

Breakfast at the Second Fire

JOHN 21:15-19 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

Jesus didn't just forgive Peter for his worst night. He handed him people to take care of, and he still does that with us.

Opening Lines

Close your eyes for a second. Think of a smell that drags you straight back to one specific moment: a grandmother's kitchen, a hospital hallway, a campfire. Got it? Hold onto that, because Peter is about to smell one.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Every person leaves knowing that Jesus met Peter at a second charcoal fire, asked three questions for three denials, and handed him sheep after every answer. Each person names one lamb, by first name, that they will feed this week.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the cross-reference tour (Luke 22, 1 Peter 5, John 10) before you cut a minute of discussion. The room doesn't need three more passages. It needs time at this fire.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in question 4, when someone quietly admits their own charcoal fire and hears that Jesus walks toward it, not away. Then it gets hands and feet in the commitments, when that same person names a real lamb and a real day.
- Your prep: Read John 18:15-27 and John 21:1-19 back to back, out loud, so you feel the echo of the fire in your own mouth. Then fill in your own charcoal fire and your own lamb on the handout before anyone else sees it.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Use the classroom opening (the smell). 0-5: smell prompt, two or three call-outs, then read John 18:18 and point out the same rare word for the fire. 5-8: read John 21:15-19 aloud. 8-15: teaching the word, *phileō* with the two-hands image, ending on verse 17 and a full thirty seconds of silence. 15-18: question 1 with the whole room. 18-30: questions 2, 3 and 4 in pairs or triads, with one quick report-back. 30-34: question 5, everyone says their answer to a neighbor. 34-41: commitments out loud, name and day, with the "Who, and by when?" press; partners write each other's lamb. 41-45: prayer over the named lambs. Transformation happens in the pairs during question 4 and in the public name-and-day press. If time runs short, cut question 2 first, then shrink question 5 to one volunteer.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Use the small group opening (go first, go real). 0-8: your two-minute story, then one or two others share a time they were trusted right after failing. 8-12: read the passage twice, the second time with one voice reading Jesus and another reading Peter. 12-20: teaching the word with the hand image, verse 17, thirty seconds of silence. 20-26: questions 1 and 2. 26-34: question 3. 34-46: question 4, and let it run long if people are opening up. 46-51: question 5 around the circle. 51-56: commitments, name and day, partners write each other's. 56-60: prayer naming each lamb. Transformation happens in question 4, where eight people can actually hear one person name their charcoal fire. If time runs short, trim the teaching-the-word section to the hand image alone (three minutes), then drop question 3.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Use the coffee opening ("Is there anything that would make Jesus stop trusting you?"). 0-4: the opening question and honest answers. 4-7: read John 21:15-19 together on your phones. 7-9: tell them about the two charcoal fires in a sentence or two, and skip the Greek unless someone asks. 9-15: question 3. 15-22: question 4. 22-25: question 5. 25-28: each person names a lamb and a day, and you text each other the names right there. 28-30: pray for those names. Transformation happens in question 4, because a table this small can get personal fast. If time runs short, cut question 3 first and go straight from the reading to the charcoal fire.

Commitments, Not Summary

Commitments, Not Summary is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach. This week we drill it deliberately. Remember week 4: you traded the tidy recap for out-loud commitments. Weeks 9, 14, 19 and 24 tightened the rep. This is rep six, and it's harder. No commitment leaves the room without a first name and a day of the week. The passage itself models this. Jesus never lets Peter's "I love You" float in the air. He attaches a charge to it every single time: feed, shepherd, feed. You'll do the same. When someone says "I want to be more caring this week," respond warmly and in front of everyone: "Who, and by when?" Then wait until they give you a name and a day. Do it to yourself first, out loud, so the room sees it's an invitation and not a trap. Then add the second half of this week's rep: pair people up and have each partner write the other's lamb and day on their own handout. Now the commitment has a witness who will ask about it on Thursday. The press will feel awkward the first time you do it. It's supposed to. Vague love is exactly what Jesus refused to settle for at that fire.

Why This Passage Matters

Almost everyone in your room is carrying a charcoal fire. It might be a marriage that ended, a kid they yelled at this morning, ten years they walked away from church, or one night they said "I don't know Him" in a way nobody else saw. Most of them have quietly decided that the best they can hope for is forgiveness with an asterisk: allowed back in, seated near the exit, never trusted with anything that matters again. This passage wrecks

that conclusion. Jesus doesn't avoid the scene of Peter's failure. He rebuilds it, down to the smell of the coals, and asks three questions to match three denials. After every answer he hands Peter the one thing a disqualified man would never expect: people to care for. The man who failed most publicly gets the flock. Tonight you get to tell a room full of people who assume they've been benched that Jesus is still handing out shepherd's staffs. You may watch someone realize their worst night could be the beginning of their usefulness, not the end of it. Few passages let a teacher say something that good and that true. You get to say it tonight.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach, sit alone with a pen and do the two things you'll ask the room to do. First, write down your charcoal fire: one specific failure you've quietly assumed limits what Jesus would trust you with. Not a category like "pride." A night, a sentence, a decision. Then read verse 17 out loud with your own name in it: "[Your name], do you love Me?" Answer out loud in Peter's words, and notice whether you want to argue your case or can simply say, "Lord, You know all things." Second, write one first name on the lamb line of your handout, someone new to faith or worn thin, and one concrete thing you'll do for them by a specific day. If you can, send that text before the lesson starts. When you walk into the room, you won't be describing an exercise. You'll be reporting from one.

Bring Your Own Story

- Prompt: A time a smell, a place, or a song dragged you straight back to a failure you thought you were over.
- Prompt: A moment someone trusted you with real responsibility right after you'd let them down, and what that trust did to you.
- Prompt: A time your motives were questioned and you kept arguing instead of letting the truth rest with God.
- SAMPLE, polished: "I once let a friend down, but God taught me about grace."
SAMPLE, real: "I skipped my best friend's dad's funeral for a work deadline, and a month later she asked me to be her son's godmother."
- Guardrail: real, not raw. Tell a failure you've already walked through with Jesus, not one that's still bleeding tonight.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Ask everyone to think of a smell that takes them straight back to one moment. Take two or three quick answers called out from the room. Then say: "John wants you to smell something. In chapter 18, Peter warms his hands at a charcoal fire and denies Jesus three times. In chapter 21, Jesus cooks breakfast on a charcoal fire. John uses that rare word only in these two scenes. Jesus rebuilt the scene of the crime. Let's find out why.""

Start with the senses. Memory lives in the body before it lives in an argument, and this

passage runs on a smell.

SMALL GROUP: "Tell a two-minute story from your yourStory prompts about being trusted with something right after you'd failed someone. Keep it specific and end it without a moral. Then ask the group: "Has anyone ever been handed responsibility right after blowing it? What was that like?" Let one or two answer, then open John 21: "Peter is about to get the biggest version of that in history.""

Go first, go real. The leader's honesty sets the depth for everyone else in the circle.

COFFEE: "Before anyone opens a Bible, ask: "Honest question. Is there anything you think you could do that would make Jesus stop trusting you with people?" Let the answers sit. Then say: "Peter thought he'd done it. He denied even knowing Jesus, three times, the night Jesus was arrested. Here's what Jesus did about it." Read the passage together on your phones."

Ask the question underneath the question. With two or three friends you can get personal fast, so start there.

Teaching the Word

For most rooms, don't teach Greek. Teach one word: *phileō*, Peter's word for love. Set it up with its partner. Twice Jesus asks with *agapaō*, the settled, whole-self, sacrificial love. Twice Peter answers with *phileō*, the warm love of a friend or a brother. Now make it physical. Raise your right hand high above your head: "Jesus asks, *agapaō*, the love that gives everything." Hold your left hand flat at your heart: "Peter answers, *phileō*, I love You like a brother." Do it again for the second question, same heights. Then, for the third question, slowly lower your right hand until it rests level with your left, and hold it there without saying anything for a moment. "The third time, Jesus uses Peter's word. He comes down to where Peter's honesty can actually reach." Point out what's different about Peter: this is the man who once swore he'd die before he'd deny Jesus. He's done making grand promises. (If someone knows that some scholars read the two words as near-synonyms, agree that it's discussed and point back to the part nobody debates: Peter won't boast anymore.) Then read verse 17 slowly, and stop: "Lord, You know all things. You know I love You." Put the Bible down. Count to thirty in your head. Don't explain it.

Discussion Questions

1. Look at verses 15, 16 and 17. Every time Peter says "I love You," what does Jesus say right after?

Coaching note: This is a warm-up observation question with a right answer: feed My lambs, shepherd My sheep, feed My sheep. When someone gets it, press once: "So what's Jesus saying love for Him looks like?" You want the room to see that every answer gets a charge attached.

If it stalls: Just read the last thing Jesus says in verse 15. Now verse 16. Notice a pattern?

2. Jesus could have had this conversation anywhere. Why do you think He did it beside a charcoal fire, and why three times?

Coaching note: Someone will connect the three questions to the three denials, so let them make that connection before you do. If someone says Jesus was rubbing it in, don't correct them fast. Ask the room, "Does it feel like punishment or like healing?" and let them work toward the idea that Jesus doesn't heal what He refuses to name.

If it stalls: If you had to face someone you'd badly let down, would you rather it happen somewhere neutral or somewhere that reminded you of what happened? Why?

3. Verse 17 says Peter was deeply hurt by the third question. Instead of arguing, he said, "Lord, You know all things." What's the difference between defending yourself and saying that?

Coaching note: People will start naming times their motives were questioned: at work, at home, at church. Let them. Then steer toward the relief in Peter's answer: he stopped trying to prove himself because Jesus already saw his heart clearly. Don't let this turn into a venting session about difficult people. Keep bringing it back to what Peter did with the hurt.

If it stalls: Have you ever been in an argument where you finally just stopped trying to prove your point? What made you stop?

4. Everybody has a charcoal fire, a failure they quietly assume limits what God will trust them with. Without naming yours unless you want to, what do you think Jesus would do if He walked you back to it?

Coaching note: This is where the lesson either lands or doesn't. Wait through the silence and count to thirty. If someone names a real failure, do not rush to comfort or fix it. Thank them, and then ask, "What did Jesus hand Peter right after?" Let the answer, sheep and a job, do the comforting. Honor anyone who just nods and stays quiet.

If it stalls: Yes or no: do you think most Christians secretly believe there's a failure that would get them benched for good?

5. This whole week asked, "Who do you say Jesus is?" Given what He did with Peter's worst night, if someone asked you today who Jesus is to you, what would you actually say?

Coaching note: This is the week's table question, so give it real time. Push past stock answers like "my Savior" by asking, "What does that mean for you on a Tuesday?" The best answers will borrow Peter's language: the one who knows everything about me and still gives me people to love. Have people say their answer out loud to the person beside them if the room is big.

If it stalls: Finish this sentence out loud: "Jesus is the one who _____ me."

Questions You May Hear

"Why does Jesus ask three times? Isn't that a little cruel?"

Peter denied Jesus three times beside a charcoal fire in John 18, so every denial gets its own question. Jesus isn't rubbing it in. He's healing the wound one layer at a time and attaching a new job to every answer.

"Does it really matter that there are two different Greek words for love?"

Jesus twice asks with *agapaō*, the whole-self sacrificial love, and Peter answers with *phileō*, the warm love of a friend. The third time Jesus uses Peter's own word, meeting him where his honesty can reach, and either way you read the words, Peter has stopped

making big promises and rests on “You know all things.”

"What death was Jesus predicting in verse 18?"

“Stretch out your hands” and “lead you where you do not want to go” point to a martyr's death, and John says outright that it would glorify God. Early church tradition holds that Peter was crucified. And Jesus follows that prediction with “Follow Me,” the same words that first called Peter.

"Was Peter on probation after this? Did he ever really get back to leading?"

No probation. He was handed the flock on the spot, and it fulfilled what Jesus prayed in Luke 22:32: “when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Years later Peter wrote as “a fellow elder,” urging leaders to shepherd the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-4).

For Experienced Leaders

- When someone names a real failure, don't rush to comfort. Jesus let Peter be deeply hurt before He said another word. Give the pain a breath, then point to what Jesus handed Peter next.
- Right after the fire, Jesus handed Peter the sheep. Do the same with your Timothy by handing them ten minutes of next week, not the whole lesson. Meet beforehand and ask, “What's the one thing you want them to leave with?” Push them off summary toward a real question, and make them promise to count to thirty in the silence. Don't rescue them mid-silence. Afterward, name one thing to keep and one thing to fix, then give them ten more minutes next time. That's how a teacher becomes two.
- The agapaō and phileō conversation can eat your whole night if you let it. Give the Greek three minutes and the hand image, then get back to the fire and the sheep.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Don't summarize. Say: “Jesus attached a charge to every ‘I love You.’ So we will too. Out loud, name one lamb, someone new to faith or worn thin, by first name. Then name one specific thing you'll do for them and the day you'll do it: a text, soup, a seat beside them on Sunday. Name and day. I'll go first.” Say yours, then go around. If anyone gives you something vague, ask warmly, “Who, and by when?” Then have partners write each other's lamb and day on their handouts.

Close by praying out loud over the actual lambs the room just named, first names and all, and over the charcoal fires people admitted to in question 4 (without repeating anything that was shared in confidence). Skip the written prayer. The point is that people hear their own words carried back to the Jesus who already knows all things.

If you run out of time: If the room gets stuck at question 4 because people are honestly naming their failures, stay there. That's the lesson working. Drop question 5, move to commitments with at least five minutes left, and let the lamb names be your close.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, send each pair a text: “Has your partner fed their lamb yet?”

Ask them today.” Next week, open with sixty seconds: “Who got fed this week?” Let two or three people tell what happened before you start the new lesson.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/john/21-15-19/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- After each of Peter's answers (verses 15, 16, 17), what does Jesus hand him? Write all three.
- Two fires: What happened at the first charcoal fire (John 18:18)? What happens at the second?
- Peter stopped defending himself and said, "Lord, You know all things." One situation where I'm tired of proving myself:
 - My charcoal fire (private, you will not be asked to share this):
 - My lamb this week. First name: _____ What I'll do: _____ By what day: _____
 - My partner's lamb and day, so I can ask them about it:

Take-home actions:

- Feed one lamb: text a friend who's new to faith or worn thin the verse that steadied you, drop off soup when her week falls apart, or sit beside her at church so she doesn't walk in alone.
- In the next conversation where someone doubts your motives, say your honest piece once, then stop trying to prove yourself. Christ already sees your heart clearly, and His knowing is enough.
- If you're watching a parent lose independence or feeling your own body slow down, tell Jesus about that road in prayer. He saw Peter's road ahead and said it would glorify God, and He walks yours first.

"Follow Me." (John 21:19) The same two words that first called Peter, spoken again after his worst night.