

# REFLECTION GUIDE

## JOHN 21:1-25 | FOLLOW ME

### KEY TERMS

**Charcoal fire** - When the disciples come ashore, they find Jesus waiting with a *charcoal fire* (v. 9). John uses a rare Greek word here that appears only one other time in the New Testament, which is the charcoal fire in the courtyard where Peter denied Jesus three times (18:18), meaning Jesus brings Peter back to the scene of his failure as he restores him.

**Follow me** - After restoring Peter, Jesus says, *Follow me* (v. 19), which are the same words he spoke when he first called Peter (see Mark 1:17). Now the invitation carries new weight, as Jesus has just told Peter that following him will cost him his life (vv. 18-19). This ending to the book is paradigmatic for all who read John's Gospel. From the first chapter to the last, John is inviting his readers to *follow* Jesus.

### DID YOU KNOW?

John tells us that the disciples caught 153 fish (v. 11), a specific detail scholars have tried to explain for centuries. Some ancient writers believed there were 153 known species of fish, suggesting the catch symbolizes the universal scope of the gospel mission. Others see it as simply a fisherman's memory lending historian reliability to the story. Whatever the reason, John's point is that the net was full and it did not tear (v. 11).

### SYNOPSIS

After the resurrection, Peter tells the other disciples, *I am going fishing* (v. 3), and they head out onto the Sea of Tiberias—the same waters where several of them first met Jesus. They fish all night and catch nothing. At daybreak, Jesus stands on the shore and tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, and the catch is so large they cannot haul it in (v. 6). The beloved disciple recognizes him first saying, *It is the Lord!* (v. 7), and Peter throws himself into the sea and heads for shore. When they arrive, Jesus has a charcoal fire, bread, and fish already prepared (v. 9).

After the meal, Jesus asks Peter three times, *Do you love me?* (vv. 15-17)—once for each of Peter's denials. In this scene, Peter is not merely forgiven, he's given work to do. Jesus then tells Peter that following him will cost him his life (vv. 18-19) and invites him to, *Follow me*. When Peter asks about the beloved disciple, Jesus redirects him: *What is that to you?* (vv. 21-22). John closes by identifying the beloved disciple as the one who is *bearing witness about these things* (v. 24), and adds that if everything Jesus did were written down, the world itself could not contain the books (v. 25).

### GOING DEEPER

Read Psalm 103:8-14 and Romans 8:1. How do these passages shape the way you approach God after failure? Where in your life do you need to hear that Jesus already knows everything about you and still invites you to himself?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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#### LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 21:1-25. Make 5 or so quick observations. What emotions do you see in this scenario?
2. In verses 1-6, the disciples fish all night and catch nothing, but at Jesus' word the nets become overwhelmingly full. How does this miracle echo the earlier call of the disciples in Luke 5:1-11? What is Jesus communicating about their future ministry – it's source and it's success?
3. The text in verse 9 specifically notes a "charcoal fire", which is the same Greek word used only one other place in John's Gospel, in 18:18 where Peter denied Jesus. Why might John deliberately recall this detail, and how does it set the stage for what follows in verses 15-17? What does this teach us about Christ's intentional, redemptive care in addressing our specific failures?
4. Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?", paralleling Peter's three denials. In this encounter, how does Jesus take seriously *both* Peter's sin and God's grace? What does it mean that Jesus initiates this restoration rather than waiting for Peter to come to him?

#### LIVING THE WORD

5. Peter likely carried deep shame from his denials of Jesus. Have you experienced sin or failure that you fear has disqualified you from Christ's love or usefulness to serve him? How does Jesus' tender, relational restoration of Peter – not glossing over the sin but redeeming it – assure you that the gospel is sufficient for even your worst failures?
6. Jesus links love for him directly to caring for his sheep. Who are the "lambs and sheep" – fellow believers, family members, neighbors, the spiritually weak – that Christ has placed in your life to feed and tend? What is one concrete way you could shepherd them this week as an outflow of your love for Jesus?
7. Peter's response to Jesus' call was to look at John and ask, "Lord, what about this man?" In what ways are you tempted to compare your calling, suffering, gifts, or season of life to others? How can Jesus' words "What is that to you? You follow me!" free you from envy, comparison, and self-pity, and refocus you on faithfulness to your own God-ordained path?
8. John ends his Gospel by saying the world itself could not contain the books that would be written about Jesus' deeds. How does meditating on the inexhaustible glory and worthiness of Christ shape the way you worship, witness, and live this week? What would change if you truly believed that knowing and following this Christ is the greatest treasure of your life (cf. Philippians 3:8)?