



# 10

## SESSION TEN

---

# The Call to Follow Him

### SESSION SUMMARY

---

In this session, Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples for the third time after His resurrection. Through this breakfast encounter, Jesus demonstrated the reality of His restorative power. Because He fulfilled God's plan to rescue people from sin, Jesus was able to forgive the disciples for their sins and failures, and then recommission them in their task of following Him. As Jesus' followers, we trust in the power of His restoration to enable us to move beyond our sins and failures to accomplish great things in His name.

### SCRIPTURE

---

John 21:1-23

# THE POINT

---

**Jesus forgives past failures and offers the opportunity to follow Him once again.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

---

### Option 1

When Christ-followers consider the mission He has given us, we confront two challenges that often cause us to fall back and retreat from the task. The first challenge is our unworthiness, and the second is the cost. We struggle with unworthiness because of the times we lapse into unfaithfulness to the One who has sent us. We struggle with cost because of the high price we might have to pay to follow Him.

Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, was aware of his unworthiness. As a young man, Luther became extremely afraid as he led a worship service. He thought to himself: “Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin.”<sup>1</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was aware of the cost. He refused to stay in the safe haven of America where he had taken refuge in 1939 and returned to his homeland, Hitler’s Germany. He wrote: “I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.”<sup>2</sup>

If we are to heed the call of our risen King to join His mission, then we must be confident in His forgiveness, His restoration, and His sovereignty over the direction of our lives, even if that direction involves suffering for the sake of His call.

- **Of these two challenges, which one discourages you more from fulfilling Jesus’ mission: your feeling of unworthiness or the cost of following Jesus? Why?**

### Option 2

Following Jesus isn’t always the easiest choice. At the top of a white board or large poster board, write out the title *The Cost*. Instruct students to call out different “costs” of following Jesus that they have specifically experienced. Next, encourage students to list some general costs of being Christ-followers mentioned throughout the Bible. Then, ask:

- **What are some of the “costs” you fear the most?**
- **What are some costs that tempt you not to wholly follow Jesus’ commands?**
- **What are some famous “failures” in following Jesus that you know from the Bible?**

We will all fail to follow Jesus at some point in our lives and on multiple occasions. Sometimes the failure to follow Jesus fully in the past causes us to fear that we won’t be able to follow Him fully in the future. But, just as Jesus forgave Peter for His denial and restored Him to ministry, He will also forgive and restore us when we repent of our failure to follow. And He will ask us, again, to follow Him fully, no matter the cost.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

---

**Jesus forgives past failures and offers the opportunity to follow Him once again.**

## CHARACTERS

---

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

## PLOT

---

In past sessions we have seen Jesus reveal Himself to the disciples after His resurrection. However, we have not seen a discussion about why the disciples abandoned Jesus or denied knowing Him on the night of His arrest. One might expect a conversation about that to take place—maybe one where Jesus expressed personal hurt and feelings of betrayal because of their actions. Instead of adding to their emotional failure and fears, Jesus once again reached out with grace and mercy, recommissioning His disciples for their mission ahead.

## TIMELINE

### FOLLOW ME

*Jesus' forgiveness and the call of every Christian.*

### AS YOU GO...

*Fulfilling the Great Commission wherever we are in life.*

### THE ASCENSION

*Jesus promises to send His Spirit.*

## JESUS PROVIDED FOR THE DISCIPLES

In Matthew 4:18-20, Peter and several other disciples left their nets to follow Jesus. In this passage, we find that the disciples had returned to fishing.

The Gospel of John did not give a reason for this decision or tell us that this decision was inappropriate. However, it does not seem to be the response we would expect from disciples Jesus had sent on a mission.

**<sup>1</sup> After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (John 21:1-14)**

Whether it was the early morning hour, the distance from shore, or another instance in which they were kept from recognizing their risen Lord (Luke 24:16,37), the disciples did not recognize Jesus. It was not until they took the fishing advice of this "stranger" and had amazing success that they recognized Jesus. It was the disciple Jesus loved (presumably the Apostle John) who first announced that the stranger on the shore was Jesus.

This affirmation prompted Peter to immediate action. His eagerness to get to Jesus on the shore confirms that the disciples were not running away from Jesus or turning from Him—no matter how uncertain or hesitant they were about their mission.

Jesus would have a conversation with Peter eventually, but His first priority was to provide breakfast to His disciples. This is a significant act. By feeding them breakfast, Jesus reassured His disciples of His presence, met their physical needs, and served them as He did before He went to the cross.

- **How have you experienced the reassuring presence of Jesus in your life? What has Jesus done to remind you that He is with you and cares for your needs?** (*p. 67, PSG*)

## JESUS CALLED PETER TO FOLLOW HIM

---

Then, Jesus demonstrated His restorative power to Peter, the one who had denied Him three times on the eve of His crucifixion (John 18:15-27). John also recorded the remarkable and stirring conversation between Jesus and Peter. Take a look:

**<sup>15</sup> 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.” <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.” <sup>19</sup> (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.” (John 21:15-19)**

Jesus began by restoring Peter with a “triple commission” to match Peter’s “triple denial” (John 18:15-27; 21:15-17). Three times, Jesus asked if Peter loved Him.

Jesus’ commission to Peter, His repentant follower, was to care for Jesus’ followers as a shepherd cares for his sheep. This was a huge commission. Jesus, the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep (John 10:10-16), entrusted this responsibility to Peter. In essence, Peter would demonstrate his love for Jesus by caring for Jesus’ followers.

As it turns out, Peter would eventually lay down his life for the sheep just as Jesus did (John 10:11,15). Jesus informed Peter that his ministry would involve death (John 21:18-19). Yes, the stretching, tying, and being carried around Peter would experience in his old age likely referred to something more drastic than being feeble. The point was not that someone else would need to care for Peter like a retirement home may take care of elderly patients today. Instead, these images show a condemned criminal being tied to the horizontal crossbeam that he would carry to the place of his execution.

Like Jesus' crucifixion, Peter's crucifixion would be a victory, not a defeat—it would be a means of glorifying God (v. 19), which is our highest calling. For some of Jesus' followers, this means a martyr's death. The Apostle Paul, whose great expectation was not comfort or self-exaltation but to exalt Christ (Phil. 1:20), was eventually put to death. And so was the Apostle Peter.

Jesus' final words as He recommissioned Peter were "Follow Me" (v. 19). This was a call to consistent discipleship until his death—a call made possible by the gracious forgiveness of the Lord.

## JESUS TAUGHT PETER TO NOT FOCUS ON OTHERS, BUT ON HIM

This call to consistent discipleship until his death as a martyr prompted Peter to ask Jesus a question. His question is one we tend to ask when we reflect on the difficulties we face for following and serving our risen King. The question is: "What about him? What about her?" The conversation between Jesus and Peter continued, but this time, Peter asked the question.

**20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"**  
**21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"** **22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"** **23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"** (John 21:20-23)

John was most likely "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (v. 20). Peter's question likely reflects a bit of a competitive spirit. Peter's implication was that John should have to face whatever Peter would face. If we are willing to admit it, we often ask the same question. We have a keen sense of fairness whenever we suspect that we might have a more difficult path to walk than someone else.

In essence, Jesus' response to Peter was, "What happens to John is of no concern to you. Focus on me and what I have called you to do."

## TIMELINE

*\*Bonus Session*  
**SONG OF THANKSGIVING**  
*Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.*

*\*Beginning*  
*Winter 2017-18*

**PENTECOST**  
*The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.*

**COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES**  
*John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.*

It is a mystery why some Christ-followers suffer more than others for the sake of the gospel. For example, King Herod attacked some believers and even executed John's brother, James (Acts 12:1-2). Around that time, Peter was kept in prison, but the church continually and fervently prayed for him (Acts 12:5). Eventually, an angel of the Lord rescued Peter, and Peter went on with his service (Acts 12:6-19). Why did God spare Peter, but not James?

The answer is the same as it is to the question, why did John get to die peacefully in his old age, as it appears he did, when Peter had to face martyrdom? In both cases, the answer is: *We don't know*. God does not tell us. What He tells us is to refocus our attention on following Him—that's what really matters.

Years later, the Apostle Peter wrote about how we can follow Jesus and serve Him even during times of intense suffering. In his first New Testament letter, he challenged believers to follow Jesus' lead and entrust themselves to God, the One who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Trust makes all the difference. When we entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator, we can continue to do good even as we face suffering for the sake of Christ (1 Pet. 4:19).

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Imputation (p. 68, PSG)

*When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or transferred to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins, but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Through His breakfast encounter with His disciples, Jesus showed the reality of His restorative power. Because He fulfilled God's plan to rescue people from sin, Jesus was able to forgive the disciples of their sins and failures, and then recommission them in their task of following Him.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How has Jesus revealed Himself to you through His power and provision? Think about a situation in which you knew the answers and fulfilled needs could have only come from the Lord.** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways in which Jesus is a shepherd to His people?** *For starters, like a good shepherd, Jesus went after Peter and the other disciples, even though they denied and abandoned Him after His arrest. Like a good shepherd, Jesus doesn't respond vindictively, but with patience and grace, knowing His sheep need Him.*
- **What are some ways in which we, as Jesus' followers, can "feed His sheep?"** *Examples may include serving those with needs in the church or community, volunteering to help Vacation Bible School (VBS) in the summer, or encouraging friends by pointing them to God's Word, and so forth.*
- **What kinds of costs must believers be prepared to pay for following Jesus in the world in general and in our specific communities?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

---

God calls us to demonstrate our love for Jesus by following Him—no matter where the journey leads and no matter what happens to us in comparison to other followers of Jesus. It takes grace to not play the comparison game and to have an eternal perspective when it comes to our momentary sufferings; sufferings that will one day seem incredibly small.

- **When have you experienced a sense of competitiveness with your brothers and sisters in Christ?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do we find it so easy to question God's reason for having different plans for different people?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

---

When it comes to obeying the command to “follow Jesus,” it is safe to say people often focus all their attention on the verb rather than the object of that verb. In other words, we place a lot of attention on the idea of “following” and what that might entail in our lives—the potential discomfort, persecution, hostility, and so on. While those things may be real possibilities in our task of following Him, our primary focus shouldn't be on the act of following, but on the person we follow—Jesus! We aren't following an ethical code or philosophical way of life. No, we are following the One who is Life! And when we center our attention on Him and Him alone, we gain a correct perspective on the difficulties of following Jesus.

- **How is it possible for believers to focus on following and serving Jesus when the cost is high and the pain is deep?** *It is possible for believers to follow Christ during difficult times solely due to the fact that they find a level of joy and satisfaction in Christ that far outweighs the sufferings this life may bring.*
- **Why is it more important for believers to focus on who they follow rather than the command to follow?** *Focusing on the command only leads to a sense of duty and obligation. Focusing on the object of our following—Christ—is what produces joy and purpose in the act of following.*



## HANDS

---

Our past failures do not have to define the course of our lives. When we turn from our fearful denials of Christ and recommit ourselves to loving Him, He forgives us and recommissions us to the mission on which He has sent.

- **How does Peter's recommission by Christ encourage you in times of personal unfaithfulness?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we use Peter's recommission story to encourage someone we know who feels overwhelmed by personal sin and failure?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

---

### SOURCES

1. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language, 4th ed.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 248.
2. Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, rev. ed.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 655.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPRisenFAL17](http://lifeway.com/TGPRisenFAL17))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**