

John 21

Third Time's the Charm

Group Guide Session 6

Materials Needed

For this session, each student will need: ❶ student journal pages for Session 6; ❷ John 21 Scripture sheets; and ❸ the page entitled “A Picture of Hope.” You’ll also need a chalk/dry-erase board and colored pencils (at least two colors per student).

Students will need their Bibles, pens and notebooks. If you plan to reward the student who correctly answers the Bonus Question (see “Review” below), you’ll want to pick up an inexpensive prize.

Session Intro

Goals of Session 6

As students experience John 21 they will ...

- examine Jesus’ last recorded conversation with Peter, comparing it with previous conversations between the two;
- be challenged to be used by Jesus no matter how much they think they’ve failed Him.

Prayer

After the group has gathered, begin the session with prayer. Pray that by studying this special conversation between Jesus and Peter, your group members will be able to grasp *“how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”* (Eph. 3:18–19).

Review

To help your group stay connected to the big themes of John’s gospel, ask a few review questions:

- What was the first word out of Jesus’ mouth when He met His disciples after His resurrection?
- Why was this word appropriate?
- What’s the connection between peace and the gospel?
- **Bonus Question:** How much time elapsed between Jesus’ appearance to His disciples and His appearance to Thomas? (*One week; see John 20:26*)

Open

Begin your study with a **discussion of these questions:**

Have you ever really let a friend down and then had to face that friend?



What emotions did you feel when you thought about facing your friend?

Did the friend make you feel better or worse about the situation?


Think for a minute about when Peter denied Jesus three times. What best describes Peter’s denials?

- All-time worst letdown of a friend?
- Understandable, given the circumstances?

Digging In

Share that Peter must have had some nervous moments when he learned Jesus was alive. He probably wondered how Jesus felt about him. Perhaps he hoped to avoid any face-to-face interaction.

Ask the group to **read John 21:1–25** using their Scripture sheets. As they read, have them mark the following:

1. Draw a cross † over every mention of Jesus; underline everything Jesus said.
2. Draw a stick figure  over every mention of Peter; circle everything Peter said or did.

While the students are reading, draw the chart below (without the answers) on the board. When most have finished, **ask the students** to look again at the main conversation between Peter and Jesus. (They can find this by referring to the crosses and stick figures they marked on their Scripture sheets.) Ask the group to give you a play-by-play of Peter’s conversation with Jesus. As you record their input, the board will begin to look something like this:

Jesus Says	Peter Responds	Jesus Replies
<i>Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?</i>	<i>Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.</i>	<i>Feed my lambs.</i>
<i>Simon son of John, do you truly love me?</i>	<i>Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.</i>	<i>Take care of my sheep.</i>
<i>Simon son of John, do you love me?</i>	<i>Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.</i>	<i>Feed my sheep.</i>

Ask the students to share any impressions they have of this meeting between Peter and Jesus. They may have noticed:

- Peter was obviously eager to see Jesus (21:7).
- Jesus made a definite connection between loving Him and taking care of His sheep.
- Peter was given three opportunities to express his love for Jesus, possibly in response to his three denials.

Digging Deeper

Express to the group that this conversation must have been monumental in Peter's spiritual journey. To experience its impact, we need to look at some previous conversations between Jesus and Peter. **Tell the group** that these conversations are printed under "Digging Deeper" on their journal pages. As the students **read the passages**, have them underline anything that reminds them of the John 21 conversation or that helps them understand it better.

While the students are reading, erase the board and make two columns. Then ask the group what struck them as significant in each of these conversations. Record their observations in the left column on the board; you'll be working to elicit and discuss the concepts beneath each set of Scriptures below.

Peter's First Encounter with Jesus

John 1:40–42

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Jesus renamed Peter (Peter means "rock") in their first encounter, but He called Peter by his original name—Simon son of John—in John 21.

Jesus' Prediction of Peter's Denial

John 13:36–38

³⁶ Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." ³⁷ Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

Here Jesus told Peter that he couldn't follow Him, but in John 21 His last words to Peter were "follow me."

Luke 22:31–34

³¹ "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." ³³ But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." ³⁴ Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

Jesus predicted that Peter would strengthen his brothers after turning back from Satan's sifting him. The scene in John 21 appears to be Peter's "turning back." "Strengthen your brothers" sounds a lot like "Take care of my sheep."

Peter's Denial

John 18:17–27

¹⁷ “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, “I am not.” ¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. ¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ “I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.” ²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded. ²³ “If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” ²⁴ Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. ²⁵ As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the olive grove?” ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Three times, Peter denied knowing Jesus; Jesus gave Peter three opportunities to express his love for Him. Also, there happened to be a fire nearby when Peter denied Jesus, as well as when Jesus restored Peter.

Taking It Inward

Once you’ve listed the students’ observations on the board, use the questions below to **prompt a discussion** of Peter’s encounter with Jesus in John 21, as compared to previous encounters. Write these responses in the right column on the board.

Peter’s First Encounter with Jesus

John 1:40–42

What strikes you as significant about the fact that Jesus went back to Peter’s old name in John 21?

Jesus may have been reminding Peter that he hadn’t lived up to the name “rock” (Peter) in recent days.

Jesus’ Prediction of Peter’s Denial

John 13:36–38

Did you observe the word “follow” in this scene?

If they didn’t, give them a minute to reread John 13:36–38 and John 21:17–19. Have them circle the word “follow” in each passage.

In these two passages, Jesus says two very different things about following Him. What does the contrast tell you about following Jesus?

No matter how badly we think we've failed Jesus, we can still follow with everything we've got.

Peter's Denial

John 18:17–27

What's significant about Peter having denied Jesus three times in John 18—and Peter being given three opportunities to express his love for Jesus in John 21?

This had to have been a major boost for Peter! Not only was he given three opportunities to express his love for Jesus; he was also given a sacred assignment—taking care of Jesus' sheep. That calls for trust!

Have you ever noticed that a smell can trigger a memory—either of a good experience or a bad one? Knowing that smell can trigger memories, what do you think was on Peter's mind when he came ashore to greet Jesus and smelled the smoke of Jesus' fire?

Peter had to have been nervous, and Jesus knew this. In fact, Jesus may have lit the fire to remind Peter of his past failure—but only so that he could experience true restoration. It was probably a humbling experience for Peter; he was made weak so that Jesus could make him strong.

What can this scene in John 21 teach us about following Jesus?

Elicit the response that Jesus wants to use us in mighty ways, no matter how badly we think we've failed Him.

In the past month, when have you let Jesus down? Based on Peter's experience, what do you think He's saying to you now?

Cross Checking

Tell the group that Peter not only left this scene feeling better about himself; he also followed Jesus...and changed the world. Total restoration is a big theme in Scripture; in fact, it's one of God's favorite activities.

Explain to the group that the passages listed on their journal pages under “Cross Checking” are from Peter and Paul, two men who'd experienced potentially “career-limiting” failures where Christianity was concerned. Ask the students to find a place where they can get alone with God—no distractions—to **read these passages**. As they read, they should journal anything the Holy Spirit teaches them about following Jesus and being used in His work. (The exercise is printed on the next page for your reference.)

Group Guide

Session 6

Are you like Peter in John 21? Before you read the Scriptures below, take a stab at answering these questions.

Do you ever feel like you've let Jesus down? If so, in what way?

- I haven't really stood up for Him.
- I haven't spent much time with Him.
- I haven't even thought much about Him lately.
- Other _____

In what ways do you feel inadequate or unable to be used by God?

- I've made some bad mistakes.
- I have a hard time following through with my commitments.
- I cave easily to temptation.
- Other _____

Here are some passages from Paul and Peter, two guys who had every reason to feel inadequate because of past failures. As you read their words from your Bible, fill the left column with reasons why someone might feel inadequate or unable to be used by God. In the right column, write the reasons why God was able to use them (and us!) in spite of their mistakes.

	Potential Reasons for Inadequacy	Reasons Why God Could Use Them
1 Corinthians 1:21–31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not wise by human standards (1:26) -not influential (1:26) -not of noble birth (1:26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise (1:27). -God chose the weak things to shame the strong (1:27). -God chose the lowly and despised things to nullify the things that are (1:28).
2 Corinthians 12:1–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Paul had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment him (12:7). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -God's grace is sufficient (12:9). -We are to boast in our weakness (12:9). -God's power is made perfect in my weakness (12:9). -Christ's power may rest on me in my weaknesses (12:9). -When Paul was weak, then he was strong (12:10).
1 Timothy 1:15–17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Paul was the worst of sinners (1:15). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -But he was shown mercy (1:16). -Christ displayed his unlimited patience in Paul's life (1:16).
2 Peter 1:1–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We forget that we've been cleansed from our past sins (1:9). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Jesus' divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (1:3). -If we possess the qualities listed in increasing measure, we will be effective and productive (1:8).

Now look back at what you wrote in the left column. How are you like Peter and Paul? Do any of these descriptions apply to you? If so, how does the info in the right column give you hope?

Peter (a former failure in his own eyes) said that Jesus has given us everything we need for life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:3). If you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, *this means you!* Look back at John 21:15–17 on your Scripture sheet, and write your name above Peter's name ("Simon son of John") wherever it appears. What is Jesus saying to you?

Wrapping It Up

After a few minutes, **call the group back together**. Ask any volunteers to share what they learned about their inadequacies versus how God wants to use them. After some have shared, encourage the students to write what they want to remember from this session on the page entitled "A Picture of Hope." Suggest that they complete this sentence:

Even though I've _____, I know Jesus will _____.

Final Review

Before **closing in prayer**, ask the students to look over what they've written on the page entitled "A Picture of Hope." Ask different volunteers to give a one-line synopsis of each chapter from this study (John 18–21). Encourage your group members to share their high points from the study or how they've encountered Jesus through the book of John. The simple act of reviewing what they've learned can help them retain it for life!