

Session 9: John 21:1–25

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

We should eagerly seek God after we have failed him because he is eager to forgive and restore us.

Head Change

To know that Jesus does not disqualify us from his service when we fail.

Heart Change

To feel confident in God's unending love for us rather than a fear that he might abandon us.

Life Change

To go to God in humility and hope after we've failed him, knowing that he restores his wayward disciples.

OPEN

When have you been offered a second chance? How did you respond to their offer?

We all fail and need second chances, but we don't often expect to be given a second chance. When we fail someone, we expect them to reject or punish us. But God is not that way.

In our final session, Dr. Tony Evans will explore Peter's journey from his great denial to his humble restoration, revealing God's heart for sinners and failures. Where guilt and shame tell us we need to hide from God, Jesus seeks us out.

READ

Read John 21:1–25.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is the significance of the charcoal fire?

How does Jesus treat a disciple who wishes to be restored?

Show Session 9: *John 21:1–25* (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

John 21 acts as an epilogue, resolving the tension between Jesus and Peter, the disciple who denied and abandoned him. Read John 21:1–14.

After Jesus’s crucifixion, some of the disciples returned to their old habits—fishing on the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. In a way, it was like Jesus hadn’t changed their lives at all. **When have you been tempted to respond to failure by going back to an old, familiar habit? What can make it easy to give up on God’s plan and stick to our known routines?**

The disciples only recognized Jesus when their nets were full. Sometimes, we don’t recognize God is at work in our lives until we see a miraculous change. **What big changes has Jesus caused in your life? When in that process of change did you recognize God was at work?**

When Peter realized the Lord was back, he jumped in the water and swam to shore. His first instinct was to go to Jesus. **What feelings or doubts can stop you from rushing to Jesus when you’ve sinned?**

Read John 21:15–19. Dr. Evans reminded us that Peter’s denials occurred around a charcoal fire (John 18:18). At the shore, Jesus deliberately recalled Peter’s failure as they stood together over another charcoal fire. As Dr. Evans said, “Jesus brought him back to his failure to face it.” **When have you let shame keep you from healing? How willing are you to face your failures in order to start healing?**

Jesus asked Peter the same question three times: Do you love me? His repeated question can feel like a condemnation, but Jesus is offering Peter a chance to repent for each of his three denials. Christ covered Peter’s sin completely with restoration. **When you think about God’s forgiveness, do you think there are limits or areas of your life he won’t restore? Explain your answer.**

Note: *To learn more about the Greek words for love, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Jesus brought Peter back into full friendship with him. Jesus did not hold Peter’s failure over his head or see him as a less-trustworthy friend—the reconciliation was

complete. **In what ways can our forgiveness be conditional?**

Is there anyone in your life to whom you need to extend full—rather than conditional—forgiveness? How might you go about restoring that friendship?

Jesus seemed to not be concerned with Peter's less-than-enthusiastic response to his questions. He did not ask for more and didn't remind Peter of his sins. Instead, Jesus immediately commissioned Peter to care for and lead his "sheep"—the ones who believed and followed Jesus. Despite our faithlessness, God is ever ready to forgive and restore us. **Do you want to be restored and forgiven? What can Peter and Jesus's conversation teach you about God's desire for your future?**

Jesus beckoned Peter to follow him while simultaneously warning that he would end up dying for his faith. We are also called to follow Jesus, but being his disciple is costly. **What price have you paid for following Jesus? What encouragement do you have for others who are struggling to stay faithful or who are new in their faith journey?**

***Note:** To learn more about Peter's life and death, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Read John 21:20–25.

Jesus had just told Peter of a difficult and undesirable future, leaving him to wonder if others would also have difficult a life. Jesus's reply was blunt: "What is that to you?" God has a unique plan for each of us. Comparing our lives to the people around us distracts us from the mission Jesus has for us. **In what ways have you been tempted to compare your life with others?**

God is not a vengeful boss, punishing us for our failures. He is a gentle and merciful friend, giving us grace beyond what we deserve. He has a plan for each of us, purposes to build his kingdom designed specifically for us. All he asks is that we follow him, no matter where the road leads. **How would you describe your current relationship with Jesus?**

What could you do to commit to following him more closely today?

LAST WORD

Peter's restoration shows us that God knows our weaknesses and his forgiveness is only a moment away. We just have to be ready and willing to admit we have sinned and failed him. Let God know you are ready to be restored. He did it for Peter and can do it for you. He's got kingdom work waiting for you.

The second half of the Gospel of John shows us a savior willing to save us no matter the cost. As we trust that his sacrifice on the cross paid the price we owe for our sins, we can step out in full confidence, knowing that God loves us fully. He's well aware that we will fail, and he calls us to share in his kingdom work anyway. Will you follow him?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

1. Peek at the Greek: Words for “Love”

The New Testament authors wrote primarily in Greek. Sometimes, a Greek word has no direct translation into English, while other times several similar words in Greek will be translated with just one word in English.

Such is the case with the word “love.” In English, it can mean anything from preference to lifelong affection for a person. We love chocolate and we love God—one word carries vastly different levels of regard. Greek offers several different words for love each with its own level of feeling and commitment.

In Jesus's restoration of Peter, he uses two different words—*agapé* and *phileo*—that our Bibles translate as “love.” When we dig into these words, Jesus's questions to Peter take on a depth we may otherwise pass over.

Agapé is divine, perfect love. It is unending, unfaltering, and without blemish. God consistently displays this kind of love to us in his compassion, kindness, sacrifice, and patience to us.

Read 1 John 4:16–21. Every use of the word “love” in this passage is *agapé*. How would you describe God's love?

What do you think it looks like to show others *agapé* love?

The more common Greek word for love is *phileo*. It refers to the kind of love a person has for their own family or close friend. To act with *phileo* meant one would show favor or preference for someone. It is a willingness to be hospitable toward someone. In the New Testament,

phileo is never used of God's love, only people's love for one another.

Jesus's first question to Peter was "Do you *agapé* me?" Peter responded, "I *phileo* you"—I love you like family. Like many of us, Peter recognizes that his love for Jesus is not unconditional—our love for Jesus can waver. **In what ways does our love for God fall short of *agapé*?**

The third time Jesus questioned Peter, he used Peter's word for love: "Peter, do you *phileo* me?" He met Peter where he was. If *phileo* love was all Peter could give, Jesus offered him friendship and grace. Jesus offers all of us the same grace, and chance after chance to be reconciled to him.

Understanding the different words for love helps us understand Peter and Jesus's conversation and God's intention for his people much more fully. **What does it look like for you to love God the best you can today?**

2. Peter's Life and Death

The apostle Simon Peter lived out his faith with exuberance, if not prudence, during the years of Jesus's earthly ministry. He was one of Jesus's closest friends, privileged to experience personal teaching and amazing events (Matthew 17:1–9), but was known for his impulsiveness and speaking before thinking. But God used Peter, flawed as he was, to build his church.

Jesus, hearing Simon proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah, accepted his worship and declared that the church would stand upon that truth. He then gave Simon the nickname Peter, or Cephas, which means "Rock." Peter went on to become the steadfast leader of the fledgling church, proclaiming the gospel to the crowds in Jerusalem immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:14–40).

What have you seen as flaws in yourself that would prevent you from serving God? How does Peter's erratic journey give you hope?

Peter knew the kind of death he had to look forward to—Jesus has told him what was coming. But that grim future did not stop him from building an eternal legacy. In his letter to the church, Peter wrote, "I think it is right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder,

since I know that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed made clear to me” (2 Peter 1:13–14).

The Bible does not tell us about Peter’s death, but early Christian writings speak of Peter’s martyrdom in Rome under the reign of Emperor Nero in 64 AD. St. Clement of Rome, Eusebius, and Tertullian mentioned that Peter was tortured and crucified, his arms stretched out just like Jesus had foretold. Even in his gruesome death, Peter was emulating his Lord.

While we cannot know with certainty the details of Peter’s death, historical documents give us enough evidence to know that Peter remained faithful to Jesus until the end—his *phileo* love had matured into *agapé* by the time he gave his life for his savior. **What legacy do you hope to leave behind? How are you contributing to that legacy now?**