

Introduction: Pg. ____

Serve Medford week... We are a serving church... / Generation Link... 100ish (1 of our own Tufts students, James Hoder, spent the summer in India... Two of our own ResLinkers: Joel & Jen Smith)

Our G-Linkers have served in Prague, India, Turkey, the Middle East, Miami, Seattle, Columbus, Denver, and a handful of other locations across the Southeast, and (Titledown, the Athens of America, the City of Cities, the Hub of the Universe, do I need to keep going? Yes, the city that needs no greater superlative because its greatness cannot be surpassed) Boston.

These teams have done a phenomenal job meeting physical and spiritual needs within the churches they've partnered with and in the cities where God has sent them, but as a reminder to them and to all of us this morning...

The fact that we serve is great, but the true measure of our service consists of how we serve and why we serve.

We are going to wrap up the Gospel of John with a story that addresses this very topic. This story will give us a huge clue as to why the early church served the world so effectively, and it will help us chart the course for effective service wherever God places us.

The heart of this story of Jesus and his friendship with a man named Peter. Peter had absolutely blown it in the final hours of Jesus' life. He had let him down in a colossal way, but what we find in this story is Jesus demonstrating his colossal forgiveness in such a way that empowers Peter to love, lead, and live in that displayed the greatness of God through his life.

Today, we are going to look at what it means to live...

"Forgiven & Free" **John 21**

We are going to learn that...

The Point: Forgiveness produces powerful freedom to love, lead, and live.

STORY...

Read 1-14

- The disciples were out *all night* fishing, but they caught nothing!
- A man shouts from the shore and suggests they modify their approach. Try the right side... (undoubtedly, they had tried the right, left, starboard, stern, front/back..) but they take his suggestion, what could it hurt when you've put up a goose egg all night (you know what I'm saying), and they catch so many fish, that they can't even pull up the net.
- 153 fish to be exact (fishermen like to count)! which is not just a good day at the office. It is miraculous.
- John, the writer of this gospel, says to Peter. "It's him." And Peter does what Peter does, he is so excited and eager to see Jesus that he throws on his outer garment, and throws himself into the sea, so that he can be the first to greet Jesus.
- Like a good friend, Jesus has breakfast ready, and they finish their meal, he set his sights on one piece of unfinished business.

{P} Read *Verses 15-19*

You probably noticed Jesus asks Peter the same question (with slight variation) three different times:

- 1. “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”
 - The word “these” could refer to loving Jesus more than the other disciples love him, or more than his fishing profession, or more than he loves the other disciples (which is my lean; we can’t know for sure.)
 - We can clearly see Jesus questioning the quality of Peter’s love publically (in front of the other disciples) and in a personal way...
- 2. “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
 - Again, Peter answers: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”
- 3. A THIRD TIME: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
 - We can almost feel Peter’s exasperation. John tells us that it grieved him to be asked a third time, probably not sure how to give a better answer. “YOU! YOU JESUS, the maker of every mind, YOU KNOW EVERYTHING.”
 - But Jesus is not trying to grieve him, is he? What’s going on?

Background

- We have to understand this conversation in context. Peter was the primary spokesman and leader amongst Jesus’ 12 closest followers.
- Peter was so devoted to Jesus that when Jesus told Peter he is about to die, Peter came back strong and said: “If you’re going down, I’m going down.” In other words, “I will die for you!”
- BUT to Peter’s amazement, Jesus says: “You’re not going to die for me, you’re actually going to deny me. Not once, not twice, but three times.” And that is exactly what happened.
- Peter would have felt incredibly ashamed after he abandoned Jesus in his hour of greatest need.
- That’s why Jesus displays such brilliant wisdom here. He allows the man who denied him three times to declare his allegiance three times so that Peter would feel the full weight of forgiveness and restoration in his relationship with him and in his leadership role in the early church.

In this Jesus shows us what real forgiveness looks like.

- **Real forgiveness recognizes the wrong.**
 - Jesus does not walk up to Peter and say: “Hey, we’re good. Don’t worry about what happened back there.”
 - BUT he goes on to...
- **Real forgiveness fully restores the relationship.**
 - Forgiveness says: “That wrong will not stand between us any longer.” Anybody need a second chance today?
 - I’m sure Peter wondered if his relationship with Jesus would ever be the same after he denied him.
 - Some people fail to see their need for forgiveness, and others think they could never be forgiven.
 - One of my new friends who just became a Christian really struggled with this. “How could God forgive me?”
 - You think you’ve failed God? look at Peter!
 - Because we cannot erase the stain of our wrongdoing out of our mind, does not mean that Christ cannot erase them from the record book of our lives and give us a fresh start!

- Listen: "There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us." - Sibbes
- **"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13-14)**
- Have you asked God to forgive you and received the gift he offers us through Christ?

T: When we are forgiven, it is like a 1,000 lb. weight has been lifted off our back. God made us to run wild, completely free from anything that would hold us back. NOW we are free to enjoy life at its best again. Let me share 3 ways forgiveness produces a powerful freedom in our lives:

I. We are free to follow him from a heart of love.

Jesus extends *to us* an amazing invitation to follow him. His last words to Peter, twice in this story (v. 19 & 22), are the same as his first words to Peter and the other disciples: "Follow me." (John 1:43; Matt 4:19), "and I will make you fishers of men."

- Do you see that? First words. "Follow ME." Last words? "Follow ME." The call is to continue following Christ. The Greek tense literally would read: "Keep on following me."
- This is our greatest responsibility & our greatest privilege! Not starting a church. Not putting on a fun night for our city. Following him.
- But as we follow, Jesus wants love to be the characteristic mark of our loves. Love drives everything [The two greatest commandments].

The three questions Jesus asks give us incredible insight into what he cares about. He goes straight after our hearts: "Do you love me?"

- We can do a lot of nice things, but not do it from a heart of love. We can say a lot of nice words, but not say them from a heart of love.
- Learning to be loved and to love is life's greatest lesson. This **{PIC 1 of JT}** is our youngest daughter Jordyn. You can see she's been working on her game... As soon as I was able to teach her how to move her arms, I started asking her the question: "How much does daddy love Jordyn?" To which, she **{PIC 2 of JT}** throws her arms open as wide as she can. I didn't pick this picture because it is the cutest one on my laptop (she climbed into my boots on her own! Plus the heart sweater.) It was just the first one I could find.

How can we increase our love for Jesus?

Get to know his love!

- God wants us to know his love like that (outstretch arms).
- Remember, everything Jesus is saying comes hours after he laid down his life for us.
 - Jesus said it himself: "Greater love has no one than this..."
 - John would later write: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us!" He is still amazed!
- If you are not growing in your love for God, it is probably a clear indication that you are failing to realize how much he loves you.
 - When someone brings you a meal when you're sick, or drops you a note of encouragement for a job well done, or spends time with you in your moment of need, do you love them more or less?
- *Love motivates love.* His love is the genesis of our love.

- It's in light of his love that he turns the question on us: "Do you love me? *How much* do you love Jesus?"

Take the next step, no matter the cost!

- Love does not calculate the cost. Love just moves because love naturally pours out and gives and sacrifices.
- It is understandable why Peter would have been a bit puzzled by Jesus question: "Do you love me?"
- "Jesus, you know I love you. Did you *not* just see that move I made in the boat? When John said "It is the Lord," I *threw myself* into the sea, and swam 300 feet as fast as I could to see you, because of I love you. {Alright, at least Peter didn't say that to Jesus - as far as we know but it would have been true!}
- And I love that picture of devotion. Devotion is throwing yourself at God. I want all of you. I want to be the first to you in the morning. You are first in morning, in my work, in my family, in my thoughts, in my actions. First. I throw myself at you to have more of you.
- But Jesus says: "Yes, Peter, but there's more for you." In *verse 18*, Jesus provides a very picturesque way Peter will love him and take the next step, no matter the cost. The phrase "Stretch out your hands," meant only one thing in the Roman empire - death by crucifixion.

"Do you love Christ? How much do you love him?" Is there any step you would not take for him?

- Would you not represent him in your neighborhood and workplace?
- Would you not give of your possessions to help someone in need?
- Would you not LIVE SENT whether that means serving in this church on Sundays or serving on the other side of the world?

T: Not only are we free to follow from a heart of love, we also...

II. We are free to lead others toward spiritual health.

After each affirmation of love from Peter Jesus has an assignment for him. (15. Feed. 16. Tend. 17. Feed)

Peter was a leader. He was a natural leader (verse 2... I'm going fishing; they all follow him). But he also had a God-given leadership role. We want to develop leaders at Redemption Hill. That is one of the values of our Generation Link partnership.

- Leadership flows from love. If you don't love, you can't lead, but leadership doesn't stop there.
- Leadership leads us to love in such a way that we seek others' spiritual good. We do this by giving people God's Word.
- When Jesus says, "Feed my sheep," I know he had just prepared a little breakfast on the seashore for his friends, but Peter knew exactly what he was talking about. Not physical food, spiritual food.
- Jesus wants action from Peter and from us. He wants us to help others grow in their spiritual health and we do this by giving people his Word.

- Jesus said it: “**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**” (Matthew 4:4) That’s how we live.
- When I feel lethargic or lifeless on the inside, it usually is a direct correlation to how much meaningful time I am spending taking in God’s Word.
- If you feel lifeless, it is probably because you are not getting your 3 squares a day... WHOLE 30... 30 days in the Word!
- Why is this so important? Because it helps us live out our primary existence.

Let me ask you a tough question: Do you exist for you? I know it’s not tough in theory (at least not from a biblical perspective). We exist to make much of God and to pour out our lives for the sake of others. It may not be tough in theory, but it is tough in practice.

You do not exist for you. We exist for us. You got that?

A few more questions:

- What happens when you start caring more about the person’s soul beside you than your own?
- What happens when you sit down and read your Bible or you sit down to hear a sermon, not with the primary goal of what you can get out of it, but what you can get out of so you can give to someone else, later that day?
- What happens when you join a group, not primarily for how that Group will benefit you, but how YOU will benefit that GROUP? Shameless plug for GROUPS that will start back up in about a month.

You know happens when we exist for us? This church and this city will never be the same.

"Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8)

T: “Do you love Christ?” Freely lead others to spiritual health by giving them his Word. Finally... not only are we free to love and free to lead, we are...

III. We are free to live the life God assigns us.

Remember, Jesus just told Peter he would one day be crucified, and look at what happens next. *Verses 20-22*

- Naturally Peter is curious. You died by crucifixion, Jesus. Now, you’re telling me that I will die by crucifixion. What about him?
- And Jesus shoots as straight as a New Englander would in a conversation about Tom Brady and Roger Goodell. He immediately says, not holding back: “What is that to you?” (whoa.)
- In other words: “Peter - you don’t worry about him; you worry about you. ‘Do your job.’ (Yes, it’s almost football season around here). You stay focused on what I have for you. Run in your lane. Stay focused with great zeal and passion on what I have assigned you. That’s where freedom is found.”
- As you seek to live a life of love and leadership, there are **Two** evils that will **distract** you and knock you off course **from** being **effective** for God.

- **The Curse of Discontentment:** “But God, I have a different plan.” Who has not said these words or at least thought them? Cancer wasn’t in the plan. Difficulty and consistent discouragement was not in my plan.
 - Is Jesus’ plan for you, enough?
- **The Curse of Comparison:** but look at them... Their life is so easy. (Ever thought that?) They are so “successful.” (Ever thought that?) They’re making more money than me. Their husband gets home from work and actually plays with their kids. Look how big their church is!?
 - Is Jesus’ plan enough for you? Is his plan enough for me?

We can trust God’s sovereign wisdom... (expound).

Run in your lane. Love, Lead, and take the next step God has planned for you.

Conclusion:

And each step is an unending adventure. Look at the final two verse of John’s gospel: *Verses 24-25*