



Links Players

QUESTIONS REDUX | DO YOU LOVE ME?

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.” (John 21:15–17, ESV)

Seminal moments: those “first moments” after which your life will never be the same. We have had scads of them, even if many are now tucked away in some forgotten mental file.

Some childhood “firsts” were wonderful and remembering them still brings a smile. Others—especially those from adolescence—can make us laugh or shake our heads at our younger selves.

They come in all shapes and sizes: your first kiss, your first home run, your first fistfight, your first breakup, or, for some of us, the first time we found ourselves on the wrong side of the law.

Golf is full of such moments: the first time you pure a seven iron, the first time you smash a driver and watch the ball carry farther than you thought possible, or the first time you make five or six birdies in a row. You do not forget those moments.

Of course, some are terrible. Your first “quad” feels awful. More seriously, failures can leave a mark on us and produce a cynical, pessimistic outlook. Though it can be hard to overcome, being jaded is no way to go through life.

Some seminal moments result from personal failure: a lost job, a lost marriage, a lost friendship, or a business that falls apart. The mistakes were ours, and recovery can seem impossible.

Some failures, especially the self-inflicted ones, are so painful that the easiest thing in the world is to quit. We think, “no way am I ever risking that kind of disappointment again.”

In this final scene of John’s Gospel, we meet Peter after the worst failures of his life. Jesus had been crucified only weeks earlier. After his resurrection, he appeared during a forty-day period to the apostles and many others.

As he had done many times before, Jesus pulls Peter aside. Then he asks him three times: “Do you love me?” Each time, Peter assures Jesus that he does.

Jesus never did anything without purpose. So why press Peter with the same question three times?

A few weeks earlier, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. One denial came when a young servant girl asked, “Aren’t you also one of his disciples?” Later that same night, when questioned again, Peter swore an oath and called down curses on himself, denying he was a disciple of Jesus.

This was the same man who had confidently declared that he was ready to die for Jesus. Yet when the pressure came, Peter played the coward and denied his Lord three times.

Then came Peter’s devastating seminal moment. He heard the rooster crow and knew exactly what he had done. Matthew tells us that Peter “went out and wept bitterly.” I do not know about you, but I have wept bitterly over some of my failures too.

Three denials. Three questions. One question for each denial.

That is not a coincidence. Peter’s betrayal ran deep, but Jesus’ restoration of Peter went deeper still. The wounds of Peter’s failure were not ignored or merely covered over. Jesus brought him face-to-face with them—and then restored him.

This is one of the extraordinary realities of the gospel: the One who was betrayed goes looking for the betrayer. Jesus forgives Peter, reconciles him to himself, and restores him to his calling and mission.

Like Peter, we have all failed. Like Peter, we can carry memories of failure that tempt us to give up, hide, or believe our usefulness is over. But Jesus comes to us through his Spirit—often through the words of other people—and says, “I love you.” Then He asks, “Do you love Me?”

Augustine wrote about “ordo amoris” — rightly ordered loves. Our hearts become restless, distracted, and empty when we love lesser things more than we love Christ. The answer is not merely to try harder or endlessly relive our failures. It is to love Jesus supremely.

Prayer: Jesus, capture our hearts by your amazing love. Restore us where we have failed, reorder our loves, and teach us to love you above all else.

READING: John 21; Matthew 26.

1. What does the golf image of memorable “firsts” teach you about how both success and failure can shape your heart?

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2. Why do you think Jesus asked Peter the same question three times, and what does that show about restoration?

3. In what ways do your loves become disordered, and what would it look like this week to love Jesus above all else?

NOTES



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