

Feed My Sheep

Written by Coach Andrew Hebert

The faculty retreat experience was great and could not have come at a better time. My relationship with God has been a rocky one as of late. To give a back story, my home life is awesome and God has blessed me with a wife, Caitlin, and I have two beautiful daughters, Dylan and Denver, and Caitlin is also 24 weeks pregnant with our third child Cash Joseph Hebert. When we found out the gender is a boy no one was more excited than our 3-year-old Dylan. She said, "I always wanted a baby brother to dance with!"

Compared to the first two pregnancies I rarely go to doctor visits with Caitlin anymore, but on her 20-week visit, she asked me to put it on my calendar. The only problem was Caitlin is usually my calendar and on par, I completely forgot about the appointment. It was the appointment starting time when I realized it had slipped my mind and I would be late. While I knew Caitlin would not be mad if I missed, I felt a need to be there, and I dropped what I was doing and left for the appointment. During the ultrasound, the tech reported Cash looked strong, and all of his organs were functioning correctly. They asked us to meet the doctor in her office, and while we were waiting for the doctor Caitlin revealed to me she believed she saw a cleft in Cash's lip during the ultrasound. My instant reaction was her eyes deceived her, she is not a professional, and Caitlin was maybe being dramatic. As I sat there and thought about the situation it dawned on me that Caitlin is rarely wrong about most things. So immediately we held hands and said a prayer thanking God for a healthy baby, and each offered up special intentions. The doctor came in and confirmed what Caitlin saw with Cash's lip. In the moment I felt as though we were both strong and we would face this head-on.

The next few days affected Caitlin and me differently; she was brought to tears daily thinking of his possible suffering through surgeries, the amount of work she may have to miss, and how that would affect our family financially. I had a different approach thinking God would heal him by the next ultrasound. Fear and negative thoughts crept into my mind but I blocked them out and replaced them with faith-filled thoughts. Every time Caitlin would bring it up I would say I believe God will heal him! My faith felt so strong.

Caitlin scheduled a follow-up appointment with a specialist, and I was positive they would find nothing and our son would be "healed." I was wrong, and the weight of it all became very real to me almost two weeks after finding out. Caitlin had been researching and educating herself on all possibilities of what we may walk into; she allowed herself to process her feelings and handled the doctor's news well. The specialist reported it looked as though he just has a small cleft lip and little to no cleft in the hard palate. While this was great news for Caitlin and the well-being of our child, I did not take it that way at all. I allowed the enemy to creep in and fill my head

with selfish lies, such as, “How can I let someone operate on my tiny baby? How much pain will this cause him? How is he going to deal with looking different with two beautiful sisters? How will he handle kids at school making comments if he looks different? He won’t ever look like me or my wife.” I knew none of these thoughts were true and we will teach all of our children to see themselves through the eyes of the Lord, not how the world sees them. But I still let it creep in. So to keep these words from coming out my mouth and trying to be "strong" for my family I become a rock. Not the good solid foundation kind, a literal rock that sits there with no emotion. I completely avoided talking about Cash and our family’s future. My mindset was to ignore it, and it may go away. I created a wedge between my family and God and started to distract myself instead of finding the truth in the situation.

Fast forward to the Sunday before our faculty retreat. I was in the middle of a bible study Caitlin and I hosted at our home for a few of our couple friends. I noticed an open book with my wife’s handwriting. It was sitting on our piano stand and the page said, God will always love us where we are at.

I did not mention it during the bible study but I wondered to myself when would this come up. During the Bible study, Caitlin began to open up about Cash's cleft lip with our friends. Something we had not discussed with many people other than those closest to us. The couples filled us with affirmations of how lucky he would be to grow up with parents like us, and hearing that from people we trust, I started to believe it. While I still didn’t say much, hearing Caitlin speak so boldly about Cash and how strong he will be and rooted in the Word, God started to soften my hardened heart.

The following day was our faculty retreat. By talking to our friends so openly I felt good about the retreat. I knew I would have an open heart to whatever Father White presented to us. He taught us how to pray with scripture using a method called Lectio Divina. He first said to **Read** the scripture normally as if we were inputting data into our minds, then to reread it slowly pausing between each sentence. The second part was to **Reflect** on the scripture and to write down your thoughts, feelings, and desires. The third part was to **Respond** to the Lord in your heart, and the last part was to **Receive** while being still and letting yourself be loved. Father White gave us three readings and while all were great I felt as though God spoke to me during the second.

In the second reading, John 21: 15-19, Father White started by explaining before this verse that **Peter denied Jesus three times during the crucifixion and felt ashamed. He further explained that Jesus asked Peter three times if Peter loved Him. He also said Jesus used another Greek translation of love that meant divinely. So Jesus was saying, "Do you love me Peter divinely?" Each time Peter responded by saying, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." But in Peter's response, the Greek word for love had a different meaning saying that Peter loved Jesus like a**

brother. So Peter was saying, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you like a brother." Father White said each time Jesus asked him, Peter's response became more desperate. Then in the last response, Father White explained Jesus accepted Peter's response and loved Peter where he was at in his faith. Right after Father White said this I imagined the book opened up on the piano with my wife's handwriting saying God will always love us where we are at. Then he went on to say Jesus asked Peter to feed his flock, and as I prayed on this scripture I was filled with emotion. God made it clear to me I have been Peter in every way possible at my home.

I had been avoiding God, feeling ashamed because my faith was so strong when we first found out about Cash's cleft lip, just as sure as Peter when he told Jesus he would never deny Him. When my faith was tested I failed by avoiding conversations with Caitlin and creating a void with God, just like Peter failed when he denied Jesus three times. But Jesus loved Peter where he was at, just like he loves me and my baby. And Jesus told Peter, who became the leader of our church, to feed his flock. I needed to feed my flock, my family, my first ministry.

Suddenly I became excited to see the face of this beautifully made perfect creation of God, our baby boy. With Caitlin having had two miscarriages before I am so grateful we will have a healthy baby. God taught me to lead my family to Him, so I lead prayer with my family daily. Dylan, Denver, and I speak over Caitlin's belly and pray for our son. I make sure my wife hears my prayers and I ask her if she would like to pray out loud, which has almost always been designated to her. I feel grateful for this scripture and what God has revealed to me. My wife and I are excited and know this is just part of Cash's story. He will know how we see Him and how our heavenly father sees him. I will take this method of praying into the school year with me and help me armor myself daily in leading young men to God as a football coach. I recommend to all praying this way through scripture.