

Do You Love Me?

By Jani Lynn Warner

The first and greatest commandment is that “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*” (Matthew 22:37). We are commanded to love God with our whole being. That love is often tested. Deuteronomy 13:3 states: “*For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*” Our love is tested not so God knows who and what we love but so that we know who and what we love. God asks us what He asked Peter: “*Do you love me?*” (John 21:15-18)

Peter thought he knew his own heart when he told Jesus, “*I will lay down my life for you*” (John 13:37). But Jesus truly knew Peter’s heart and replied, “*Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times*” (John 13:38). In the Gospel of Luke, more detail is given to this exchange. The enemy of our souls, Satan, was involved and demanded to sift Peter as wheat, but Jesus said, “*I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*” (Luke 22:32). Romans 5:5 reveals that “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*”

We can ask God to give us more love, but I believe God teaches we will love more by repenting more. Luke 7:40-43 describes a parable of two debtors who were forgiven their debts. The one who was forgiven the most loved the creditor the most. Jesus gave this parable to reveal the truth about the woman, a sinner, who washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment. Jesus said, “*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little*” (Luke 7:47).

Jesus said that to love Him is to keep His commandments. As we have seen, the first and greatest commandment is to love God. The second is like it: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39). Jesus added a new commandment in John: “*...that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*” (John 13:34). But we cannot love using human love, because human love is of the old nature and rooted in “love of self.” God’s love both redeems and heals. Peter was healed by Jesus’ love, acceptance, and affirmation of his ministry as a shepherd of God’s people. Hosea 14:4 states: “*I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely.*” The ultimate love of God was Jesus’ sacrifice at the Cross and His Resurrection.

God’s love does not prevent suffering, and we are often tested through suffering to learn obedience. Through testing, we may learn what is in our hearts and sometimes what is in the hearts of those around us. After Peter’s denial, Jesus asked him three times, “*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*” (John 21:16) We also are tested and in the tests are asked, “*Do you love me?*” Like Peter, we also fail at times, but Jesus restores us and asks again, “*Do you love me?*” Let’s pray that we can answer, “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*” And when we fail, we can pray, “*Lord, I believe, help my unbelief*” (Mark 9:24).