

May 3, 2026 Leaders' Guide

John 21:15–19

"Death to Self; Resurrected Life in Christ"

This study follows Peter's encounter with the risen Jesus, tracing the movement from failure, to loving confrontation, to restoration, and into a life shaped by "dying and living" with Christ. As a group, you'll explore how Jesus exposes the deeper roots of sin, restores with grace, and forms a community marked by both truth and love.

Read John 21:15–19

1. What stands out to you in this interaction between Jesus and Peter? What surprises you, or raises questions for you?

Invite your group to begin with observation before interpretation. Some may notice the repetition, the charcoal fire, or the emotional tone. Let different observations surface—this helps anchor the discussion in the text itself.

2. Why do you think Jesus asks Peter the same question three times? What might he be doing in Peter through this repetition?

Help the group connect this to Peter's three denials. Jesus is not shaming Peter, but restoring him—bringing him back through the wound. This is not punishment, but intentional, healing confrontation that leads to restoration.

3. Jesus asks, "Do you love me more than these?" What do you think "more than these" refers to? How does this connect to Peter's earlier claims about the other disciples? (*John 21:15; cf. Matthew 26:33*)

Guide the group to recall Peter's earlier statement: "Though they all fall away... I will never." His sin wasn't just denial—it was pride in comparison with others. Jesus is not simply asking, "Do you love me?" but exposing Peter's inflated self-assessment over against the other disciples. This is the "sin under the sin." Help the group see how subtle this can be in our own lives—measuring our faithfulness, maturity, or devotion against others. Jesus brings that comparative pride into the light—not to shame Peter, but to humble and restore him into a truer, grace-grounded love.

4. Peter is grieved by Jesus' third question. In light of 2 Corinthians 7:10, what might be the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow? Which do you see in Peter here?

Help the group distinguish: worldly sorrow focuses on consequences or self ("I can't believe I did that"), while godly sorrow looks toward Jesus ("What have I done in light of his love?"). Peter's grief is not self-protective—it is responsive to Jesus. This is sorrow that leads to life and restoration.

5. Verse 15 notes that this conversation happens "when they had finished breakfast." What significance might the shared meal have in this moment? What does it communicate before Jesus even speaks?

Draw out the first-century meaning of meals—welcome, belonging, peace, restored relationship. Jesus extends grace before he addresses Peter's failure. The confrontation happens within an already-established context of love, safety, and acceptance.

6. After Peter's confession, Jesus says, "Feed my lambs...tend my sheep." How does this moment shape the kind of community Jesus is forming? What might it look like for a community to hold both truth and love like this?

Help the group see that Peter is not sidelined but entrusted. His failure, met with humility and grace, becomes formative—not disqualifying. This is the kind of leadership and community Jesus forms. You can draw in the idea from the sermon that when this posture takes root, it creates a community marked by both truth and love. We often drift to one side or the other: some communities emphasize "truth" but lack gentleness, becoming harsh or exposing without care; others emphasize "love" but avoid truth, leaving people unchallenged and unchanged. But Jesus holds both together—he lovingly names what must die, and he does so within a relationship of deep grace. Invite your group to reflect on how this balance might grow in your own community: where might you lean more toward truth without love, or love without truth?

7. Jesus tells Peter about the kind of death he will die, and calls him to follow. How does this connect to the pattern of "come and die that you might truly live"? What might that look like in your own life right now?

Gently move toward application. In the sermon, this was framed as Jesus exposing what must "die" in us—not for our ruin, but for our resurrection. Encourage participants to consider where Jesus might be inviting them to surrender something—not out of fear, but in trust that his desire is their life.