

Savoring God's Word

A Meditation on John 21:4-17

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This meditation exercise on Jesus reconciling Peter to himself is especially for those wishing to build relationships with others. If you wish to have a group meditate on the passage together, the instructions for the group leader are in italics. If you wish to use it alone, ignore those instructions. This meditation roughly follows the pattern of *lectio divina*, but also includes elements from the Ignatian style of Scripture meditation. For more information about how to meditate on Scripture, see *Savoring God's Word* {link} or tape *Meditating on Scripture* {link}.

WARMING UP (5-10 minutes)

Before beginning this meditation, reflect quietly for a few minutes. Breathe in and out deeply five or six times. Relax your neck and move it around. Then let your arms go limp and relax the legs and ankles. Relax each part from the inside out.

If you have trouble quieting yourself, try using the palms up, palms down method. Rest your hands in your lap, placing the palms down whenever you think of concerns you need to turn over to God. Turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord and set aside distractions

Then ask yourself this "quiet question": **What draws you to a group/individual study like this?** Close your eyes and reflect on your past experiences or pressing needs in your life. If an answer to the above question doesn't come to you at this time, that's fine. Try to enjoy God's presence without having to do anything.

Group leader: After your group has had a chance to greet each other, read the centering instructions above. Then ask the above "quiet question." Sit quietly in the group for about two minutes, repeat the question and ask group members to share their thoughts in a sentence or two. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so. After group members share, thank them and comment that it's helpful to hear the variety of ways that God speaks to people.

READING the PASSAGE (15-20 minutes)

Read silently the passage printed below, noting the explanations in the right column.

Group leader: Ask a group member to read the passage below aloud. Suggest that other group members might want to close their eyes and listen.

JOHN 21:4-6, 7b, 9, 12a, 13-17

THE DISCIPLES SEE JESUS

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the *shore*, but *the disciples* did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

ITALICIZED WORDS &
PHRASES

SHORE of the Sea of Galilee, a large lake about 7 1/2 miles across and 13 miles long. The

"No," they answered.

6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

JESUS SERVES BREAKFAST

7b As soon as *Simon Peter* heard [John] say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 12a Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."

13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples *after he was raised from the dead*.

JESUS & PETER CONVERSE

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "*Feed my lambs.*"

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

disciples had seen the resurrected Christ in Jerusalem but not in Galilee (60 miles away).

THE DISCIPLES Peter, James, John, Thomas, Nathanael and 2 others (21:1-3) had been fishing all night, but caught nothing.

SIMON PETER Since the time Peter denied Jesus, they had not talked or seen each other except when Jesus appeared to the disciples as a group. Peter denied he knew Jesus three times -- the third time he spoke vehemently and full of curses (Matt. 26:69-74).

AFTER HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD This occurred after Jesus died and raised from the dead, but before he ascended to heaven.

FEED MY LAMBS Jesus owned no sheep, but he had cultivated the disciples and there would be many new Christians to guide, protect, teach and heal.

If you haven't read the notes in the right column, read them silently now. Take a minute to consider the following questions.

Group leader: After the passage is read, ask group members to read silently the explanations in the right column and then to jot down answers to the questions below. After a few minutes, have them choose one question and share their answer to that question in a sentence or two. Or they may pass, if they wish. Explain that this is not a time for discussion, but for reporting responses to the questions.

JESUS

1. Which of these facts about Jesus catch your attention?

He is a savior who cooks.

He is a savior who offers help anonymously.

- Jesus isn't recognized 100 yards away, but is easily recognized for his miraculous works.
- He is a savior who commissions an apostle in spite of his failures.
- Jesus, in his resurrected body, was capable of eating as well as walking through locked doors (John 20:27, 40-43).
- Other: _____

2. This passage is full of images of Jesus as a nurturer and provider-- helping them catch fish, handing them food He has cooked, telling them to feed his lambs. In what ways do you need to be nurtured or provided for?

JESUS' QUESTIONS FOR PETER

3. Here are some reasons offered for why Jesus asked Peter three times, Do you love me?

- Asking three times, Do you love me? paralleled Peter's three denials.
- Jesus was trying to help Peter overcome his self-doubt about their relationship.
- Peter had been the one to suggest going fishing (vs. 3). Jesus probed to see if Peter loved him more than the work of fishing (perhaps pointing to the nets and boat when he said, "Do you love me more than *these*?").
- Jesus was trying to get Peter to examine how devoted he was or wasn't to Jesus. (Peter once claimed, "I will lay down my life for you." {John 13:37-38} but then denied Jesus. Where was Peter now?) thought.)

If you had been Peter, what would have been most helpful to you about this interchange?

- Jesus singled me out for conversation.
 - Jesus didn't seem to be mad.
 - Jesus helped me look at my inner motives.
 - Jesus accepted my less-than-perfect answers.
 - Jesus gave me a commission -- feed the sheep -- even though I had failed.
 - Jesus kept challenging me to love him, to do his work on earth.
 - Jesus was still on this earth to talk to.
4. Who, if anyone, has ever welcomed you back into their life when you thought it could never happen?
5. By jumping out of the boat and swimming ashore, Peter was communicating something powerful to Jesus. By pulling Peter aside for conversation, Jesus was saying something to Peter. What were these two saying to each other?
6. If Jesus could pull you aside and say anything to you,
- what would you like for it to be?
 - what do you think He would say (based on what God's been impressing on you lately)?
- If any of the above questions are too difficult, hold them before God for a few minutes and then go on. Don't worry about getting an answer, but be open to what may come to you in the next few days.

PICTURING the PASSAGE (10-15 minutes)

Before reading the passage again, consider these cues. Let them help you set the scene of how this event in Scripture might have occurred.

CULTURAL CUES: FISHING HABITS

Night fishing was common, and it was probably a delightful experience to be out on the lake in the moonlight to fish all night and then come home tired. The disciples probably used grill nets, a long net fitted with floats that stayed in the water all night and was hauled in by boat the next day.¹

CULTURAL CUES: THE BREAKFAST SCENE

When the disciples saw Jesus, they were about a hundred yards from the shore -- the length of a football field (vs. 8). As they scrambled to shore, they found the tantalizing sight of their breakfast being cooked, but the cook (Jesus) had hands that were pierced with nails and a wounded side. Inside his sandals were feet with huge wounds as well (John 20:27) as he walked on a beach of pebbles and small shells.² How strange that must have been -- how difficult to keep from staring!

SETTING CUES: JESUS & PETER TALK

When the conversation occurred, it was probably still morning and they are resting from a full night and a big breakfast. Imagine the smell of fire and burning coals.

Read the passage again -- aloud, this time -- and picture one of these scenes described in the cues above.

Group leader: Have group members read these cues silently. Then have a group member read the passage aloud while the others picture the passage.

SOAKING in the PASSAGE (5-15 minutes)

Consider now the all-important question that should be addressed whenever Scripture is read: How is my life touched by this passage today? Read the passage aloud again and ponder the following question for about five minutes: **What word or phrase, scene or dramatic moment, sound or smell emerges from the passage and stays with you?**

Here are some examples to consider:

- hearing John say, "It is the Lord," and Peter jumping into the water to swim ashore(vs. 7b)
- the smell of the coals that Jesus prepared to provide breakfast for His disciples
- phrases (circle one): unable to haul the net in; Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them; Do you love me? feed my sheep.

After several minutes, write about the images or words that resonate with you from the passage.

Word or phrase: _____

Scene or moment: I hear . . . or, I see . . . I smell _____

Group leader: Have a different group member read the passage aloud and then state the question printed in bold. Have group members sit together quietly and then fill in the one of the blanks above. After a few minutes, ask group members to read what they've written. Remind them that they may pass if they wish.

¹V. Gilbert Beers, *The Victor Journey through the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), p. 341.

²Beers, p. 340.

PONDERING the INVITATION (5-15 minutes)

Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do or be something different in your relationships. What might that be? Sit quietly for a few minutes, pondering this question: **What do I sense this passage is calling me to do or be in my relationships with people?** If nothing comes, that's fine. Watch for insights in the next few days, but for now, simply sit in the quiet and enjoy God's presence.

Group leader: Read the above instructions aloud and after a few minutes, repeat the question printed in bold. Ask group members to respond by saying, I SENSE THIS PASSAGE CALLING ME TO: and then completing that statement with a short phrase. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so. Encourage them to listen respectfully and prayerfully to other group members.

PRAYING (5-10 minutes)

Take a few minutes to respond to God about all of this. **How do you feel about what you sensed (or didn't sense)? What is it you most want to say to God at this time?**

Group leader: After allowing a few minutes for private prayer, ask group members to pray for the person on their left. Anyone wishing to pray silently may do so, saying, "I'm praying silently." When they're finished, they can say, "Amen."

DAILY LECTIO:

If you wish, use the above format to meditate on God's word between group meetings. You may wish to focus on today's passage everyday this week (try using a different version of the Bible besides NIV) or use the following passages:

- Matthew 18:21-35 (parable of the unforgiving servant)
- Matthew 6:12-15 (forgiveness as taught in and with the Lord's Prayer)
- Luke 23:34-43 (Jesus talking with the thief on the cross)
- 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (forgiving those who grieve us)
- Ephesians 4:29-32 (showing forgiveness by getting rid of bitterness)
- Colossians 3:12-14 (having compassion and kindness for others)
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