Sunday School Lesson
TOPIC: “Jesus’ Followers Follow Him”
John 21:15-25

VERSE DISCOVERY: John 21:15-25 (KJV, Public Domain)

Prepare

- Refresh and review the events that occur in John 21:1-14 before today’s lesson text. After His resurrection and seeing Jesus for themselves, why do you think some of His disciples went back to Galilee? Do you think Jesus wanted them to return to being regular fishermen?

Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus gave the call to “follow me” (Matthew 4:19) to some of His disciples. In that call, Jesus was going to transform their profession from fishing for fish to being “fishers of men.”

In chapter 20 of the book of John, after His resurrection, Jesus empowered His disciples by breathing on them and saying, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” (John 20:22).

With that being said, what do you think about where the disciples are and what they’re doing now? Discuss.

- There are two very important words that are found in this lesson. There are “love” and “follow.” Make a two-columned chart on the board. At the top of each column write one of these words. Ask your class what each of these words mean to them and write their ideas under each. Ask, when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, why do you think these two words are important? Do you think they go hand in hand? Why?

Explain, for Jesus’ followers to truly love Him they must be willing to follow Him in faith (refer to John 14:15; find other similar verses for comparison); they must live out what they believe in their daily lives.

- Do an internet search for object lesson ideas for following Jesus. Tie it in with the love/follow theme and use it as a lead into today’s lesson.

Explore – Full Lesson Available on pages 5-13

Are we living the example Christ lived before us? Are we walking the steps that are ordained for those who would be called His followers should walk? In life, we have many choices laid
out before us. We can choose to go here or there, to do this or that. But the only choice that will lead us into that blessed eternal life, is a choice to follow Him, to follow Jesus.

Following means there is a leader. Many are familiar with that childhood game when the one in charge does or says a particular action and/or phrase, and the others in the game have to mimic what is being done or instructed. Jesus gave His followers a better than clear example of what it means to go all the way with Him, in what it really means to follow Him.

In a devotional I previously published, I wrote:

“Which pathway are we really walking down? The times we are living in are disturbing. Biblical prophecies are coming to pass like never before. I have heard much preaching for us to have an awareness that we are living in the last days. Jesus is soon to come back and escort us home, but will we be ready to follow?

There are many influences in the world today. There are many questions being raised about this life. There are many voices out there ready to give you their version of what the right answer is. Many voices that want to pull you and me in this direction and that; trying to twist your arm to go along with what they believe is right for your life.

Our challenge today is to fight to stay on the true and right course that God has already preordained for each of us to walk. A course that doesn’t always seem plain and straight; a road that may seem rocky and hard to journey on at times, leaving us to believe that we can’t make it.

Life is rough, I’ll give you that. Nevertheless, be encouraged. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” (John 14:6, NKJV). 1 Peter 2:21 also tells us, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.”

Even when the way seems dim, follow His footsteps and we will travel on the pathway that leads to life.” (©WordforLifeSays/His Footsteps, Our Pathway)

While many may live a life of excellence, Jesus lived beyond excellence the life of the truest example we could ever hope for. He lived in service to God, walked in righteousness before God, and died to fulfill the plan of God. Through every step taken, every action performed, and every word spoken He showed us how true followers are to follow the path and the life God has planned out and laid out before them. “Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps,” (Psalm 85:13).

Jesus showed us how to walk this life pleasing God so that we would know how to walk it, too. God has plans for each of our lives. Are we following?

Activities
Jesus calls us all to follow Him. Using the Adult Journal Page, write what’s on your heart about following Jesus. Use this as a guide and a prayer reminder to make your heart sensitive and receptive to His leading for you to follow. On the Kid’s Journal Page, students can fill in the blanks with their thoughts about following Jesus: “I will follow Jesus...” Or use Blank Journal Pages to express and bring out what you desire for yourself or your class.

In the Draw the Scene section found on site, younger students can use the activity page to draw a picture of Jesus talking to Peter, as found in today’s lesson.

Footprint Crafts: Do an online search for different footprint crafts and/or activities for kids. Use these to bring out the idea of “following” in Jesus’ footsteps according to today’s lesson. The ideas available are plentiful.

Younger students can also put together a Peter Paper Bag Puppet craft. This Peter Puppet affirms his love for Jesus and is made to go with this week’s lesson. Go on site and click the appropriate link to download the free craft.

Alternate activity sheets such as Memory Verse, Word Search, and others are available on site for those who just want to work with printed materials.

Review

Commit to memory the base verse from the lesson: “...And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me... If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.” (John 21:19, 22)

Fill out the review sheet provided (page 14)

Life

How closely are you following Jesus? Has His footprints become yours? Is it His pathway you are walking in? The love we have for Christ will be shown in the way we follow Him (compare John 14:15). Recommit yourself today to pattern your decisions and life choices after that of our Lord. Ask yourself, how would Jesus handle this when dealing with the various things during the week, and let His life be your guide.
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John 21:15-25

VERSE DISCOVERY: John 21:15-25 (KJV, Public Domain)

15) “So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16) He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17) He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

18) Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

19) This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

20) Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

21) Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

22) Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

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23) Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

24) This is the disciple which testifieth of 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, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.”

INTRODUCTION

As Christians, God expects us to follow Christ in every sense of the word. Christ is our guide in everything. As He lived, so too are we called to live. 1 John 2:6 tells us, “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked,” (see also John 13:15). Christ is our ruler whereby we measure the life we live, and His standards are the guide to our pathway. And, in case anyone thinks that’s the easiest thing, let’s examine His call to follow Him a little more closely.

“Follow me,” are two words Jesus will speak twice to Peter in this lesson and two words we must each examine for ourselves. Now, they may just represent themselves as two simple words out of the many that make up our language, but in truth, they are words of great impact. Firstly, they are words that ask us to leave behind other things in order to pursue what we are called to pursue. If you will remember, during Jesus’ earthly ministry many claimed to want to follow Jesus but made up varied excuses of why they couldn’t do it at the present time. There were things or people or situations they weren’t ready to break free from in order to walk the steps in which Jesus walked (ex. the rich young ruler found in Mark 10:17-27; also, others found in Luke 9:57-62; 14:18-20). The usage of excuses has not stopped today, yet He still asks us to follow Him.

Secondly, the words “follow me” is asking for a connection. This brings us into a deeper realm of relationship and fellowship with the Savior. This connection is so strong it calls that one to
mimic the life of Christ and walk as He walked (as noted above). It’s a life whose story with Him is one that willingly denies self to journey His same path. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus taught His disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

Lastly, “follow me” commands that one gets involved with what He is involved with; to use our life to embark on His journey that He wills to accomplish on this earth. Hence, we have the call to be fullfillers of The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20.

So, as you can see, when Jesus tells Peter and eventually us to follow Him, He is asking us to join up with Him in the greatest adventure we will ever experience. It may not always be the easiest journey, but the rewards at the end are awesome.

LESSON SUMMARY

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples on several separate occasions. In this lesson, the disciples had traveled to the region of Galilee, specifically, they were at the Sea of Tiberias. It is here where seven of the remaining disciples of Jesus were found fishing.

When they encountered Jesus as He called out to them from the shore, they met up with Him and dined on a fish breakfast by the sea with their risen Savior.

It was after this impromptu meal where Jesus brought His focus in on one particular disciple out of the bunch: “Simon Peter.” Peter was definitely a character. His journeys with Jesus during His years of earthly ministry discloses different facets of this complex individual and his personality.

Why do I call Peter complex? For the same reason I feel his personality identifies with so many of us today. He is seen as sure during the time when he declared the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. And yet, unsure when waves were tossing about him and threatening to take him under despite that same Jesus standing before him. He is seen as loyal when he declared he would follow Jesus to death and disloyal when the opportunity came, and he denied he ever knew Him. He was a man of faith where he left all to follow Jesus (see Luke
18:28) and when he initially stepped out of the boat. But there was a time when his faith would only allow him to follow Jesus afar off (Luke 22:54) even though he was a part of Jesus’ inner circle (Luke 9:28; 8:51).

With the ups and downs of his temperament, and to draw him deeper into the plans and the mission the Lord has for him in total restoration, Jesus asks, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”

Many Bible students debate on the identity of the “more than these” portion of this question. Some believe it’s the other present disciples and some believe it’s the idea of fishing and returning to his old lifestyle and profession. Most believe the reference is toward the disciples. Rather, than posing the question as asking Peter if he loves the disciples more than Jesus, it is asking does Peter love Jesus more than the other disciples do.

Why is this important?

Previously, when Jesus was preparing His disciples for His death, He stated that all of them would be offended because of Him and be scattered on that night (Matthew 26:31). But Peter, in his boastfulness and surety of self, stated, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,” (Matthew 26:33; see also Mark 14:29).

So now, Jesus questions him.

Previously, I published an article titled, Jesus Questions Trust, and in it, I wrote:

“What would it be like to sit across from Jesus, face to face, and have Him question your trust? Would we be able to look Him in the eye as we pondered our answer? Would our heads be bowed, feeling unworthy to lift it and look into the eyes of love pleading with us to believe? What would be like? I imagine it would be self-revealing because in those questions we find where our hearts and our true belief lies. It reveals where we really stand in our faith.” (Word For Life Says)

I must wonder if some of these emotions are crossing Peter’s mind at the hearing of Jesus’ current question of, “Do you love Me more?”

Please Note: While Peter was the focus of this question, I don’t believe it is reserved just for him alone. “Do you love Me more” is a question every Christian should use to measure their
own relationship with Christ to see if there is anything that we allow to take precedence over or come before Him.

But, without hesitation, Peter immediately answers, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” Love is best exemplified in action rather than just touting it with the lips. Sometimes it’s easier to declare one’s devotion than to actually take that stand for it when push comes to shove.

Jesus already knew the frailty of Peter’s heart in this area for when he denied Jesus on that fateful night, Jesus Himself turned and looked Peter directly in the face as if to acknowledge what He foretold (Luke 22:60-61). At the same time, Jesus also knows how Peter “wept bitterly” when he realized what he had done (Luke 22:62).

With Jesus turning to him once again, Peter speaks confidently of his love for Christ.

Hearing his answer, Jesus instructs him to follow through that spoken devotion from his lips with action from his heart. He said, “Feed my lambs.” Using a shepherd/sheep metaphor is something that is not strange for Jesus to use. He would often refer to His people as sheep or lambs whilst pointing to Himself as the Shepherd (see John 10:1-15).

For reference purposes, we know that the shepherd is the primary caregiver herdsman of the sheep. The sheep are totally dependent upon the shepherd. Without the shepherd’s watching, leading, guiding, and providing nature, the sheep would be unkempt, wild, lost, helpless against predators, and unable to fully provide for their own care (compare Matthew 9:36). Shepherds not only take care of the flock, but they make sure they are fed. The feeding that Jesus is concerned about regarding what His people will be receiving has nothing to do with bread and butter, but the Word of God (compare Matthew 4:4).

Jesus is calling Peter to step up to the plate and fulfill the calling on his life. If you think back to the time when Peter so confidently and courageously spoke up and confessed Christ, Jesus told him, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” (Matthew 16:18). And when Jesus knew that Peter was to deny Him, He told Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not…” (Luke 22:32). He knew the blow Peter would take due to the denial, but He also knew where Peter needed to be in the mission and so Jesus, in His questioning, is working to restore Peter and bring him to the fullness of
that calling. But, for that to happen, Peter must truly know where his own heart is. So, Jesus asked, “Lovest thou me?” Do you really love Me more than these other’s do?

Please Note: Before you can feed anyone else, you have to know your own heart. The question of love must be answered by all.

Then Jesus asked Peter the “second time, Simon, son of Jonas, loveth thou me?” The only variance in this second round of questioning as opposed to the first time He asked is this time Jesus leaves off the “more than these” part. But, for the second time, Jesus is really asking where the heart of Peter truly is. If the measure of it could be weighed on a scale, would it be fluctuating up and down? Was Peter steady in his love for Christ?

The examination of his heart goes deeper with each round of questioning. Sometimes repetition not only reflects on what was done in the past but it opens one up to the truth of where they stand today.

Nevertheless, during this second round of questioning Peter held fast to his affirmation of devotion to Jesus, saying again, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.”

Again, after receiving the answer, Jesus instructs Simon Peter, “Feed my sheep.”

I don’t know how many moments passed between each line of questioning, but we find that Jesus asked once more, “Simon, son of Jonas, loveth thou me?” This was the “third time” those words of divine heart inspection came from the lips of the resurrected Lord and into the hearing of Peter, and the Bible tells us “Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?” The three-time repetition surely brought to mind the three times his own mouth spoke words that wouldn’t even admit that he knew Jesus, let alone followed Him and was, in fact, one of His closest disciples and personal friends. Because of those denials, he was now being challenged to look deep within himself and answer the questions with his all.

“And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Although the line of questioning from the third time Jesus asked compared to the previous two differed in the Greek, with the previous Agape love of verses 15-16 being compared with this Phileo love He asks of in verse 17, and with the meaning of the first being supremely stronger in total devotion than the second which stands for affection; Peter openly

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admitted that there is nothing hidden from Christ. Everything is open before Him, including Peter’s own heart. Anything that Peter could reveal, Jesus already knew it all and he was confident that Jesus knew that he really did love Him despite his flawed background.

Moving on from the line of questioning, Jesus clues Peter in some of the things he would face not only in his future service to the Lord but his death as well. Before His crucifixion, Jesus taught all His disciples that there was a cost in discipleship. He said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,” (Matthew 16:24; see also Luke 14:27). This is something Peter would literally have firsthand experience with as Jesus explained to him “what death he should glorify God” with. (By the way, did you notice those two words asking one to “follow me” in Matthew 16:24 as well?)

Jesus gave Peter a comparison of how his life looked when he was “young” and how events will play out when he is “old.” While freedom was his for the taking and Peter could “girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest,” there would be a time when that truth is not so. Peter would lose his freedom and be bound: “thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee.”

Instead of tying his own garments, another would possibly tie or put him in chains and “carry thee whither thou wouldest not;” against his will and he would die a death that would bring glory to God.

The life of the Christian is not to call one into luxury and so forth where everything is a bed of roses and life is covered with peaches and cream. The life of the Christian is often called to hard service that requires the sacrifice of much, and in some instances, even life itself. There have been many instances throughout history and there are, in many areas of the world today, where people pay the high cost of discipleship. Let us not take lightly the times we are able to do things on our own accord and in our own power.

“When he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.” Christ is Peter’s example of life and ministry and He is ours and He is inviting His disciples and followers from all eras to join in His journey and follow Him (more on this was discussed in the introduction; refer back there).

During their discussion, “Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following” asked, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” Peter was referencing John who also happens to be the author of this book and the teller of these events as they are unfolding.
in the restoration of Peter. He is the same disciple who was seen leaning on Jesus during the
time of the Last Supper and he is also the same one whom, after being motioned by Peter,
asked Jesus during the time of that supper about the one who would betray Jesus (see John
13:24-25). If Peter himself were to suffer such a great ordeal in his future, what about
John? What would his end look like? What would his future entail?

Please Note: Everybody’s pathway will not look alike in our journey to follow Jesus. Some
roads traveled may seem harder than others. At the same time, one can never be sure what
another is going through, therefore, comparing one’s life or ministry with another is a futile
effort. Nevertheless, all that proclaim to be of Christ are commanded to apply themselves to
be diligent and faithful workers of this great calling wherewith He has called us and allowed us
to walk in our own measure of faith (compare Romans 12:3).

Therefore, Jesus responds to Peter’s question, saying, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what
is that to thee? follow thou me.” Now, this portion of Scripture is not only important to Peter,
but to the modern-day Christian as well. Too many get hung up on what others are doing
instead of focusing on what Christ has called them to do. Jesus wasn’t concerned about filling
in the blanks of Peter’s questions for him. Jesus was concerned about Peter’s obedience to
follow Him.

When our time on this earth comes to an end, no one will answer for the life we lived and the
choices we made but us. Nobody else is responsible for us, but us. Therefore, our attentions
should be geared toward questions that ask, “How am I doing? Am I fulfilling the calling of
God on my life? Am I a faithful follower of Christ in every sense of the word?” If we can
honestly answer these questions about ourselves more while worrying about others less,
perhaps we can get more things done for the Kingdom of God.

But, as usual, some took Jesus’ words the wrong way. Rather than taking what He said at
face value, some spread a saying about that stated, “That that disciple should not die: yet
Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is
that to thee?” To get a clear understanding of the Bible and all its teachings, including what
Jesus is teaching here, proper interpretation and communication of the Word is of the utmost
importance. There is an indescribable value in the Word of God to them that believe and hold
dear its truths. Read it, absorb it for the treasure that it is. Say like the psalmist, “Open my

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eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law,” (Psalm 119:18), and not my own interpretation, Lord.

Our lesson ends, and the book of John ends with this conclusion: “This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things,” speaking of John himself. After he wrote everything involving the telling of the gospel proclaimed in his self-named book and showing the story of this meeting with Jesus by the seashore and the restoration of Peter, John is ready to close this book out. But he does not do so until he makes sure that the readers know every word within, every event stated that occurred, every portion of the life of Jesus, His death, resurrection, and the events following are absolutely, one hundred percent “true.”

John has walked with Christ throughout His earthly ministry. He was there at the cross when He hung for us all. And, now he records everything for our learning, faith, and edification in Him; that we might believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name,” (John 20:31).

John was a faithful reporter of everything he witnessed. So much did this story entail – did His story entail, that it all couldn’t be recorded. To hear about all Jesus did, “even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” That is utterly astounding! But, out of all that is written and recorded herein, and throughout the rest of the Bible, it is up to the individual to believe in Jesus Christ for themselves and treasure these words for their own life and salvation, and make the choice for that they will follow Jesus, too.

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“Jesus’ Followers Follow Him”

John 21:15-25

Please Answer the Review Questions Below

1. T or F. Jesus and His followers dined together.
2. Jesus’ instructions to Peter three time was to _______ His lambs and sheep?
   A. Feed   B. Help   C. Bless   D. None
3. What event(s) happened right before we get to the text of today’s lesson?
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
4. Why do you think Jesus asked Simon Peter three times if he loved Him?
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
5. “Peter was ______ because he said unto the third time, Lovest thou me?” (John 21:17)
   A. Angry   B. Upset   C. Grieved   D. None
6. T or F. Jesus said the disciple noted in verses 20-23 of this lesson would not die.
7. This lesson points out the enormity of all Jesus has done. So much so, “if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written,” (John 15:21). Reading that, how does it encourage your personal faith in being committed to following Jesus?
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