, outside the tomb

2<sup>nd</sup> appearance—(Day One) 2 men on the road to Emmaus

3<sup>rd</sup> appearance—(Day One) Jerusalem, in a locked room → 10 disciples

4<sup>th</sup> appearance—(8 days later) Jerusalem, same locked room → 11 disciples

Jesus is alive! Let's go fishing.

5<sup>th</sup> appearance—Sea of Galilee → 7 disciples

It's kind of humorous when you think about it. Jesus is alive—let's go fishing! The disciples were trained by the Lord for three years and this was the best idea they could come up with? You can't really fault them because they didn't know what was supposed to happen next. And they were just returning to what they knew the best, which was their former profession of fishing. They had been fishing for men for the past three years, but they fell back into their old habits. Sovereignly speaking, though, it did create a place for a really important conversation.

None of the disciples were exactly in good standing with Jesus at this point. They all ran away when Jesus was arrested, just as he said they would do. Peter returned but then denied the Lord three times, exactly as Jesus had predicted he would do. Jesus appeared to them and called them to faith, but there wasn't a true restoration until now.

In this story there are three things the disciples experienced within a few minutes of one another—the familiar, the miraculous and the ordinary. The familiar experience happened when Jesus told them how to cast their nets. This would have felt very familiar to them because the same thing happened at the beginning of their ministry with Jesus.

*4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. Luke 5:4-11*

Perhaps that familiar scene is what caused John to notice that it was Jesus standing on the shore. The miraculous was the miraculous catch of fish. Yes, it was familiar, but it was also very much a miracle. The ordinary comes when they sit down for breakfast. First of all, imagine the creator

of the universe making you breakfast! There on the beach was a fire with fish and unleavened bread. And what do you get when you combine grilled fish and unleavened bread? This could have been the first example of fish tacos, who knows? 😊 Did he wave his hand and the breakfast appeared? Did Jesus catch the fish himself, prepare it, and cook it along with the bread? We don't know but even after his resurrection of his glorified body, he was still playing the role of a servant leader. The night of his arrest, he served them by washing their feet and here he served them by providing a meal for them.

The ordinary comes into play merely by Jesus and the disciples eating together. This was something they had done a thousand times and they got to experience it one last time. While eating a meal together was one of the most ordinary parts of life, it had an additional higher meaning with Jesus. The fact that he actually ate food was evidence that this was his actual body that had been resurrected. He was not a ghost or a spirit. He was flesh and blood. This can get confusing when you see him suddenly appear in a locked room, which is what he did the first two times he appeared to the disciples. In his resurrected and glorified body, he was able to do things he could not do before. But the simple act of eating food was more evidence that this was Jesus' actual resurrected body. He didn't need to eat, did he? But he could and did eat with his disciples.

Most of this story focuses on Peter, and for good reason. Peter was the lead disciple. Jesus announced that he would build his church upon the petra—the rock that was Peter. Peter was in the inner circle of three disciples who ascended the mountain to witness the transfiguration of Jesus, along with Moses and Elijah. Jesus chose the twelve, out of those twelve, special attention was given to Peter, James and John and of the three, Peter was the de facto leader. He bore the heaviest weight of responsibility, which makes his threefold betrayal all the more devastating.

We all know what it's like to get caught in sin. Often while we are in the middle of sinning, we have this awareness that we are in fact sinning right then. We're actually doing it and we feel powerless to stop. It feels our sin is a giant boulder attached to us and it's dragging us downhill. I can imagine Peter felt something like that as well. He was asked, "Aren't you one of his disciples?" He vigorously denied it. The boulder has begun to roll down the hill. "You're one of his disciples, aren't you?" A second adamant denial. The boulder is gaining speed. Peter feels trapped and helpless as his sin carries him so much further than he could have ever imagined. "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Now it's too late. His sin has taken him so far that he can't stop the momentum. He can't seem to turn things around so for a third time he flat out denies that he ever knew Jesus.

Peter's sin was unique and it was horrible but it's also all too common, isn't it? And here's where I want to make the application to moms. Out of all of the parents in the world, mom's make up one-half of all the sinners. Just simple math, right? They're half the sinners but they have their own unique mom struggles and a common one is not feeling good enough. For some moms this is an occasional experience but for others, not feeling good enough is the daily air that they breathe. It's an inescapable feeling.

Why are those feelings so strong and even overwhelming at times? Some is a direct result of sin and rebellion, no question. Some comes from the lies of the enemy. It's important that we

distinguish between these two but at the end of the day, what Peter experienced should cover both.

The scene begins with Peter swimming a world record open sea 100 meter race to see Jesus. The text tells us they were about a hundred yards from the shore and I call it a world record swim because he was so incredibly eager to see Jesus. I believe that swim to shore would have made Michael Phelps look like a baby splashing in a wading pool. Then they ate together, that wonderful intersection of the familiar, the miraculous and the ordinary. After breakfast, the conversation got deadly serious. Peter denied Jesus three times so three times Jesus asked the difficult question, “Do you love me.” On the surface, this feels like a test for Peter, doesn’t it? If you were a Navy SEAL and you failed the obstacle course, I can imagine that they would make you pass it three times in a row to show that you can do it. On the surface, this interaction sort of has that feel. Peter denied Jesus so the Savior asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me.” In other words, did you learn your lesson? Are you truly repentant? What will you do to make sure that this never happens again? You demonstrated that you didn’t love me, but have you fixed that now?

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” It seems like Peter is saying, “Yes Lord. You know that I messed up really bad, but I learned my lesson. But just to be sure, Jesus asked a second time. Simon, son of John, do you love me? Then a third time—Do you love me? It has the feel of a parent repeatedly asking his son, “Look at me when I’m talking to you. Listen. I can’t afford for you to screw this up again.”

It feels like a test for Peter. And it can feel like a test for you and me as well. Moms, place yourself in Peter’s shoes for a moment. You don’t feel good enough. You feel like you can never do enough, never measure up to God’s standards. Then Jesus comes to you three times and ask point blank, “Do you love me?” Which box do you check at that moment—yes or no? We know we are supposed to love Jesus but we also know we have boulders of sin tied around us that continue to drag us downhill. We can barely get through the day let alone be able to confidently answer “yes” to this all-important question.

It feels like a test, but I want to suggest a different perspective. How would it have been possible for Peter to have loved Jesus? How does anyone truly love Jesus? The answer lies in one of John’s letters. About ten years before he wrote his gospel. John wrote three letters. I want us to travel over to his first letter, the fourth chapter and the 19<sup>th</sup> verse which reads, “We love because he first loved us.” Now we carry this verse back into the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of John’s gospel and take another look at Jesus’ question. “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter can’t ever be good enough, can he? Peter can’t undo his three denials of the Savior of the world sitting next to him.

The transforming love of Christ is the only power than enables us to love Jesus in return. So Jesus was not testing Peter to see if he had learned his lesson and was ready to behave himself. He was asking Peter if he had received his forgiveness. In essence, Jesus was saying, “Peter, I just showed you how much I love you. Do you believe it? Do you really know that I love you? Do you know you are forgiven? I loved you first and that’s the only way you can get this question right.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Yes Lord, you know that I love you because you first loved me.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Yes Lord, you know that I love you because you first loved me.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Yes Lord, you know that I love you because you first loved me.

Remember that world record swim I talked about? I believe something else was happening there as well. You’ve heard of the walk of shame. I see this as the swim of shame. Peter dove into the water still full of shame from his betrayals but as he swam, with each stroke, the shame began to wash away. It washed away because with each stroke he got closer to Jesus.

Bring that shame to Jesus. Bring your unworthiness, your “I’m not good enough” to Jesus. We can’t do it on our own, but that’s the lesson we are supposed to learn. Before I said that moms can feel they’re not good enough because of their own sin and due to Satan’s lies. But we still need to take some responsibility for believing the lies. In those moments, unbelief has a chokehold on us. So that is why I said the solution to both issues is fundamentally the same.

“Do you love me?” Jesus asks? There’s only one way to answer that question.

**Rich Maurer**  
**May 12, 2019**