SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

John 21

Breakfast on the Shore, Follow Me — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

The risen Jesus does not wait for failed men to find their way back; He comes to their shore, feeds them, and asks the one question that matters. He restores me by love, sends me to feed His sheep, and tells me to quit comparing and follow Him.

00 The Text

JOHN 21 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way.

2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No."

6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.

8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread.

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."

11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord.

13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.

14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You

know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs."

16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."

19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

20 Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

21 So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"

22 Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

23 Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

24 This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

Marked in the text

- **v3** "that night they caught nothing" — Sin / warning
- **v4** "the day was now breaking" — Time / place / contrast
- **v4** "the disciples did not know that it was Jesus" — Sin / warning
- **v5** "Children" — Promise / blessing
- **v6** "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat" — Command / instruction
- **v7** "It is the Lord" — God — His character & actions
- **v7** "threw himself into the sea" — Time / place / contrast
- **v9** "a charcoal fire already laid" — Time / place / contrast
- **v11** "a hundred and fifty-three" — Time / place / contrast
- **v11** "the net was not torn" — Promise / blessing
- **v12** "Come and have breakfast" — Promise / blessing
- **v13** "took the bread and gave it to them" — God — His character & actions
- **v15** "more than these" — Time / place / contrast
- **v15** "Tend My lambs" — Command / instruction
- **v16** "Shepherd My sheep" — Command / instruction
- **v17** "Peter was grieved" — Sin / warning
- **v17** "Lord, You know all things" — God — His character & actions
- **v17** "Tend My sheep" — Command / instruction
- **v18** "someone else will gird you" — Time / place / contrast
- **v19** "by what kind of death he would glorify God" — God — His character & actions
- **v19** "Follow Me!" — Command / instruction
- **v22** "until I come" — Promise / blessing
- **v22** "what is that to you?" — Sin / warning
- **v22** "You follow Me!" — Command / instruction
- **v24** "his testimony is true" — God — His character & actions
- **v25** "the world itself would not contain the books" — Time / place / contrast
- **v1** "manifested" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v15** "Simon, son of John" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v15** "love" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

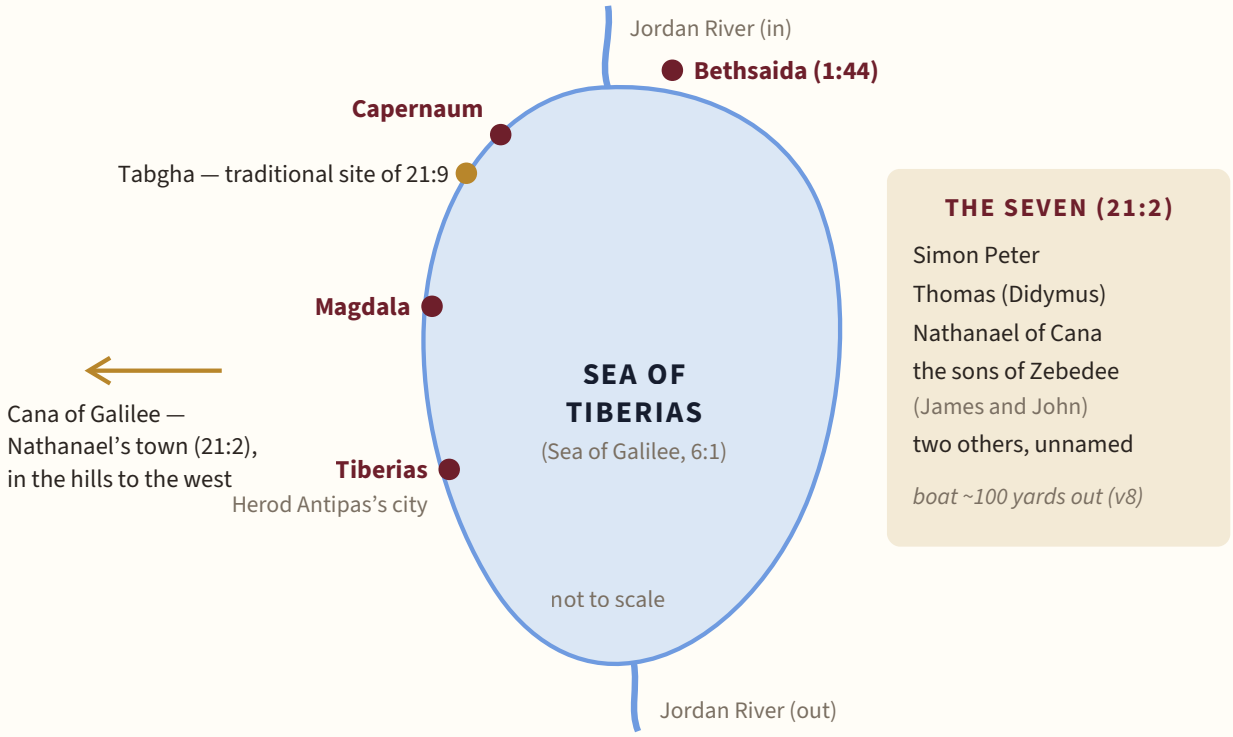
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · JOHN 21:7

"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "△ It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and ◷ threw himself into the sea."

FIGURE · THE SEA OF TIBERIAS



The disciples are back on home water in Galilee: Bethsaida was Peter's town, Capernaum his base, and later tradition places the breakfast at Tabgha on the north-west shore.

Setting. "After these things" — after the resurrection appearances in Jerusalem (John 20) — seven disciples are back in Galilee at the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus had told them He would go ahead of them to Galilee (Mark 16:7). It is night, then daybreak, on the lake; then a charcoal fire on the beach; then a walk along the shore. This is Jesus' third appearance to the disciples as a group in John (v14).

Structure:

- vv1–8 — **the empty net:** Peter says, "I am going fishing"; six go with him; that night they catch nothing. At daybreak a Stranger on the beach asks, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" — "Cast the net on the

right-hand side of the boat." The net is too full to haul. The beloved disciple: "It is the Lord." Peter puts on his garment and throws himself into the sea; the others bring the boat about a hundred yards.

- vv9–14 — **breakfast:** a charcoal fire already laid, fish on it, and bread. "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Peter hauls the net ashore — 153 large fish, and the net not torn. "Come and have breakfast." No one dares ask, "Who are You?" Jesus takes the bread and gives it to them, and the fish. The third manifestation.
- vv15–17 — **restored:** three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Three answers, "You know that I love You." Three commands: "Tend My lambs … Shepherd My sheep … Tend My sheep." Peter is grieved at the third.
- vv18–23 — **follow:** "when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you" — the death by which he would glorify God. "Follow Me!" Peter turns, sees the beloved disciple, asks, "Lord, and what about this man?" — "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" A false rumor corrected.
- vv24–25 — **the witness:** this is the disciple who testifies and wrote; his testimony is true; the world could not contain the books.

Repeated words, with counts:

- "Jesus" ×16 — vv1, 4 (×2), 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25.
- "Peter" ×9 — vv2, 3, 7 (×2), 11, 15, 17, 20, 21; "Simon" ×8 — vv2, 3, 7, 11, 15 (×2), 16, 17; "Simon, son of John" ×3 — vv15, 16, 17.
- "Lord" ×8 — vv7 (×2), 12, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21; "It is the Lord / it was the Lord" ×3 — vv7 (×2), 12.
- "love / loved" ×9 — "love" ×7 in vv15 (×2), 16 (×2), 17 (×3); "loved" ×2 — vv7, 20 ("the disciple whom Jesus loved"). "Do you love Me?" ×4 — vv15, 16, 17 (×2).
- "know / knew / knowing" ×7 — vv4, 12, 15, 16, 17 (×2), 24; "You know" ×4 — vv15, 16, 17 (×2).
- "fish" ×7 — vv5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13; "net" ×4 — vv6, 8, 11 (×2); "boat" ×3 — vv3, 6, 8.
- "disciples" ×6 — vv1, 2, 4, 8, 12, 14; "disciple" ×4 — vv7, 20, 23, 24.
- "manifested" ×3 — vv1 (×2), 14; "third (time)" ×3 — vv14, 17 (×2).
- "Tend / Shepherd" ×3 — vv15, 16, 17; "sheep" ×2, "lambs" ×1.
- "follow / following" ×3 — vv19, 20, 22; "Follow Me!" ×2 — vv19, 22.
- "remain until I come" ×2 — vv22, 23; "what is that to you?" ×2 — vv22, 23.
- "wrote / written" ×3 — vv24, 25 (×2); "testifying / testimony" ×2 — v24.

Contrasts: night and nothing (v3) ⟷ daybreak and a full net (vv4–6). They did not know it was Jesus (v4) ⟷ "It is the Lord" (v7). Peter by the officers' charcoal fire (18:18) ⟷ Peter by Jesus' charcoal fire (21:9). Three denials (18:17, 25, 27) ⟷ three confessions (vv15–17). Young Peter girding himself and going where he wished ⟷ old Peter girded by another and led where he did not wish (v18). "What about this man?" ⟷ "You follow Me!" (vv21–22). What was said ⟷ what was not said (v23). Many things written ⟷ more than the world could hold (vv24–25).

Shape of the chapter: a night (1–3), a dawn (4–8), a meal (9–14), a conversation (15–17), a walk (18–23), a signature (24–25). It moves from the boat to the fire to the road, and from a group to one man — and ends with that man told to follow.

Chapter theme (my words): The risen Lord comes to failed men on their own shore, feeds them with His own hands, and by a second fire turns Peter's three denials into three confessions and a lifelong commission — then shuts down comparison with one command: "You follow Me!"

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · JOHN 21:15

"So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs.""

FIGURE · TWO CHARCOAL FIRES

THE FIRST CHARCOAL FIRE John 18:15–27		THE SECOND CHARCOAL FIRE John 21:9–17	
WHEN	night, "for it was cold" (18:18)	WHEN	"the day was now breaking" (21:4)
WHO LIT IT	the slaves and the officers	WHO LIT IT	Jesus — "already laid" (21:9)
PETER	standing, warming himself	PETER	threw himself into the sea to reach Him
THREE TIMES	"I am not," "I am not," denied again	THREE TIMES	"You know that I love You" (21:15–17)
THE END	"a rooster crowed" (18:27)	THE END	"Tend My sheep … Follow Me!" (21:17, 19)

ἀνθρακιά (anthrakia, G439) — used only in these two scenes in the whole New Testament

John 18:18 and 21:9: the place of the fall becomes the place of the restoring

Read across each row: John uses the word for a charcoal fire only twice, and the second scene answers the first point for point.

FIGURE · THREE QUESTIONS, THREE ANSWERS, THREE COMMANDS

	JESUS ASKS	PETER ANSWERS	JESUS COMMISSIONS
v15	*agapaō* "… do you love Me more than these?"	*phileō* "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."	*boskō* "Tend My lambs."
v16	*agapaō* "… do you love Me?"	*phileō* "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."	*poimainō* "Shepherd My sheep."
v17	*phileō* "… do you love Me?"	*phileō* "Lord, You know all things …"	*boskō* "Tend My sheep."

Three denials by one fire (18:17, 25, 27) — three confessions by another
and every confession answered with work: "My lambs … My sheep … My sheep"

Follow the Greek verbs: Jesus twice asks with agapaō, Peter answers each time with phileō, and the third time Jesus takes up Peter's own word.

Was Peter wrong to go fishing (v3)? Our teachers lean different ways. Guzik lays out both views — a "compromised return to a former occupation," or simply being wise and practical — and lets the heart decide: "Whether their motives were good or bad, that night they caught nothing." Henry is gentle: "They knew not well what to do with themselves." I won't make Peter a backslider the text doesn't call one; but I notice that the old skill, without Jesus, produced nothing.

Why didn't they recognize Him (v4)? John doesn't say. It was dawn and about a hundred yards; Henry says they took Him "for some common person," not expecting Him. Guzik: "We don't know exactly why they did not know that it was Jesus." As at the tomb and on the Emmaus road, recognition is given — here through a familiar miracle (Luke 5).

The 153 fish (v11). Allegories abound (Augustine built one on seventeen). Guzik: "all we know for certain is that 153 represents the number of fish in the net," and with Tenney he sees an eyewitness and a fisherman who counted. Spurgeon draws a picture from it — God knows the exact number of His own — and from the net that did not tear: "the invisible Church is one." Henry stays practical: more than they needed, so they could sell them. I hold the number as a fact and Spurgeon's picture as a picture.

Two charcoal fires. John uses *anthrakia* only at 18:18 and 21:9. He doesn't comment; he lets the word do it. Peter denied Jesus three times at one fire; Jesus asks him three questions at another. Henry: the third question "put him in mind of his threefold denial of Christ, and was plainly designed to do so." Sproul's article grants that reading but adds another possibility — emphasis by repetition, as in Isaiah 6:3. Both can be true: the repetition presses home both the wound and the charge.

"More than these" (v15). Three options: more than these men love Me; more than you love these men; more than these things (the boat and nets). Sproul's sermon weighed all three (per Ligonier's summary). Guzik takes the first — Peter had boasted, "I will lay down my life for You" (13:37) — and Henry presses the third: "Those only love

Christ indeed that love him better than all the delights of sense and all the profits of this world." Peter's answer claims no comparison at all — Spurgeon: "not as to the quantity but as to the quality of his love."

agapaō and phileō — does the change matter? Jesus asks twice with *agapaō*, Peter answers with *phileō*, and the third time Jesus uses *phileō*. Guzik reports that most commentators see a humbled, more reserved Peter. A Ligonier devotional answers that "the words are used interchangeably throughout John's gospel," and John does use both for the Father's love of the Son (3:35; 5:20) and for the beloved disciple (20:2; 21:7). I teach it carefully: the text says Peter was grieved because Jesus asked "the third time," not because He changed verbs.

Does this give Peter primacy over the church? Henry says no: "Peter himself never claimed such a power, nor did the other disciples ever own it in him." Peter's own letter calls himself a "fellow elder" and Christ the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet 5:1, 4). The flock is always "My sheep."

Peter's death (vv18–19). "Stretch out your hands" is widely read as crucifixion (Guzik; Henry: "some think"); that Peter was crucified upside down is later church tradition (Guzik via Clarke), not Scripture. John's phrase "by what kind of death" is the same he used of Jesus (12:33; 18:32). Peter knew it was coming (2 Pet 1:14) — and followed anyway.

"Until I come" (vv22–23). Jesus speaks of His return as real and personal (14:3). John carefully corrects the rumor: Jesus did not say John would not die, only "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" Henry: "Let the words of Christ speak for themselves." I believe He is coming again; I also take Spurgeon's warning not to let prophecy-speculation replace following.

Who are the "we" of verse 24? The beloved disciple wrote the Gospel; "we know that his testimony is true" sounds like the circle around him vouching for him. Henry: "they ventured both this life and the other upon it." Guzik: "John gave solemn testimony to the truth of what he wrote."

Word study (Greek):

- **manifested — *phaneroō* (G5319):** to make visible; vv1 (×2), 14 — and the word of the first sign (2:11).
- **children — *paidia* (G3813):** "lads," a diminutive; Jesus calls across the water.
- **fish (to eat) — *prosphagion* (G4371):** anything eaten with bread; only here.
- **charcoal fire — *anthrakia* (G439):** only John 18:18 and 21:9.
- **fish (cooked) — *opsarion* (G3795):** the small fish of 6:9, 11.
- **torn — *schizō* (G4977):** to split; in John only of the seamless tunic (19:24) and this net.
- **love — *agapaō* (G25) / *phileō* (G5368):** Jesus' word and Peter's; in v17 Jesus uses Peter's.
- **know — *oida* (G1492) / *ginōskō* (G1097):** "You know all things; You know that I love You."
- **tend — *boskō* (G1006):** to feed, pasture (vv15, 17).
- **shepherd — *poimainō* (G4165):** the whole care of a shepherd (v16; 1 Pet 5:2).
- **lambs — *arnion* (G721); sheep — *probaton* (G4263):** always "My."
- **grieved — *lypeō* (G3076):** pained, hurt.
- **gird — *zōnnymi* (G2224):** only here (×2) and Acts 12:8.
- **follow — *akoloutheō* (G190):** present imperative — keep on following; v22 adds an emphatic "you."
- **remain — *menō* (G3306):** to abide, stay.
- **testifying / testimony — *martyreō* (G3140) / *martyria* (G3141):** witness; the root of "martyr."

- **true — *alēthēs* (G227):** truthful, reliable.

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **The Lord meets failure at the place of failure** — two charcoal fires (18:18; 21:9).
2. **The question is designed to hurt so it can heal** — Henry: "plainly designed to do so."
3. **Breakfast before the hard conversation** — Spurgeon: "not with prayer, but with provender."
4. **Their catch added to the menu; it did not make it** (Guzik).
5. **The sheep stay His** — "My lambs … My sheep."
6. **Restoration ends in work, not in a feeling** — tend, shepherd, tend, keep on.
7. **Love, not performance, is the test** — Spurgeon: "love is the best evidence of piety."
8. **Peter would die his Master's kind of death** (v19; 12:33; 2 Pet 1:14).
9. **Comparison is the enemy of following** — "What is that to you? You follow Me!"
10. **The Gospel ends with a signature and an admission** — true testimony, and more than the world could hold.

Cross-references: Ps 23:1; Isa 6:3; Ezek 34:23; Matt 26:33–35; Mark 16:7; Luke 5:1–11; 24:16; John 1:39–44; 2:11; 6:1, 9–11; 10:1–16, 27; 12:26, 33; 13:23, 36–38; 14:3; 18:15–18, 25–27, 32; 19:24, 26, 35; 20:2, 19–31; Acts 12:8; 1 Pet 5:1–4; 2 Pet 1:14.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · JOHN 21:22

"Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain ☆ until I come, ⚠ what is that to you? You follow Me!""

Promise to trust — He comes to my shore. I didn't go looking for Jesus the night I hit bottom; He came looking for me. That's John 21. The disciples were back in the boat doing what they knew, catching nothing, and Jesus showed up on the beach with breakfast already on the fire. Some of the men I sit with think they have to clean up and crawl back before God will have them. Not here. He comes to the shore of my failure and calls out, "Children."

Sin to confess — my own charcoal fire. Every man I know has one: the night he said "I am not," the thing he did that he swore he'd never do. Peter warmed himself by a fire and denied his Lord three times. I confess mine to Jesus by name. And I notice Jesus doesn't pretend it didn't happen — He asks three times, and Peter is grieved. But the grief is the doorway, not the verdict. "Every remembrance of past sins, even pardoned sins, renews the sorrow of a true penitent" (Henry) — and then Jesus hands him work to do.

Command to obey — "Tend My lambs." Restoration isn't a feeling I wait for; it's a job I'm given. If I love Him, I feed His sheep. For me that means the men in my group, the new guy who can't sit still, my own family at the table. This week I will name one "lamb" Jesus has put near me and do one concrete thing to feed him — a call, a meal, an hour in the Word together.

Example to follow — Peter in the water. John saw first; Peter went first. He didn't wait for the boat. When I realize it's the Lord, I don't want to be careful and slow about getting to Him.

Command to obey — "You follow Me!" Peter's first reflex after hearing about his own cross was to look at John: "Lord, and what about this man?" That's me — comparing my road, my sentence, my recovery, my ministry to another man's. Jesus says, "What is that to you?" My business is to keep following, and to keep my eyes off the other guy's path. Until He comes.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. Where have I gone back to "fishing" — the old life, the old way of coping — when I didn't know what else to do? (21:3; Luke 5:5) *Henry: "They knew not well what to do with themselves." Jesus met them right there.*
2. What is my "charcoal fire" — the place or memory of my worst failure — and what would it mean to meet Jesus there? (21:9; 18:18) *The same word, two fires: the place of the fall becomes the place of restoring.*
3. Jesus fed Peter before He questioned him. How have I experienced His kindness before His correction? (21:12–15) *Provender before prayer — the meal came first.*
4. If Jesus asked me today, "Do you love Me more than these?" — what would "these" be for me? (21:15; 13:37) *Henry: love Him "better than all the delights of sense and all the profits of this world."*
5. Who are the "lambs" Jesus has put near me to feed, and what would tending them look like this week? (21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:2) *Love proved by work: "Do something to prove thy love."*

6. Whose life or calling am I comparing mine to, and what does “You follow Me!” say to that? (21:20–22) *Emphatic “you”: your road, your cross, your Master.*

Worship. The risen Son of God, with the wounds still in His hands, kneels by a fire on a beach and cooks fish for the men who ran away. He serves the bread Himself. He knows all things — every denial — and still says, “Follow Me.” The Gospel that began with the Word who was God ends with that Word making breakfast. The world could not contain the books.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You know all things; You know that I love You — and You know how weak that love has been. Thank You for coming to my shore when I had nothing in the net. Meet me at my charcoal fire and heal what I did there. Give me Your lambs to feed and the love to feed them. Take my eyes off the other man’s road. Whatever death or life You have for me, let it glorify God, and keep me following You until You come. Amen.

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