



underthefigtree

# ANTHRAKIA

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

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### **Burning Coals.**

We've all had them, and been them ... disappointments. Some are minor, others major but then there are those catastrophic heart crushing - relationship extinguishing disappointments where no way of return seems possible. That's where Peter is. He feels disappointment's double edge: the edge of how he disappointed his Rabbi with both abandonment and denial, and the edge of his disappointment with himself - his pathetic lack of courage and faith. He has, and is, so injured that all appears so broken and he, so lost. Peter has no way to fix it. Once transformed from a fisher of fish to a fisher of men by a word from Jesus Peter is again on the waters of the Galilee and he encounters a stranger on shore. This stranger will prove to be no unfamiliar person but one who has

another word and bold commission for Peter.

In this lesson we take a walk in Peter's sandals on his journey from a shameful denial to a full restoration where we discover that no matter how great the injury, with Jesus there is never a relationship that can't be fixed. At a charcoal fire Jesus prepares a backslider breakfast... and we come to realize just how far God will go to get us back. His love is louder than our denials and deeper than our shame.





## The Text

Before you watch this session's video together, read the following passages:

John 21: 1-19

Isaiah 6:1-7

Romans 12: 17-21

Psalm 80:3

## The Teaching

Watch the video and if time allows, take a moment to review the vocabulary.

## Vocabulary

### **Antathrakia**

burning coals, charcoal fire

### **Mishnah**

The Oral Torah written; Judaism's first major canonical document following the Bible.







## Background Information

One would think that after encountering the risen Christ, Peter and the other disciples would have wasted no time proclaiming that Christ now lives! Jesus, once crucified, dead and buried is now ALIVE! Miracle of miracles! Instead, Peter and the other disciples are hiding, cowering and silent. Why?

In our teaching, we find the group on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They are there because Jesus had told them to go and there he would meet them. Our teaching takes place on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee near an ancient fishing village called: Tabga. Greek for 'seven springs', this spot was an important place for fishermen of the 1st century. The warm water springs that flow into the Sea of Galilee create a welcome habitat for sardines which thrived in warm water and are prize catch for fishermen.

The disciples wait but Jesus does not show up. Impatient Peter decides to go fishing and several disciples join him. He returns to the old ways, doing what he used to do before meeting Jesus. The one God intended to be "fisher of men" returns to being a fisher of fish. Why? Understanding the tradition of the time may give us a clue. In Rabbinic tradition, one of the worst offenses a disciple might commit was to deny their rabbi. The Mishna, on Rabbinic authority, states that "he who speaks against his Rabbi speaks against the Shekinah (i.e. the presence of God)." And that's exactly what Peter had done, three times! Each denial ratcheted up from the last until Peter calls down curses (Mark 14:71). Now, Jesus is alive and Peter's shame is so deep, deeper than the reality and miracle of the resurrection. Peter knows he has committed the unforgivable.



John in his Gospel wants us to know that both the denial and restoration take place at a fire of burning coals; “anthrakia”. This Greek word, “anthrakia” “burning coals or charcoal fire” occurs in only two places in the entire New Testament; John 18:18 and John 21:9.

Burning coals actually played an important practical role in ancient times. Because coal burned longer and hotter than wood did, it was a popular and valued source of heat. In fact, women whose fires had gone out in their homes would seek out coals from their neighbors. Then they would carry them home on their heads in clay pots or ‘stoves’. It was considered very generous to ‘heap coals’ for someone so they could light their own fire again.

# THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 In John 18, Peter denies Jesus three times. How can this be? Peter spent time with Jesus in the flesh! On one hand, his denial seems hard to imagine, on the other not so. We know that fear can make us do things we never thought we would do. Our denial of Jesus may not be as outright as Peter's yet we have all said and done things that say, "I am not with Jesus." Would you be willing to share some experiences where fear caused you to compromise and discuss how you felt afterward?
- 2 A short time before, as Jesus and his disciples entered Jerusalem amidst palm branches, few would have dreamed how the following week would develop. Some of us, like Peter, have taken risks in serving Jesus. But then things don't go quite the way we had planned and so like Peter it's tempting to throw up our hands in discouragement and backslide to our old ways. Has this ever happened to you? We learn that the denying of one's Rabbi was "unforgivable". Is there anything "unforgivable" with Jesus? Really? How is that "good news"?
- 3 Jesus tells his disciples to meet him in the Galilee. Interestingly the disciples aren't searching for Jesus, instead they appear weary of waiting and go fishing! It is Jesus who seeks them out. How distinctive is that? In what other faith does deity seek man; especially unworthy betrayers and deniers? In addition, it is only after Jesus joins and directs them that they catch a single fish. What about that?
- 4 The only two times the Greek word: "antathrakia" charcoal fire, is used in the Bible are in the courtyard where Peter is warming by a fire of burning coals and denies Jesus three times; and later by a fire of burning coals Jesus restores Peter three times. Would you agree that this story shows that God's desire is to fully restore and call us back into His vision and purpose? How do you imagine this experience impacted Peter for the rest of his life? How does this story speak to the forgiveness and restoration God offers and calls us to offer others?
- 5 How does this lesson affect your understanding of Romans 12:17-21 where Paul tells us to feed our enemy and provide him with drink? When we do so what are we really pouring on our enemy? How far does God go to restore, redeem, and renew relationships? How far does He call us to go?



“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4

## The Mission



How important is it that Jesus encouraged the disciples to fish on the other side of the boat, then prepared breakfast for them and invited them to add their fish to his before he began his discussion with Peter? A friend of mine commented, “It was like Jesus was offering an olive branch in his peace-making with his disciples.” Fact is, Jesus doesn’t let his followers wallow in their failure. He restores Peter and invites him back into His service; and does so with such grace. Despite the profound ways Peter failed, he is restored and invited back into service. This week, spend time asking God to reveal how He is calling you back into His service? Especially how God might be calling you to use the same grace as Jesus used to restore someone like Peter? Pray through those people who might be your “Peter”. Pray also for the courage and faith to be like Jesus to them. Remember, Jesus taught that no one comes to the Father but through him and he has called and is crafting us to be the Body of Christ in a broken world.

Lastly, sometimes when we work it alone, our nets come up empty. Allow Jesus to direct your work this week. Commit it to him in prayer and deed. Take note and bless God for those times when your ‘nets’ seem to be full.