

PEOPLE ARE RESTORED



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The risen Messiah reveals Himself (John 21:1-6).
2. The risen Messiah enjoys relationship (John 21:7-14).
3. The risen Messiah restores fellowship (John 21:15-19).

Background Passage: John 21

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In giving Peter the opportunity to confess his love three times, Jesus demonstrated His forgiveness and desire to restore fellowship with His own.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

During Jesus's trial, Peter denied knowing Him three times. After Jesus was resurrected, He gave Peter the opportunity to declare his love of Him three times, confirming to the disciple that their relationship had been restored. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus restores the relationship between God and all who believe in Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Christ has restored our relationship with God, we seek to live as God's agents of reconciliation, pointing others to how they too can be made right with God through Jesus.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you had to wait patiently for someone or something really important and how were you at waiting?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: So let's get a picture of the eleven disciples waiting on Jesus. They were back in Galilee, and though Jesus had revealed Himself, they were not exactly sure what the next step would look like, let alone the rest of their lives. What did the resurrection mean? How would it change them? Before Jesus could lay out the plan for taking His gospel to the ends of the earth, first He had some relationships to restore.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Jesus had appeared to His disciples twice in Jerusalem a week apart. But that wouldn't be the only place He would come to them as the resurrected Lord. Jesus had left instruction for the disciples with the women who had come to His tomb: Go to Galilee. They would see Jesus there (Matt. 28:16). Galilee had been home base throughout most of Jesus's earthly ministry, so it probably felt like going home for them. We can only imagine them wondering what was coming next and waiting for Jesus's next appearance.



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POINT 1

THE RISEN MESSIAH REVEALS HIMSELF (JOHN 21:1-6).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:1-6** from his or her Bible.

1 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. **3** 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. **4** Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5** Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” **6** 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.

COMPARE: Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S FINAL DAYS MAP** to show the location of the Sea of Galilee. Tell your group to turn to Luke 5:1-11, Jesus's first encounter with these men by the same shore. Make a chart comparing the two instances, with your group shouting out answers. (by the Sea of Galilee; Peter and the sons of Zebedee were there; they tried to catch fish on their own but couldn't; Jesus told them where to cast their nets, and they obeyed; they caught lots of fish)

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain **verses 1-5** (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 38):

Jesus will choose to reveal Himself anytime and anywhere—He shows up in His timing when needed.

- A few of the disciples were together at the Sea of Tiberias, and in such a time of confusion and uncertainty, the impulsive Peter needed to do something, anything. But his friends weren't going to let him do it alone. They told him, “We will go with you.” They knew he would need their support.
- We know from Luke 5:1-11 that Peter, Andrew, James, and John had been professional fishermen before Jesus called them to follow Him and fish for men. We can only imagine that a night of work with nothing to show for it was frustrating.
- Much debate exists between Bible experts as to whether these men were acting in obedience or not by going fishing. Some commentators think they were going back to their pre-Jesus lives, becoming again who they once were. Others say they were simply waiting, doing something comfortable as they passed the time as not to be idle.

SEA OF TIBERIAS

Also known as the Lake of Tiberias, Lake of Gennesaret, or Sea of Chinnereth, but most commonly known as the Sea of Galilee. It was a major resource for the fishing industry in Jesus's time.



- In the morning, Jesus “stood on the shore” (v. 4), revealing Himself, though the disciples didn’t know it was Him. They may not have recognized Jesus because there wasn’t enough light, or perhaps they were too far away. Or perhaps they weren’t expecting Him to be there, so they simply assumed it was someone else.

ASK: (DDG p. 38)

What are some reasons we might struggle to recognize the presence or work of Jesus in our lives? (we aren’t looking for or expecting Him; we have sin in our lives distracting us; we are struggling in the areas of Bible reading and prayer; we are living more by sight rather than by faith)

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the main point below as seen from **verse 6** (DDG p. 38).

Sometimes Jesus’s instructions may seem unrealistic, but anything is possible when we submit to His will.

- Knowing that the disciples didn’t catch any fish, Jesus simply told them to “cast the net on the right side of the boat” (v. 6). It doesn’t take a fisherman to understand that Jesus’s instruction would have seemed silly. What difference would it make to cast on the right side?
- As mature believers know, it makes all the difference in the world that when Jesus speaks and instructs, we need to obey. In the disciples’ obedience, their catch was abundant and full.

ASK: (DDG p. 38)

When has Jesus led you to do something odd or contrary to a societal norm and how did you respond? (answers may vary, but may include: helping a stranger; giving over and abundantly; sharing the gospel with someone who seemed antagonistic; praying in public)

TRANSITION: The disciples obeyed, but we know Peter’s reputation, temperament, and past mistakes. We thus turn our attention to shore.

POINT 2

THE RISEN MESSIAH ENJOYS RELATIONSHIP (JOHN 21:7-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:7-11** from his or her Bible.

7 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.

8 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. **9** When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. **10** Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” **11** 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.

DISCUSS: This story takes a dramatic turn at this point. Though this may seem to be a fun fishing story, we see here that it is actually about the Man on the shore. Let’s first consider Peter’s reaction to Christ in **verses 7-11** (DDG p. 38).

Whatever our state or circumstances, the appropriate response to Jesus’s presence is to come to Him.

- Peter had taken off his outer garment for fishing, as the tunic alone would have made movement easier. But many struggle to explain Peter’s reasoning for putting on his outer garment upon seeing Christ. Some suggest He was simply making himself appropriately attired, as no one would appear in public wearing only a tunic.¹ Some suggest he donned it to cover spiritual nakedness when facing Christ.² What we know is this: In the midst of a great catch of fish, Peter stopped fishing and went toward Jesus.
- The words “charcoal fire” appear only twice in the New Testament: here and in John 18:18, where Peter denied Jesus three times. Though charcoal fires were common, we can only imagine that the sight and smell brought back that very vivid memory to Peter.
- Notice that Jesus already had a meal waiting. He already had fish and bread, even as the disciples were hauling in fish. He helped the disciples catch fish, not for Himself but for them to understand who He was.
- Commentary writers have attempted to explain the significance of the number 153 (v. 11). What we take away, though, is simply that it was a large enough haul of fish that it was worthy of counting. And even though it was large, with Jesus’s power and authority, the net was not torn.

THE DISCIPLE THAT JESUS LOVED

John often described himself as the disciple that Jesus loved in his Gospel (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20,24). Some reasons for this may have been to identify himself as an apostle as well as to emphasize that he understood his ultimate identity as one being loved by Christ.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“We offer Christ the submission of our hearts, and the obedience of our lives; and He offers us His abiding presence. We take Him as our Master; and He takes us as His friends.”³

—Hugh Black (1868–1953)

ASK: (DDG p. 38)

How do you respond when you experience Jesus’s presence in any given moment? (we, like Peter, might run to Him; we sometimes might want to avoid or ignore Him if we have unconfessed sin; we might be uncertain of what to do; we might treasure the moment)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:12-14** from his or her Bible.

12 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.

13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. **14** This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

HIGHLIGHT: Though John recognized Jesus, and Peter jumped out of the boat, we can’t forget the others who were there with them. They all enjoyed a meal with Jesus. Let’s zoom in on **verses 12-14** and consider this moment on the beach, using the idea found below (DDG p. 38).

Jesus desires and invites us to fellowship with Himself and others.

- Over the past two sessions, we’ve seen Jesus appear to His followers, inviting them to see His wounds and touch Him because of their doubts. That experience of unbelief wasn’t necessary here; they all recognized who He was as He invited them to have breakfast with Him (v. 12).
- Note that Thomas was among this group (v. 2). After being chastised by Jesus for his lack of belief, we don’t get a word from him in this situation.
- Jesus shared bread and fish with His disciples. Sharing meals with others in Jesus’s time, as it is in ours, was a sign of solidarity, unity, and fellowship. Jesus and the disciples were enjoying each other’s company.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 38)

What does it look like to enjoy fellowship with Jesus and others today? (like the time on the shore, nothing elaborate is needed: simple food, undistracted time together, and freedom to listen and share are the only needed ingredients; simply time to enjoy each other’s presence; everyday moments to cherish memories together)

TRANSITION: How compassionate of Jesus to feed Peter before starting a difficult conversation. We see His compassion and friendship with the impulsive man, who had been a leader among the disciples and would become a leader of the early church.

POINT 3

THE RISEN MESSIAH RESTORES FELLOWSHIP (JOHN 21:15-19).

INTERACT: Invite groups of 3-4 to describe what loving Jesus looks like and to compile a list of responses (for example: enjoying His presence; obeying Him; wanting to spend time with Him; serving others; living like He would; sharing His good news; living on mission for Him). Then allow groups to share their responses with the larger group.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:15-17** from his or her Bible.

15 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.” **16** 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.” **17** 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.”

EXPLAIN: In **verses 15-17**, we see a significant conversation between Jesus and Peter. Just as the disciple had denied Him three times, so he would have three times to state his love for Jesus. Through this, Jesus was restoring Peter. Use the bulleted points below to explain (DDG p. 38):

Jesus desires to forgive us and restore fellowship with us when we’ve strayed so that we may be used for His glory.

- Several interpretations have been given for Jesus’s question in verse 15, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (1) “Do you love Me more than these fish, or more than your past life of being a fisherman?” (2) “Do you love Me more than you love these friends?” (3) “Do you love Me more than these men love Me?” Whichever way you interpret it, the main point is Jesus was giving Peter an opportunity to be restored.
- Throughout this passage, Jesus and Peter used both *agape* and *phileo* as Greek words for love. But remember, they weren’t speaking Greek; they were speaking Aramaic. This conversation was written in Greek. Analysis doesn’t lead to any firm conclusion that Peter didn’t love Jesus as Jesus was asking.
- Jesus instructed Peter to “feed my lambs” (v. 15), “tend my sheep” (v. 16), and “feed my sheep” (v. 17). Some commentators make a distinction between lamb and sheep, alluding to different maturity levels of Christ followers. Peter was called to both feed and shepherd all of them. This would include ministering, sharing the Word, and speaking boldly about Christ.

SHEEP

In the Bible, God referred to Israel as sheep, then extended that symbol to all His people (Ezek. 34; Matt. 10:6; 15:24). Sheep aren’t the smartest animals. They are helpless, wander often, and have herd mentality. They need a master and leader to follow because of their inability to take care of themselves and stay on the right path. We, as sheep, need Jesus as our Shepherd and trustworthy pastors and leaders to shepherd us as well.

READ: In restoring Peter, Jesus was also edifying him, helping him to mature and be equipped for service. Ask someone to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 39):

Key Doctrine #89: Edification: Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.

ASK: (DDG p. 39)

What can we be doing to minister to other believers, whether or not we're called to full-time service? (seek opportunities to share the Word; help meet spiritual and tangible needs; guide and direct younger believers; walk beside those who are struggling)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:18-19** from his or her Bible.

18 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." **19** (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."

ENGAGE: Use the bulleted points below to explain **verses 18-19** (DDG p. 39).

Our life of faith may lead to undesirable situations, but we can be certain that it will glorify Jesus.

- Jesus's words to Peter indicated that his faith would lead to death at the hands of others. From Acts 1–12, even knowing he would die for the sake of Christ, Peter did not back down from speaking and doing according to the gospel. The bold-spoken Peter became a devoted leader and example for the early church. (According to tradition, Peter was crucified for his faith, requesting to be so upside-down as he did not deserve to die as Jesus had.)

ASK: (DDG p. 39)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **When has bold faith because of love for Christ led to persecution or trials in your life?** (laughter from coworkers; shunning from relatives; lost job because of personal integrity; lost love because of the Spirit's guidance)

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus restores the relationship between God and all who believe in Him. Because Christ has restored our relationship with God, we seek to live as God's agents of reconciliation, pointing others to how they too can be made right with God through Jesus.

HEAD:

Peter knew who Jesus was. Peter had witnessed Jesus's life, miracles, and teaching. But Peter still failed Him. But just as we can know Jesus, we can know He seeks to reconcile us to Himself when we fail Him. A life of knowing Christ is not wasted through one day or season of sin. He seeks us out, brings us to confession, and gives us reconciliation.

How has a regret from your past led you to live more fully in His path and plan today?

HEART:

Three times in just a few moments, Jesus asked Peter some form of "Do you love Me?" And though Peter felt frustration at His repetition, we must recognize the connection between our love for Christ and our willingness to obey and honor Him. Our love for Christ leads us to worship, pray, submit to, and serve Him. Perhaps we should spend time prayerfully considering our own love for Jesus and how we reveal that in our lives.

How do you know that you love Jesus?

HANDS:

It may seem simple or old-fashioned, but one of the most timeless ways to fellowship with other believers is through sharing a meal. As we consider Jesus and His disciples enjoying fish and bread on the beach, we can imagine them talking, laughing, and perhaps even joking. Relationships are built around moments like these, and we should be intentional in cultivating our unity with other believers in this kind of situation. Enjoy the godly blessing that comes through eating, talking, and laughing together.

With whom can you enjoy a meal this week to enjoy fellowship in Christ?

PRAY: Father, we see the beauty in restored relationships. We know that we sometimes fail You and stray from Your presence. Thank You that You pursue us and restore us. Thank You that You are a God of reconciliation.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"When you are restored by a person who knows what he is doing, you will be restored in such a way that no one knows that you ever were broken."⁴

—Tony Evans

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE RISEN MESSIAH REVEALS HIMSELF

(JOHN 21:1-6).

+ COMMENTARY

“The sea of Tiberias. Called also the sea of Galilee, being situated in Galilee. In this place Jesus had promised to meet them. . . . Galilee was a retired place where they would be free from danger, and was therefore a safe and convenient situation for Jesus to meet them, in order to give them his last instructions. . . . That night they caught nothing. This was so ordered in the providence of God, that the miracle which was wrought might appear more remarkable. On the right side. Why the right side is mentioned is not known. . . . It does not appear that they yet recognized the Lord Jesus, but from some cause they had sufficient confidence in him to make another trial. Perhaps they judged that he was one skilled in that employment, and knew where there was the greatest probability of success.”⁵

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

As you delve into John 21:1-6, invite learners to focus on Peter’s statement: “I am going fishing,” and the disciples’ response to him: “We will go with you” (v. 3). Say: “Peter had been a fisherman professionally before he followed Jesus; here, he’s going fishing and his friends are joining him. Let’s consider for just a moment that I have a \$1000 budget for each of you to take us all to join you on a favorite activity. What would you take us to do?”

Hopefully learners will share activities they enjoy or are skilled in doing. As volunteers offer their ideas, ask questions such as: “What would we need to take? What skills would we need to have? What might we expect from this outing?”

Point out that these men encountered Jesus doing this very ordinary activity. Encourage learners to consider following through on Peter’s example: find something they can do this week and invite others to join them. Suggest this may develop relationships in a new way and create wonderful memories.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE RISEN MESSIAH ENJOYS RELATIONSHIP

(JOHN 21:7-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“With characteristic impulsiveness, Peter quickly put on his outer garment (‘naked’ simply means ‘stripped for work’) and dove into the water! He wanted to get to Jesus! This is in contrast to Luke 5:8, where Peter told the Lord to depart from him. The other six men followed in the boat, bringing the net full of fish. In the experience recorded in Luke 5, the nets began to break, but in this experience, the net held fast. Perhaps we can see in these two ‘fishing miracles’ an illustration of how the Lord helps His people fish for lost souls. All of our efforts are useless apart from His direction and blessing.”⁶

+ COMMENTARY

“Chapter 21 is about discipleship and leadership. As its story unfolds, Peter remains in the spotlight (along with the Beloved Disciple, John), modeling for us what it means to shepherd the flock of Christ. The disciples have now not only witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, but they have experienced the Spirit. They know the truth and have experienced the Spirit of truth. One question remains: What will they do with it? Will they simply privatize these spiritual moments with Jesus or will these moments lead them somewhere significant? The miraculous catch of fish no doubt is symbol as well as surprise. Jesus is still the disciples’ champion, aiding them in the struggle of their labors. But more, he wants to direct their work, and with his help they will find catches beyond their wildest belief. This symbolism can be applied to the church and its work. As Jesus worked through the direction of the Father, so too the disciples must work at the word of Jesus. He is a coworker and with him success is assured.”⁷

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

After reading John 21:7-14, engage learners in considering Peter’s overall reaction to realizing that Jesus Himself was on the beach. Say: “We aren’t told these things, but what do you think was going on in Peter’s mind and heart?” Consider playing for the group videos of returning soldiers surprising their family members. Engage learners in considering if the family members’ reactions possibly look like Peter’s as he jumped out of the boat.

Ask: “Have you ever found yourself in this kind of situation with the Lord? Have you ever realized just how far you were from Him and desperately sought to get into His presence?” This kind of answer might include an immediate need to pray, worship, or sit privately with another believer. Some learners might remember this desperate call to walk an aisle, pray at an altar, or even rededicate their lives. Ask: “What should we do when, like Peter, we’re overwhelmed with the inclination to go straight to Jesus?” Encourage learners to challenge themselves to be more impulsive in following the prompting of the Holy Spirit, even if it goes against cultural norms.

POINT 3: THE RISEN MESSIAH RESTORES FELLOWSHIP (JOHN 21:15-19).

+ COMMENTARY

“Peter needed to be broken, but he also needed to be restored. That’s exactly what Jesus does. . . . How could he who denied Jesus three times claim to love Jesus more than someone else? The foundation of his self-righteous morality had eroded, and he was forced to confront the reality he wasn’t good enough. His effort wasn’t enough. Twice more Jesus asked Peter if he loved him (vv. 16,17). All three times Peter responded yes. This is the mercy of Jesus at work. . . . With great mercy [Jesus] restored Peter. In mercy he lifted him up and healed him. . . . Jesus atoned for Peter’s failure. Peter did nothing but receive mercy.”⁸

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

If you have a group of mature learners, you may want to dig a little deeper into Jesus’s instructions for Peter as to how to be a leader. Don’t minimize the fact that Jesus restored fellowship with Peter, which was crucial, but point out that He also gave basic but integral instructions for taking care of the flock, the fledgling church.

Say: “If you have a relationship with Jesus and are following Him faithfully, you are also called to minister to others. We are all called to reach the lost, but we’re also all called to edify the body of believers. We all have a call to lead, whether by teaching, serving, caring, or any other number of things.” Consider playing a short clip of R. C. Sproul’s “Feed My Sheep” sermon. The sermon is for pastors primarily but is enlightening for all believers serving others. Engage learners in discussing how they are individually serving your church and, for those who are not regularly serving, different opportunities they could pursue.

Additionally, encourage learners to consider who their “flock” may be: their families, friend groups, small group from church, etc. Challenge them to see the people in their sphere of influence as the flock of sheep assigned to them by Christ Himself. Invite learners to prayerfully consider how well they are acting as caretakers in their communities.

References

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8. Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, *Exalting Jesus in John* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017) 390–91.