# Week 32

# You Follow ME!

##### John 21

## Day One

Our author is not through with his lesson, even when we have come to conclude that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He pushes us one step further. Will you follow?

*Lord,*

*Your will is my will. I want what You want for me. Show me the next steps in my walk with You.*

*Amen*

1. Why do you think Peter wanted to go fishing *(21:1-3)?*
2. How did they know it was the Lord *(21:4-7; compare Luke 5:4-8)?*

*Do you think there is something significant about the way the Lord was cooking the fish* *(20:8-14)?*

## Day Two

Peter had denied even knowing the Lord not once, but three times. This is failure on a BIG scale. It doesn’t seem possible that a person could recover from an event like this, but Jesus brings Peter back.

*Lord,*

*Help me to see that failure is not optional, but also not permanent. Show me the way back to serving You with the right attitude.*

*Amen*

1. Why is it important that Jesus restore Peter to service in front of the other disciples*?*
2. Why does Jesus ask Peter three times if he loves him *(21:15, 16, 17)?*

*How can a person who has failed be restored?*

## Day Three

What we fear most often comes to us in the plan of God, just not at the times we would expect. He wants us to see that He is greater than our fear. He wants us to trust Him and focus on doing His will in ministry.

*Lord,*

*Your servant hears and seeks to do Your will Your way. You alone know the depth of my fear and what it will take to overcome it. I am here to do Your will by faith, not sight.*

*Amen*

1. What do Jesus’ words indicate about the type of death Peter would die *(21:18-19)?*
2. What was Peter’s concern about this prophecy *(21:20-23)?*

*In light of v. 22, what should our attitude be toward differences in how other Christians or Christian leaders serve God (see also 1 Corinthians 3:1 -- 4:7; 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 10:12)?*

## Day Four

How do we know what we know about Jesus? This is key to finding out the truth about our Lord. We have studied one of four Gospels, but have not gained even 25% of Jesus’ life. There is more to learn, but for now it is enough.

*Lord,*

*I want to know You more. Let me find out about You and the truth of Your powerful words as I live them. Build my confidence in You that I might stand and witness with the disciples.*

*Amen*

1. Does this Gospel exhaust all the known information about Jesus’ life and work *(21:25)?*

*If you could ask the author one question about Jesus, what would it be?*

## Bonus Material

After the climax of the preceding chapter, which included Christ’s post-resurrection appearances, Thomas’ dramatic statement of faith (v. 28), and the purpose statement for this gospel (v. 31), we might have expected John to conclude his narrative. But instead, he adds a postscript which ties up some loose ends, including a beautiful picture of reconciliation between Jesus and Peter, and which gives us some additional lessons to consider.

v. 1 **Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias . . .** This appearance at the Sea of Galilee (see 6:1) took place sometime during the thirty-three days between Jesus’ appearance to Thomas and his ascension (see Acts 1:3).

v. 3 **"I’m going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We’ll go with you."** Some have criticized the disciples for going fishing after having seen the risen Lord, as if they were abandoning their commissions (20:21) to return to their homes and former occupations. However, since Jesus had said that he would meet them in Galilee (Mk. 14:28; 16:7), it is more likely that they are just trying to keep busy while awaiting further directions. Leaping into the water and swimming to Jesus (v. 7) does not seem like the response of a man who was abandoning his master!

**that night they caught nothing . . .** This parallels Jesus’ initial encounter with Peter, James, and John, in which, after a night of fruitless effort, they respond to the suggestion of a stranger and take in a huge catch of fish (Lk. 5:4-11). A replay of that scene at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry illustrates the fact that the disciples still cannot do anything (such as fulfill their commission to be fishers of men) apart from him (15:5; see 20:21; Lk. 5:10). vv. 5-6 If the willingness of these professional fishermen to take advice from a stranger seems odd, we must remember that they had done so before (Lk. 5:4-11). Perhaps their fatigue and failure made them open to suggestion, fostering an attitude of "what have we got to lose." And perhaps Jesus spoke with an authority that implied he knew what he was talking about. In any case, they complied.

v.7 Although John is the first to see the hand of their master at work, perhaps recognizing the similarities between this event and their first encounter with Jesus, Peter is (characteristically) the first to react. It is not clear exactly what Peter did with his outer garment; perhaps he knotted it around his waist so as not to impede his movements while swimming.

v.11 **It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn . . .** Although the exact number of fish is probably not significant, their great number is likely an anticipatory sign of the fruitfulness which Jesus’ followers will enjoy as "fishers of men" (Mk. 1:17) as they follow the guidance of their Lord. The fact that the net was not torn reminds us of Jesus’ assurances that he would lose none of those whom the Father had given him (6:39; 10:28).

vv. 12-13 Jesus ministers to the disciples by preparing and serving them a meal, demonstrating that, although in one sense their relationship has been dramatically altered, in another sense it has not changed. He continues to serve them, even as he remains their master (see 13:12-14; also Lk. 22:24-27). This scene reminds us that no matter what service they, or we, may render to Jesus, we can never equal his service to us.

This is also a powerful symbol of the fact that Jesus provides the spiritual strength and nourishment his disciples need to carry out the task he has given them. The disciples’ response to their master is halting and tentative; although they know it is Jesus, they dare not ask so as to remove all doubt. The contrast between the response of Peter and the other disciples should cause us to reflect on how we may react when we come face to face with our Lord. Will we respond in exuberant joy, as did Peter? Will our welcome be lukewarm, muted? Or will we be ashamed because we have failed to continue in him (1 Jn. 2:28)? May our attitude be that of John at the close of Revelation: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20; see 1 Cor. 16:22).

vv. 15-17 At this point, Jesus has already appeared to Peter alone (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); perhaps some reconciliation had taken place between them already. But just as Peter’s boast of ultimate loyalty and his subsequent denial of Christ were made in public (13:37-38; 18:15-18, 25-27; see Mk. 14:29), so also must his reinstatement be made publicly, n order to eliminate any question in the minds of the disciples (or Peter) concerning his fitness for ministry.

**"Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"** Jesus could be asking if Peter loves him more than he loves the other disciples, or more than he loves fishing. But it is more likely that Jesus is asking whether Peter’s love for him is greater than that of the other disciples; in other words, "Peter, do you really love me more than these other men do?" Peter’s answers show that he has gained humility by his failure; he does not compare himself with the other disciples, but only speaks of his own love (see vv. 20-22; 1 Pet. 5:1).

It is often suggested that the different Greek words for "love" in these verses indicate differences in the meanings of the questions and answers, since Jesus uses *agapao* in the first two questions and *phileo* in the third, while Peter responds with *phileo* all three times. Supposedly, *agapao* expresses a higher, self-sacrificing love, the love which comes from God and which one has toward God, while *phileo* expresses a more common kind of love, the love which one has toward a friend. Therefore, it is argued that Jesus first asks Peter (twice) to testify that he loves him with a worship-love (*agapao*), but Peter, remembering his shameful denial, cannot bring himself to do so, answering only that he loves him with a friendshiplove (*phileo*). Finally, Jesus relents and asks Peter to affirm merely a *phileo* love.

However, this interpretation is questionable, because the distinction between these two verbs is not consistently maintained in the New Testament. For example, in John’s gospel, both verbs are used of God’s love for Jesus (*agapao*, 3:35; *phileo*, 5:20), of Jesus’ love for John (*agapao*, 19:26, 21:7; *phileo*, 20:2), and of Jesus’ love for Lazarus (*agapao*, 11:5; *phileo*, 11:36).

In addition, John often uses different terms for stylistic, rather than theological reasons. Thus, the three repetitions of Jesus’ question do not indicate a change in their content. Rather, they provide Peter an opportunity to reaffirm his love for the Lord three times, just as he had denied him three times. In response, Jesus accepts his testimony and restores him to ministry, exhorting him to "feed my lambs" (see Jn 10; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

vv. 18-19 Peter’s threefold affirmation of love results, not in a promise of reward, but in a promise of suffering: death by crucifixion. However, in truth the suffering is a reward, for through his own crucifixion Peter would have the honor of glorifying God just as his master before him had done (Jn. 12:27-28; 13:31-32; 17:1; also Acts 5:41; Phlp. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:14-16). Historically, Peter was probably crucified in Rome under the emperor Nero, before this gospel was written.

**Then he said to him, "Follow me!"** Jesus invites Peter to walk with him (see v. 20), but his words also summon Peter to discipleship in spite of the suffering that awaits him.

vv. 20-21 John’s reference to himself as **"the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper"** and who had asked Jesus Peter’s question (13:24-25) gives credibility to the next few verses by reminding us of the intimate relationship which John enjoyed with both Peter and Christ.

v. 22 **Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."** Jesus’ words are a reminder to Peter and to us that the commission we share as Christ’s disciples (Jn. 20:21) will require different things from each one (see 1 Cor. 12-14). For Peter, it meant martyrdom; for John, it meant a long life and the writing of this gospel (v. 24). Thus, comparisons between different ministries or different leaders are foolish (2 Cor. 10:12). One reason for this is that we are unable to judge another’s heart; only God can (and will) judge motives. Another is that visible fruit in ministry often results from the prior work of those who prepare the soil without producing obvious results. In the end, what matters is our faithfulness to the task the Lord has assigned us (1 Cor. 3:1-4:7).

v. 24 **This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.** Here the author of this gospel is identified as John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (v. 20; see notes on 13:23). The "we" may refer to the people or elders of the church that John belonged to when he wrote this gospel. Or it may be an editorial "we" which John uses as an alternative to referring to himself directly (see 1 Jn. 1:4; 2:1). This is consistent with the fact that he avoids naming himself anywhere in this gospel.

v. 25 **Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for all the books that would be written.** If we evaluate this statement in terms of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it must be regarded as the literary device of obvious exaggeration, *hyperbole*. But if we consider all the deeds of the Son of God, including his pre-incarnate works of creation and providence (Heb. 1:2-3), then this is not in the least an exaggeration.