

# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 34

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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What is your favorite thing to have for breakfast?

### SEVEN DISCIPLES AND 153 FISH

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Numbers play an important role in John's Gospel. In this week's reading, the scene is of seven disciples who, through Jesus' help, catch 153 fish.

Without Jesus, the disciples catch nothing. They fish all night only to come up empty-handed. But then Jesus appears on the shore and tells them to cast their nets on the other side. They listen and wind up with a net full of more fish than they could dream of. It's as if Jesus is reminding them of what he said earlier in John.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5).

But why 153 fish? The number 153 occurs in just one place in the Old Testament, with the building of Solomon's Temple. We're told it took approximately 153,000 workers to construct the magnificent building (2 Chron. 2:1-2). John's description of the fish as "large" could be a way of symbolically magnifying the number 153 to recall back to this passage. What is John trying to communicate?

Jesus tells Peter that he is the rock upon which the church will be built (Matt. 16:17-19). No longer will God's presence be mediated through the Temple, but through a new kind of humanity, the followers of Jesus who make up the Church—a Church the disciples in this story are integral in gathering together.

Another clue comes from the number seven, as in the seven disciples in this story. Since the resurrection, John has made several allusions to the creation stories of Genesis. John wants us to see how Jesus is creating a new kind of humanity who lives in partnership with God through Jesus. John's use of seven here could be a way of marking this story as the seventh day in this

new creation story. In other words, Jesus' ministry has finished. The baton is now passed to his disciples, just as God passed the baton to the first humans. The age of the Church has begun!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. Even when they didn't recognize him, Jesus was still at work in the disciples' lives. Has there ever been a time when you looked back and realized that God was with you, even though you didn't think so at the time?
3. The disciples meet Jesus again in the midst of the ordinary act of fishing. Through what ordinary or mundane moments have you encountered Jesus?
4. Jesus provides an abundant catch of fish, more than the disciples could need. Has there ever been a time when you've experienced God's abundant provision for your needs?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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Jesus is intentional when it comes to repairing the relationship between himself and Peter. He wants to make sure Peter knows that there is no wrong relationship between them, and he takes the initiative in extending an olive branch of healing. Desmond Tutu says, "Without reconciliation, there is no future together." Spend a few moments in prayer asking God if there is someone you need to reconcile with. Remember, reconciliation is not about allowing hurtful or toxic people back into your life; it's about ending our worry and anxiety around the troubling relationships that keep us from experiencing the abundant life Jesus offers or lead to resentment and bitterness. What would it look like to take the initiative and offer an olive branch to someone you need to reconcile with this week? It could be as simple as sending a card or an email or as bold as inviting them to share a meal or cup of coffee.

If you're not ready to take the first step in healing a broken relationship, that's okay! Instead, this week, start by praying these words from St. Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union;  
where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy;  
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*