

SIMPLY JESUS



Exploring the Seven “I AM”
Statements of Christ
Discovering that Jesus is Enough

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☞ *Simply Jesus* ☞

Dear Friend,

Imagine we're getting acquainted over a cup of coffee. I invite you to tell me about yourself and you say to me: "*I am a mother of two boys,*" "*I am a musician,*" "*I am an avid reader,*" or "*I am a nurse.*" All those statements, beginning with *I am*, would help me get to know you a little — help me understand what you're interested in, what motivates you and perhaps even help me relate to you. But *none* of those statements would change who *I am* on the inside — they wouldn't alter the course of my life, or fundamentally change my thinking.

We read in the Gospel of John that Jesus also introduced Himself so people could get to know Him. He didn't focus on His occupation or hobbies. He did, however, use *ordinary* objects of life to form common ground with His listeners. But His statements were *extraordinary*, in that they *were* intended to alter the course of people's lives and fundamentally change their thinking.

Jesus wanted people to be influenced and transformed through His "**I AM**" statements. When Jesus said, "**I AM...**", He was basically saying, "**I AM enough for you — I AM what you need in every facet of life**". When we come to know Jesus better, He doesn't just *give us* what we need to handle life, He *becomes* what we need for life.

The Apostle John recorded seven of these "**I Am**" statements in his Gospel. They're tucked within the narratives of Jesus interacting with ordinary people and attending ordinary celebrations. In the mix of the ordinary, Jesus explained Who He was and gave people an opportunity to respond to Him in faith. It's my hope that, as we study and meditate on these "**I Am**" statements, we'll also respond in faith and realize that Jesus is enough — Jesus is what we need for this life.

May the Lord richly bless you as you study His Word.

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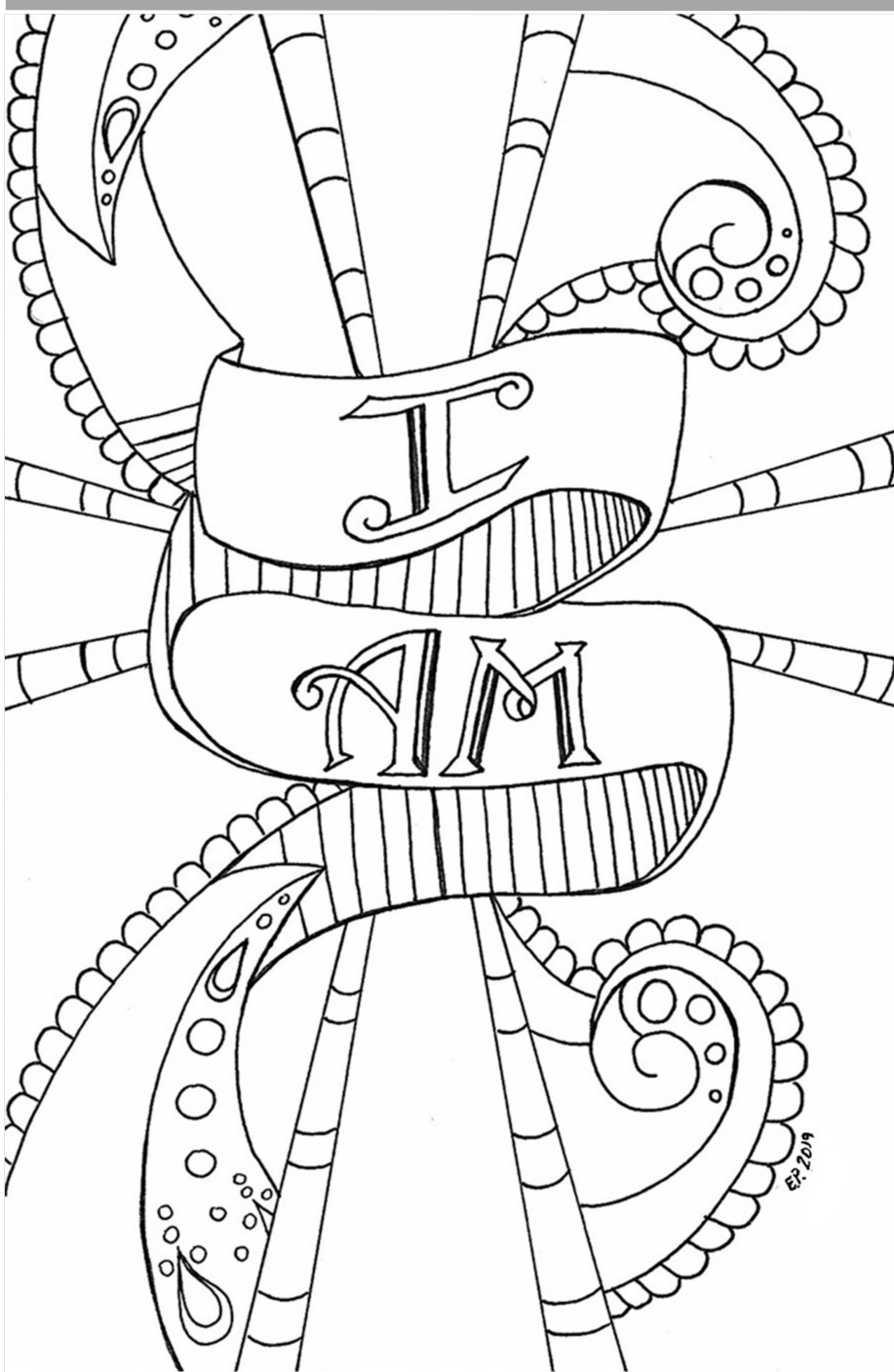
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Week 1 — Who is I AM?



Notes for Introduction

Some of the questions that naturally rise from deep within us are:

- *Is God there?*
- *Does He care?*
- *Or am I alone in this world?*

The Bible shows us that God broke into human history twice to answer those questions — The answer was **I AM**.

The New Testament book that gives us the **I AM** statements of Jesus is the Gospel of _____. There are _____ **I AM** statements.

In the Old Testament, God answered the question, “*Who are you?*” when He introduced himself to Moses at the burning bush:

- **Exodus 3:14** — ***God said to Moses, “ _____ who _____, say this to the people of Israel, _____ has sent me to you.”***

In the New Testament, God answered the question, “*Who are you?*” when Jesus introduced Himself to His people — the Jews:

- **John 8:58** — ***Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, _____ .”***

Week 2 — I AM the Bread of Life



Welcome to our first day of self-study in the Scriptures. At the beginning of each week's lesson, you'll find space to write out the Scripture verse that contains the **I AM** statement we're focusing on for the week.

READ & WRITE John 6:35—

Even though God could be described as just about anything but *ordinary*, it's through the most *ordinary* of foods that Jesus chose to introduce Himself, using the Name of God — **I AM the Bread of Life!**

Not only is bread a common food, but hunger itself is a common human experience. Everyone knows what it's like to feel hungry — at least a little. But how many of us have felt an inner hunger for a connection with the living God? We all possess this spiritual hunger, but we're often too busy or too consumed with details around us to recognize this type of hunger.

It makes complete sense that Jesus wove both of those yearnings — physical food and spiritual food — together, as He introduced Himself to the hungry crowds.

Day 1:



Today we'll study **John 6**. Let's begin with the setting of this narrative.

🌀 READ John 6:1-4

- Where, geographically, was this passage set?
- More specifically, where did Jesus go?
- Who was there with Him?
- When did this narrative happen?

 READ John 6:5-11

- What was the dilemma they were facing?
- What was one suggestion given for solving the problem?
- Who made that suggestion?
- Did it seem to be a likely solution?

Jesus' solution to the problem of hunger was different than that of His disciples. From v.11, write down three things Jesus did with the bread:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What about you? You're undoubtedly facing some type of problem in your life. What dilemma or perplexing situation is on your mind?

Have you come up with an idea to solve the problem? Maybe you've already expressed your solution in prayer, as if to tell God what to do. But, maybe God has a better solution! If you followed Jesus' pattern here, what would it look like in your current situation? How would God direct you?

1. Take what you DO have: _____

2. THANK God for it: _____

3. Use it to BLESS others: _____

Day 2:

☞ REREAD **John 6:1-14**. Oh, if all of life's problems would be solved so speedily, but problems aren't often solved in one day, and needs aren't always met with extra to spare. Yet, maybe God *has* met a huge need in your life in a way that was nearly as miraculous. If so, note what it was and prepare to share how God satisfied your need with your group.

☞ READ **John 6:15**

- Why do you think the people wanted to make Jesus their King?
- What was Jesus' response to this?
- How does **John 2:25** explain His reasoning?

☞ READ **John 6:16-21 and Mark 6:45**. These passages reveal that Jesus actually *sent* His disciples into the boat. He knew there were two storms brewing: one on land (the mob pressing to advance their own kingdom) and one on sea (the wind and waves). Jesus sent His disciples directly into the natural storm at sea.

- Even though Jesus sent them into the path of the storm, were they ever in real trouble? What did Jesus say to them in **v.20**?

Is it possible that your Heavenly Father could be allowing you to sail through difficult waters, knowing His eye is on you, knowing you won't perish, and knowing that He is sparing you from a more treacherous situation?

🌀 READ **John 6:22-26**. In that moment, Jesus knew the crowd desired a free meal — an improvement of their circumstances. In our day, people often become interested in Jesus because they're told He will make their marriage better, make their depression go away, or improve their relationships — basically, make life better!

- Has that ever been your motivation to know Jesus? For an improvement of your quality of life?

🌀 READ **John 6:27-29**. Jesus began to challenge their motives.

- What do you think He meant (in **v.27**) when He contrasted *food that perishes* with *food that endures to eternal life*?

- Write out the phrase from **v.29**: “**This is the work of God,**

”

Day 3:

🌀 READ **John 6:30-35**. In **v.27**, Jesus said that *God had set His seal* upon Him — He had been chosen! That probably got the Jews to thinking about their own national history and their first national leader, Moses, whom God had chosen for them and *set His seal* upon.

When God delivered the Jewish nation out of slavery in Egypt, they passed through the wilderness on their way to the promised land. They were fed every morning with a wafer-type food that fell from heaven — manna! Over time, they associated this miraculous *bread from Heaven* with their wilderness leader — Moses. If they were to give allegiance to a new leader, wouldn't it be great if he would produce a similar daily sign? After all, it seems like that's what God's leaders do — provide bread!

- What were the people suggesting in **v.30-31**, and why?

- How did Jesus correct them about Who actually provided in the wilderness and Who was providing now? (**v.32-33**)

Let's set up some analogies based on this passage:

- In the same way that manna was given from Heaven, so also Jesus...

- In the same way that bread is taken into the body and used for physical fuel, so also Jesus...

- In the same way that our physical hunger is satisfied with bread, so also Jesus...

Explain why our tradition of taking communion is a good reminder of what Jesus accomplished for us, what He provides for us, and how He satisfies us:

Day 4:

CS READ **John 6:35-44**. Begin today's study by writing out **John 6:44**:

CS READ **John 3:27 & John 6:63-65**. Do you see that you would not be even doing this Bible study, if God had not been drawing you to Himself by His Spirit? His invitation is always ***Come to Me!***

- How do these verses inspire you to pray for loved ones who have not yet believed in Christ?

CS READ **John 6:45-59**. When God sent manna from Heaven in the wilderness, He delivered it right to where the people were camped. They didn't have to search high and low, they didn't have to work for it, God revealed it to them simply.

- In what other ways is the bread in the wilderness (manna) and the Bread of Life (Jesus) similar?
- In what ways are they completely different?
- What happened to their forefathers in the wilderness, who actually did get the manna?

📖 READ John 6:60-71.

- Based on v.63, what is required to understand the things of God?

There seemed to have been three different reactions for Jesus saying He was the REAL *Bread from Heaven* and that a person needed to *feed on* the life-giving fuel that He offered:

1. **Rejection (v.66)**— Who flat out rejected Jesus' teaching and left?

2. **Faith (v.67-69)**— Who spoke for the believing disciples who remained? What was his reasoning?

3. **Counterfeit Faith (v.70-71)**— Who continued with the disciples, but did not truly embrace the teaching of Jesus?

We see the same response today when people are confronted with truth: some walk away, some believe, and some mimic the externals of Christianity but don't truly *feed on the Living Word of God*.

Jesus knows that our deepest need is to partake of HIM, to actually have His Spirit *living within* us to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst, and to become what we need for life and godliness.

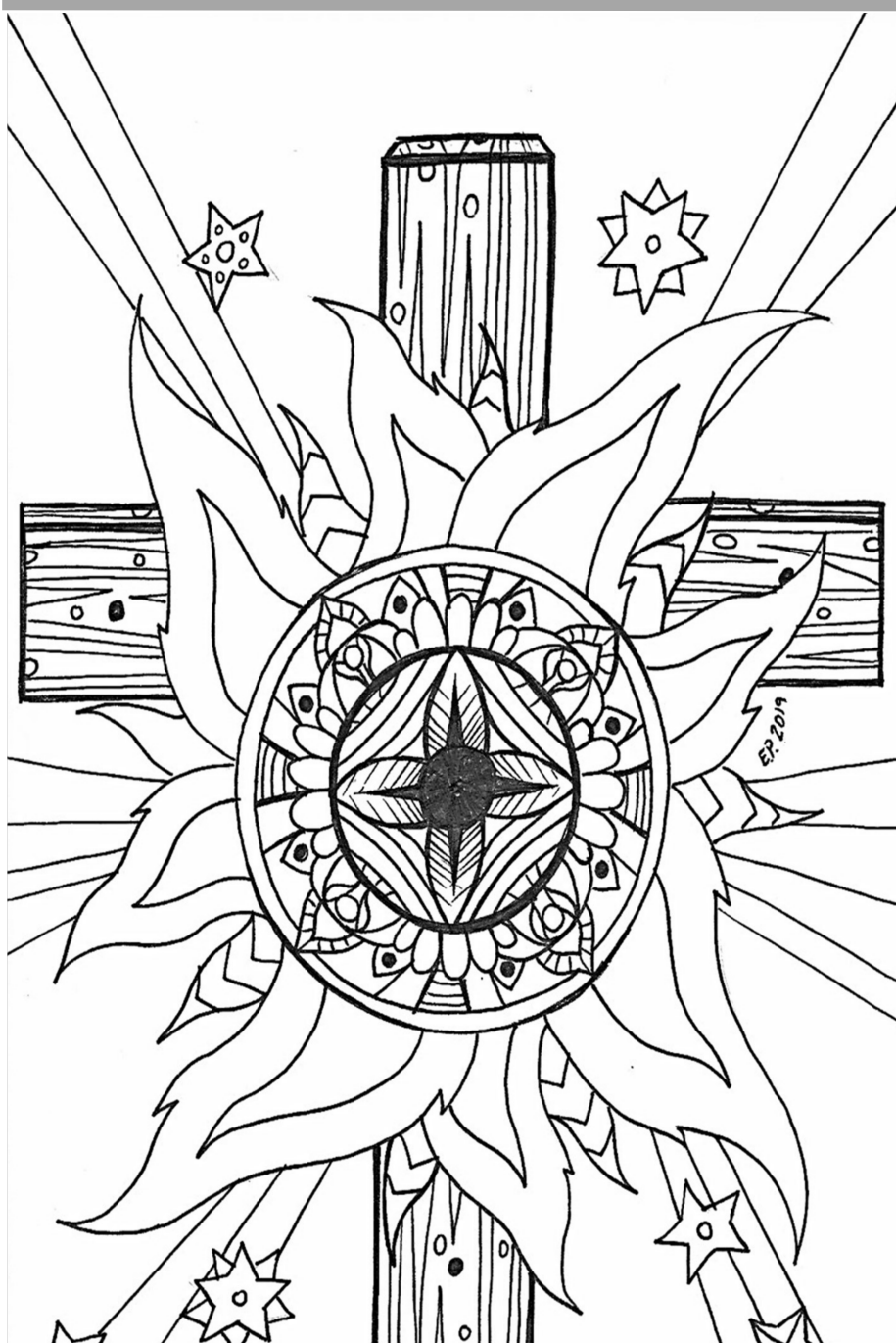
This is the greatest miracle — that sinners like us can instantly change course from our appointment with God's wrath to everlasting life — simply by believing, accepting and receiving the transforming work of Jesus — the Bread of Life.

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Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Spiritual hunger and thirst is at the root of the hopelessness, discouragement and despair that people feel today. In what ways do people attempt to satisfy these feelings of emptiness?
2. What do you think of Jesus actually sending His disciples into the boat, knowing a storm was brewing? Does your theology allow for that in your own life?
3. When Jesus told Nicodemus, '*You must be born again*' (**John 3:1-4**), he took Him literally. When Jesus told the Samaritan woman she could drink and '*never thirst again*' (**John 4:10-15**), she took Him literally. When Jesus said, '*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man...you have no life in you*' (**John 6:53**), they took Him literally. Why do you think some religious groups still struggle with the communion bread having to become the **literal** flesh of Christ?
4. READ **Matthew 7:21-23** and **13:24-30**. Over the years that Judas spent with the disciples, no one seemed to suspect that he wasn't a genuine follower. Why do you think God tolerates unbelievers right alongside true believers?
5. Share how, in your life, Jesus hasn't merely *given* you what you need to satisfy you, but has *become* what you need.

Week 3 — I AM the Light of the World



READ & WRITE John 8:12 —

What is the promise in this verse?

What is the condition in order for that promise to be fulfilled?


There are actually two verses in John's Gospel that use the very same words (**John 8:12** and **John 9:5**). The former was chosen for our written verse because of how clearly it expresses the *condition/promise* relationship. If you found yourself needing to navigate through a dark forest on a starless night, *following* the person with the lantern would be the smartest thing to do. But we always have a choice, as we can pridefully choose the path of independence, launch into the darkness and take our chances, or we can follow the light!

This world IS a dark place and Jesus not only HAS the light — He IS the Light! The smart thing to do would be to follow HIM!

Let's begin in **John 9**, where Jesus created a brilliant object lesson by healing a man who had lived in literal darkness his entire life.

Day 1:



 READ **John 9:1-7**. From this text, note:

- The condition of the man:

- The disciples' assumptions:

- Jesus' explanation:
- Jesus' actions:
- The blind man's actions and the result:

For today's consideration, let's go back to the disciples comment about the condition of the blind man. Their assumption was that someone was to blame, "*Who sinned, this man or his parents?*"

- Do you think that assumption was more in keeping with a Biblical worldview of suffering, or a pagan idea of *karma*?
- Have you ever made a similar assumption about suffering or trouble in someone else's life? Have you thought, "*Hmm, I wonder where they went off track to deserve that kind of trouble?*"

Because He loves us, God sometimes disciplines us. But there are many other reasons for physical suffering. In this case, Jesus explained, "*that the works of God might be displayed in him.*" When we endure suffering in our own lives, we need to remember that we may never see the entire picture until we're in Heaven. Then we will "*know even as we are known*" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Sickness and hardship come into all of our lives, but we can be sure that none of it has escaped God's notice. Whether He heals us or holds us with strength to endure, He will use it for our good and His glory, *if* we trust in Him.

Day 2:

When we read through the Gospels now, miracles and healings seem commonplace. But, in those moments, they *always* created a stir — especially a Sabbath Day healing. Jesus was good at getting attention!

Imagine that blind soul — every day spent in darkness until suddenly, after an encounter with Jesus, he could not only see, but probably had perfect vision! That really started people talking — the *neighbors*, the *Pharisees*, and the man's own *parents*. Let's study their reactions:

📖 READ John 9:8-25

- Summarize what the *neighbors* thought and said:

- Summarize the *Pharisees'* thoughts and comments:

- Summarize his *parents'* thoughts and comments:

Now, let's observe how the *healed man* responded as he was questioned. Note specifically how his understanding became progressively clearer, each time he gave an answer:

- v.11

- v.15b

- v.17b

- v.25b

I love that last statement! Sometimes, I still feel that way as I walk with the Lord. *"I don't know, I don't have all the answers...all I know is that I once was lost and now I'm found."*

In tomorrow's lesson, he'll speak with even more clarity. For today, let's personalize this idea by reading **2 Corinthians 4:6**. Write it below:

Day 3:

There is important information that we didn't fully investigate before we started this week's narrative, and that is the *setting* of this story. Chapters **7-9 of John** describe events that happened in close sequence at one particular celebration. Let's go back and gather that information:

- *When* — From **John 7:2** and **7:37**, describe *what* was happening at the time:

- *Where* — From **John 7:14** and **8:59**, describe *where* Jesus was ministering, just before this miracle:

This is relevant because today's reading ends with '*they cast him out*'. It's helpful to understand from *where* the healed man was cast out.

☞ READ **John 9:26-34**. The Pharisees seemed to be stepping up their harassment and the healed man found even greater boldness, after already telling them three times about Jesus healing him.

- Summarize his response this time in **v.27**:

- What did the Pharisees have to say to that?

In **v.31-33**, the healed man, who may have never given much thought to such things, now spoke with complete logic and clarity. What are the points that he made in defense of Jesus being *from God*?

-
-
-

The religious leaders had asked all the questions and listened to all the answers from the neighbors, parents, and the man himself, and they **still chose not to believe**. Since they couldn't deny the miraculous, they resolved to discredit the messenger (**v.34**).

READ **John 3:19-21**.

- How does that explain the response of the religious leaders?

- How do you think it explains how people respond today?

Day 4:

✞ READ John 9:35-39

What a day! The man started the morning as a blind beggar *near* the temple courts, and ended the day with 20/20 vision but *cast away* from the temple. The man (remember, he was blind) didn't know who Jesus was. But Jesus, always the friend of the outcast, "*heard that they had cast him out, and having found him...*", determined to introduce Himself (v.35). Jesus went out of His way to find the man!

- What are your impressions of that conversation with Jesus?

This is the character of God. He's always looking for hearts of faith.

Who will believe in Him? Who will trust Him?

Who will accept that He is ENOUGH?

Even today, God is still searching all over the earth for hearts that are open to be introduced to their Savior!

We started this lesson with the *condition and promise* from John 8:12, "***Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***" We are all walking through this dark world. Jesus HAS the light and Jesus IS the Light we need. The Apostle Paul told us, "***at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.***" (Ephesians 5:8) The contrast from physical blindness to sight is miraculous; but not as amazing as the transformation from *spiritual darkness* to *spiritual light* in the Lord.

Let's follow through these bullet points that parallel the healed man's stages of understanding, and think about how they relate to our own spiritual journey from darkness into light.

- We're all spiritually blind from birth.
- God calls us out—He makes the first move in our life.
- Jesus does a work of healing us from spiritual blindness.

- Jesus calls us to be obedient to what He commands.
- We may understand very little about Jesus at first.
- People may notice we're different. In fact, they may even wonder if they recognize us at all.
- We may become persecuted by people who are still in darkness.

We're never told the name of the blind man. Jesus is the Hero of the story. But, we can see the man's trouble in life was truly used to bring glory to God! Think through his journey compared to your own journey with Jesus. Do you find any similarities?

Let's finish with some important Scriptures related to Jesus bringing light and illumination to our life. Look up these verses, jot some notes, circle your favorite and prepare to share why.

- **Isaiah 9:2**

- **Isaiah 60:1-3**

- **John 1:9**

- **Ephesians 5:8**

- **1 John 1:5-7**

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Why do you think we have a need to make sense of human suffering, by linking it to some sort of tangible reason? (*Who sinned, this man or his parents?*)
2. How do you feel about the Lord allowing a physical infirmity in your own life for the purpose of His Glory? (Read **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** for additional thoughts.)
3. Have you ever experienced a situation similar to the parents of the blind man; you knew your conclusions about God were not going to be accepted or appreciated; you knew that, if you held to your beliefs, it may cause you to be *thrown out* of a social circle? How did you handle that situation? How would you counsel someone facing something similar?
4. If an unbelieving friend asked you to pray for a physical problem and the Lord miraculously healed them, how does this story instruct you about what your next step should be?
5. How does *following Jesus* make the difference between walking in darkness and boldly walking in the light? Give specific examples.

Week 4 — I AM the Door of the Sheep



READ & WRITE John 10:9—

After introducing Himself as **I AM** through life's common essentials like food and light, Jesus chose a new focus now — relationship — which is also an essential part of life. We're all wired to belong to someone, and to give and receive love and care. Even if we won't admit it, we also sense within, that an independent life is *not enough*, as we need more.

In Jesus' day, everyone was familiar with sheep and everyone knew that **shepherds** and **sheep** had close relationships. Today, we might see parallels with Mommas and babies — they sleep in close proximity, they go everywhere together, and they learn each other's voices fairly quickly!

In the next two **I AM** metaphors, we'll ponder those relationships: how sheep are gathered, how they're cared for, and how they're led out again. This week, our study will focus on the *door*, or the *gate*, that allows the sheep entry and protection.

Day 1:

Since this chapter continues the dialog between Jesus and the man who was just healed from his blindness, let's begin there for context:

🔗 READ **John 9:39-41** through **John 10:1-6**. Linking this passage with the previous chapter helps us recognize the audience.

- *Who*, specifically, was Jesus speaking to?
- In general, who do you think *the sheep* represent in this metaphor?

- What specific *sheep* may have been in mind, given the context?

Jesus said the *Legitimate Shepherd* used the door of the sheepfold — sort of like legitimate visitors to your home use your front door rather than an upstairs window. He explained how two sorts of people want access to the sheep, but they attempt to get in by different ways.

Note below everything you learn about these people's actions, motives and responses from these verses:

<u>Shepherd</u>	<u>Thief, Robber, Stranger</u>
-----------------	--------------------------------

How they get in
the sheepfold

How sheep react
to their voice

How sheep respond
physically to them

In the previous chapter, the Pharisees claimed to have *sight* regarding spiritual things, so Jesus had contrasted those *walking in the light* with those who were spiritually *blind*. In these verses, He contrasted the *Legitimate Shepherd* with *false shepherds*.

Combining those two contrasts, it's interesting that the man born *blind* came to *see*, by listening to the voice of the *Legitimate Shepherd* and spurning the voices of the *false shepherds*, who claimed to know the Scriptures but could not even recognize Jesus as the Son of God.

- Do you think there are modern-day counterparts to the false shepherds we read about in this passage? Give an example:
- In what ways do these false shepherds avoid *the door* (Who is Jesus) and try to get access to the sheep a different way?

Day 2:

✞ READ **John 10:1-4,9**. Yesterday, we noted the contrast between the True Shepherd and the thief, robber or stranger. Then Jesus mentioned one additional player in His analogy.

- Who had the responsibility to open the way for the true shepherd?
- Jesus didn't interpret who this was. What are some of your ideas? Who do you think *the gatekeeper* in **v.3** may be referring to?

Many Old Testament prophets foretold that God's legitimate Messiah would enter our world at a particular place, from a certain bloodline and for a specific purpose. He would not slink in the backdoor, but would come in exact fulfillment of those prophecies.

Let's consider just a few prophetic scriptures. Give a brief summary of how Jesus fulfilled them:

Isaiah 11:1-2

Isaiah 42:1-4

Matthew 2:1-6

Galatians 4:4-5

Today, people say there are *many* ways to have access to God — *many doors*! Jesus, however, explained that *someone* or *something*, which He called **the gatekeeper**, was anticipating His arrival and would confirm His prophetic credentials when He showed up and would open the way for Him, as the True Shepherd of the sheep.

In **v.4**, Jesus said that the Shepherd of the sheep calls them by name and *leads them out*. The wording in **v.9** says that the sheep *will go in and out and find pasture*. Ancient shepherds did not drive their sheep from behind the flock like a sheepdog, rather they led them from the front, paving the way and showing, by example, the path to be followed and expected the sheep to follow.

There was another time in Israel's history when Israel needed someone to lead them. At the end of their wilderness journey, Moses knew that he would not be allowed to lead Israel into the Promised Land. So, he petitioned the Lord for such a leader.

READ Numbers 27:15-18

- What are the similarities in wording that you see between this passage in Numbers, and our current text in John?

- Two men with the same name were God's answer to Moses:
 - The first man who led Israel into the Promised Land with a Hebrew variation of his name was _____.
 - The second man who led Israel into the Promises of God with a Greek variation of His name was _____.

God graciously gave His Son to be our True Shepherd, and He graciously gave the sheep a choice, as to whether they would listen and follow. Look at **v.9** again:

- How did Jesus describe His role?

- What would be required of the sheep?

- What would be the blessing?

Day 3:

🔗 READ **John 10:7-10**

We've been making the point, in this study, that Jesus doesn't just *offer* what we need for life, He actually *becomes* what we need. In the context of caring for sheep, the Legitimate Shepherd not only *entered* the sheep pen via the door, but he then spent the night lying *in that same doorway* to protect the flock. From the sheep's perspective, he *became* the door since any sheep wanting to get out, or any dangerous character wanting to get in, had to pass through him.

The possibility of thieves was a real threat within the sheep pen. The character of the thieves and the Shepherd were completely opposite, as was their motivation.

READ **John 10:10**, and note the contrast in motivation:

- Of the thief:

- Of the Shepherd:

Jesus came, not only for our redemption, but also to lavish abundance on us. That's not my opinion — that's what He said in **v.10!**

Read these Scriptures, pondering and noting the aspects of abundance that come from the True Shepherd:

John 1:12

John 1:16

John 10:28-29

Ephesians 1:7-10

Ephesians 2:18-19

Hebrews 4:15-16

Day 4:

I find it interesting that these initial three **I AMs** of Christ have parallels to our natural senses.

- The Bread of Life — to our sense of taste
- The Light of the World — to our sense of sight
- The Door/Shepherd — to our sense of hearing (as we see below)

✞ READ **John 10:1-10**. Mark in your Bible all of the words pertaining to our sense of hearing — words like *voice, calls, listen, etc.* Do you see how repetitive those words are, and how liberally they are sprinkled throughout this passage?

- What did Jesus explain about the voice recognition between the sheep and the Shepherd?

- What tells you that the Shepherd's voice wasn't difficult to hear?

- In this passage, how did the sheep relate to the voice of a stranger?

Okay, it's time to bring this home, make it personal, and ask ourselves some probing questions. Whether you've been *in the Faith* for 3 weeks or 30 years, here are some important questions to reflect on:

- Would you characterize yourself as someone who intently listens for the voice of your Shepherd?
- If you do listen, do you recognize His voice when He calls you? Is His voice familiar to you?
- It seems that one purpose for listening to the Shepherd's voice in our text is so that He can lead out the sheep — presumably to find pasture. When is the last time that you recognized your Shepherd's voice, either gathering you in to safety or leading you out to an abundant pasture? Explain.

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
— Revelation 3:20 (ESV)*

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Have you ever fallen victim to the deception or trickery of a false shepherd, as described in this passage? Explain:
2. Why do you think it can be such a challenge to embrace the *abundant life* that Jesus promised, and instead focus on lists of perceived *must-dos* as a Christian?
3. The ancient shepherd physically laid in the door to protect the sheep. Has there been a time in your life, when Jesus acted as a protector in the same way, either physically or spiritually?
4. If someone asked you how to develop a keener ear for listening to the voice of the Shepherd, what two practical things might you suggest?
5. In what one way would you like to improve your sheep/Shepherd relationship by the end of this Bible Study?

Week 5 — I AM the Good Shepherd



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READ & WRITE John 10:11 —

You may recall that the first three *I AM* statements appealed to our sense of *taste*, *sight* and *hearing*. Can I go out on a limb and suggest that this fourth statement could appeal to our sense of *touch*? A Good Shepherd is a hands-on Shepherd — grooming, comforting, and nurturing. We all crave that type of personal relationship (even if we deny it). We're not truly content in isolation. We need and desire care. The verse you wrote describes the height of love and care.

As we consider Jesus *becoming* our Good Shepherd, my desire is that we draw a bit closer to Him and embrace the relationship He desires.

Day 1:

✎ READ John 10:11-16

Let's mark the cast of characters Jesus described in these verses. (If you don't write in your Bible, print out John 10 so you can liberally mark it). Choose your own unique marking method for each identity below — like underlines, circles, squares, or waves...

- Mark each phrase **good shepherd** (you should find 3).
- Mark the phrase **hired hand** (and pronouns associated with it).
- Mark each of the six instances of **sheep**.

You probably know that, in Scripture, *we* are identified as sheep.

- READ **Psalm 100:3** and write it out below:

What two things did Jesus tell us about *Good Shepherds* in this text?

- From **v.14**:

- From **v.11**:

Let's begin with the first description above — a Good Shepherd identifies with His sheep—but how? Have you ever used that little quippy saying, “*it takes one to know one*”? There's some real truth to that. One reason Jesus knows His sheep is that He *is* a Sheep. He's a Sheep/Shepherd, and that is the wonder of the Incarnation.

- READ **John 1:29**. Who declared Jesus to be a Sheep in that verse, and how is Jesus described?

Jesus also became a Sheep in order to fulfill what you wrote from **v.11** above — to lay down His life to benefit them.

- READ **Isaiah 53:4-7**. How do you think these two passages reinforce one another?

Under the Old Covenant, the sheep died for the shepherds,
But, under the New Covenant, the Shepherd died for the sheep.

Day 2:

✞ READ **John 10:11-15**

Many of the great men of the Old Testament were *leading sheep* before God called them to *lead His people*. Abraham, Moses, and David come to mind. Perhaps the skills they gained during long hours

in open fields with no one to talk to, but God and sheep, were the perfect training ground for Godly leadership.

Not all leaders are Godly, however. Yesterday, we marked two different types of leaders in our passage: the *Good Shepherd* and the *hired hand* (which Scripture also calls, *false shepherds*).

What did Jesus have to say about those who were not appointed by Him and who did not share the same care and concern for the sheep?

Actions and traits
of false shepherds

How their actions
affected the sheep

John 10:10

John 10:12-13

Ezekiel 34:1-6

Remember, this conversation took place near the temple in Jerusalem after the healing of the blind man. Read **John 9:34**, and think back to the actions of the religious leaders in the previous chapter.

- How had those *hired hands* treated that tender sheep?

- READ **Revelation 7:17**. Contrast the religious leaders' actions with our Sheep/Shepherd Jesus:

Does this study bring up a sense of regret over a relationship? Have you ever acted like the *hired hand* — knowing you could have cared more for another sheep, but didn't? Perhaps you became distracted by your own concerns, or experienced a temporary callousness for some reason.

As sheep, we neither act with 100% virtue nor 100% evil. We can be fickle and undependable. We *can* be shepherds, but we're not the *Good Shepherd*, and our motives are tainted by our sinful nature.

If you're feeling burdened over a relational failure:

- Confess the situation to the Lord, admitting your neglect in the situation, and your need for more of His character.
- Resist the accusation and paralysis of the enemy, and move forward in your relationships, trusting in the Lord to make you more like Him each day.
- Always remember to point people to the *real* Good Shepherd, who *does* care for the sheep and will not disappoint them.

Day 3:

✞ READ **John 10:12-16**. Draw an "O" around the word "*own*" each time you encounter it. (*3 times*)

You're familiar with the phrase, *pride of ownership*. We often use it to describe a higher level of care when we *own* a home or a car. If you will indulge the phrase, *pride of ownership*, I think it will give us a new perspective related to the words that you marked.

- In **v.12**, how does *pride of ownership* relate to the *hired hand*?
- In **v.14-15**, how does *pride of ownership* relate to the *Shepherd*?

Throughout this passage, Jesus clearly explained HE OWNS His sheep.

- What additional insights does **v.16** give us about the sheep?

- READ **Matthew 15:24**. If Jesus were likened to an *arrow* in His Father's *quiver* — which sheepfold was the initial target?

- READ **Romans 1:16**. Who do you think may be the sheep *that are not of this fold*?

- What ultimate goal did Jesus express for the flock in **v.16**?

- Combining **Romans 1:16-17**, with Jesus' words in this text, how do you think *they will listen to His voice*?

- READ **John 10:27-28**. What are the rewards for those who *hear His voice* and *follow Him*?

READ **Ephesians 2:11-13**. It's good, once in a while, for us Gentiles to read words like *no hope* and *without God* to remind us what a huge privilege it is to be purchased into His flock. The Jews wouldn't have been thinking about Jesus gathering other sheep. Sometimes we're not as aware as we should be of ALL the sheep Jesus wants to gather.

By way of agreement with Jesus' intentions, ask Him to impress on your heart someone whom you believe is NOT part of His flock, and begin (or continue) to pray for that lost sheep, and ask Jesus how He might want to use YOU in that gathering process.

*I will search for the lost and bring back the strays.
I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. Ezekiel 34:16*

Day 4:

Jesus, our Good Shepherd...

- laid down His life for the sheep (**John 10:11**),
- by purchasing the sheep with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**),
- so those who follow no longer belong to themselves, as (**1 Cor. 6:19-20**) they have been bought with a price.

We naturally love independence, don't we? We aspire to be our own boss, to do *what* we want, *when* we want. While that may be an advantage in business, it's not how things work in God's Kingdom.

In God's flock, we're not our own, we have an Owner, and He is a wonderful Owner — He's a Good Shepherd! He is kind, gentle and caring, and has our best interest at heart.

Do you really believe that? Even if you've read the Scriptures and believe it in your head, make sure right now that it's in your heart. Believe and treasure in your heart what you read in the passages today.

✞ READ **Isaiah 40:11**, which expresses God's tenderness so elegantly. Ponder the missing words, as you complete the verse:

He will _____ his flock like a _____,

He will _____ the lambs in his _____,

He will _____ them in his _____;

And gently _____ those that are with _____.

☞ READ Ezekiel 34:15-16, and complete:

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will _____, declares the Lord GOD. I will _____ the lost, and I will _____ the strayed, and I will _____ the injured, and I will _____ the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will _____ them in justice.

☞ READ Psalm 23:1,3, and complete:

*The LORD is my Shepherd ... He _____ my soul.
He _____ me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

☞ READ Revelation 7:17, and complete:

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their _____, and he will _____ them to springs of living water, and God will _____ every tear from their eyes.

Did you notice that you were writing mostly action verbs to complete those verses? Each of those passages show strong, yet tender, actions on the part of the Shepherd. Look at them again. Read them aloud from start to finish. Would you not say that everything on that list has the best interest of the sheep in mind?

- Which of those actions can you identify as something Jesus has done for you recently? Explain.

- Which of those actions do you know about intellectually, but you want to experience personally?

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Probably the most well-known passage of Scripture, regarding the Good Shepherd, is **Psalm 23**. Give two reasons why you think that is such a popular Psalm.
2. We mentioned the similarity between shepherds and Mommas. If you're a Momma, how does a study of the Good Shepherd inspire you in your role of care, nurture, and sacrifice for your sheep?
3. These lessons on leadership from **John 10** don't have to be confined to Church life. Regular employees can choose to display an attitude that's either like a hireling — who cares little for the job to be done or the people around them; or like the Shepherd — who serves sacrificially. Read **Colossians 3:22-24**, and share how both of these passages can relate to your life and your career.
4. Read **John 10:27-29**. Discuss the phrase, "*no one will snatch them out of my hand*".
5. What are some Biblical expectations we should have of our Good Shepherd?

Week 6 — I AM the Resurrection and the Life



READ & WRITE John 11:25 —

The **I AM** texts liberally include the word *life* — *Bread of Life, Light that leads to Life, now Resurrection and the Life* — yet, as we process the concept of *life*, the text draws us into the deep pain brought on by *death*. Jesus' dear friend Lazarus died, and in the narrative, John exposed the pain and even perhaps betrayal felt by his sisters.

The pain of death is felt by all, people who love God and people whom God loves. Why doesn't God spare His kids from deep pain? If *Jesus is enough*, as we've been claiming, then where is the **abundant life** that is supposed to be our experience?

Maybe part of our answer lies in our verse for this week. We tend to hope for God to *DO* something, but all the while, He's **BEING** something! After all, He said: **I AM the Resurrection and the Life!**

Day 1:



✞ READ **John 11:1-2, 5** and also **Luke 10:38-42**. List everything you learn about Jesus' friends, their relationship to Him and to each other:

🌀 READ **John 11:3-6**.

- The problem was clearly spelled out — Lazarus was very ill. Why do you think the sisters sent word to Jesus about his illness?
- What did Jesus have to say about the illness?
- What was Jesus' specific plan of action, based on this news (v.6)?
- Is that the response you would have expected? Do you think the disciples anticipated that response?

🌀 READ **John 11:7-10**. Two days had passed between verses 6 & 7.

- Why did the disciples object to a trip to Judea?
- Do you think their fears were founded?

We all deal with risk and fear differently. Some people are so paralyzed by fear that they do whatever it takes to keep to their safe

- With what three words did Jesus clear it up in v.14?
- How did Jesus feel about Lazarus' death (from v.15)?

Now, we *just* finished the passage, "*I Am the Good Shepherd*", and learned that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. How can we harmonize that *Shepherd image* with this statement that Jesus was *glad* that He wasn't there when Lazarus died?

Our goal in these verses is to broaden our acceptance of the things God allows to touch our lives, and then learn to rest deeper in His eternal plan, even in the midst of our suffering.

 READ John 11:17-20.

- How long had Lazarus been in the tomb by the time Jesus arrived?
- Describe the movements of the sisters in these verses:
 - Martha —
 - Mary —

One thing that's not to be overlooked in this passage is the respect and honor that Jesus showed these women. The pertinent conversations surrounding Lazarus' death and resurrection were with women.

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The typical male response of the day would have been to ignore the ladies, but that is not how Jesus operated. He engaged them, listened to them and responded with kindness and truth.

✞ READ **John 11:21-27** (Martha's conversation with Jesus)

- What emotions do you suppose were behind Martha's initial words to Jesus in **v.21**?

Are those emotions familiar to you at all? Have you been disappointed with what God has or hasn't done in your life, or a loved one's life? These can be very painful questions. It's natural for us to create a perception that the Good Shepherd would never let one single bad thing affect His sheep. If He *does* allow something to adversely affect His sheep, our theology buckles and we lose faith.

- What were Jesus' initial words of comfort regarding Martha's brother in **v.23**?

...to which Martha responded that she believed in an **event**

— *the Resurrection on the Last Day.*

But Jesus wanted her to believe in a **Person**

— *I AM the Resurrection and the Life!*

Jesus asked Martha, "*Do you believe this?*" — *Do you believe I AM?*

Martha said, "Yes, Lord" (**v.27**).

Jesus asks each of us, "*Do you believe in ME?*" You might believe in the Bible, or believe in proper doctrine, or believe in Heaven, but the main question is, "*Do you believe in I AM?*". Jesus said, "*everyone who believes in me shall never die*". It's not enough to believe in an event — we must believe in a Person!

Day 3:

Jesus not only loved Lazarus, He also loved Mary and Martha. John took note of it, and recorded their conversations for generations to read. Today's lesson features the dialogue with Mary...

✎ READ **John 11:28-32**.

- Who encouraged Mary to make contact with Jesus (**v.28**)?
- Compare both of the ladies' initial meeting with Jesus in **v.21** and **v.32**, and list the similarities and differences:

✎ READ **John 11:33-38**. John used words to show Jesus sympathizing with what was happening around Him. Write any phrases from the following verses that show Jesus' emotional response:

V.33 _____

V.33 _____

V.35 _____

V.38 _____

READ **Hebrews 4:15-16**. What do we find is still true of Jesus today?

God's love for His own is not a pampering love; it is a perfecting love. The fact that He loves us and we love Him is no guarantee that we'll be sheltered from the problems and pains of life. After all, the Father loves His Son: and yet permitted Him to experience the pain of the Cross. We must never think that love and suffering are incompatible.¹ — Warren Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary

Do you believe Jesus sees your life and difficulties through eyes of sympathy? Here's another passage to consider. READ **Mark 6:33-34**.

- Describe Jesus' response to the people's struggle:

Back to our text, the Jews saw Jesus weeping (**v.35**). Because of that, what conclusions did some of them make about His abilities in **v.37**?

Is it also possible for us to draw false conclusions about God's ability or willingness to intervene in our lives? The bystanders were still in the *pre-resurrection* stage of this event, and could **only** lament that Jesus hadn't healed Lazarus like He did the blind man. They would soon witness a greater work of God.

Consider the possibility that some area of your life may be in the *pre-resurrection* phase but all you can see is the *dead* phase.

- Have you been lamenting God's ability or willingness to intervene?
- Does God perhaps have a good reason for allowing the situation?
- Can you commit this area to God and rest in your Savior, who IS the Resurrection and the Life?

Day 4:

📖 READ **John 11:38-48**. Finally, we get to Jesus' conversation with Lazarus: "**Lazarus, come out!**"! It's been said that Jesus had to call Lazarus by name, or *all the dead*, would have come out of the caves and tombs!

- What was Martha's objection to removing the stone?
- What does that tell you about just *how dead* Lazarus was?
- Go back through **v.40-48**, and mark each time *believe or believed* is written. What does that show us about God's intention to make salvation *simple* and *clear*?
- What outcome were the chief priests and the Pharisees afraid of when they gathered the council?
- If you read only Jesus' words, what would you say was HIS primary goal in raising Lazarus?

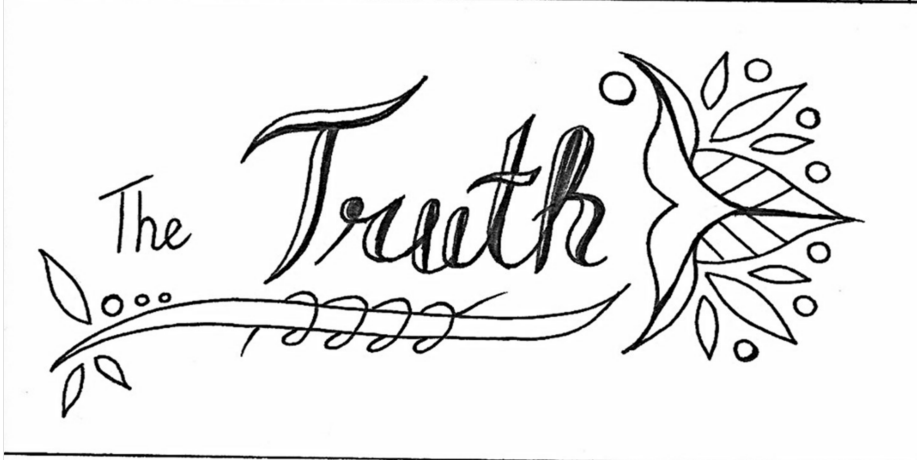
Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Why do you think it can be challenging to remember that God's love doesn't prevent us from experiencing tragedies and trials?
2. Do you think it's appropriate for a Christian to grieve when sad or disappointing things happen around them?
3. READ **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** and explain the similarities that exist between Lazarus and those who die before the Rapture.
4. DELAY was a prominent puzzle piece in the narrative of Lazarus. We learned that the Lord sometimes delays so that He might work even more powerfully in a situation that seems hopeless to us. Can you think of a time when God's intervention was *delayed* in your life, but now you are very grateful for that outcome?
5. Think of how to simply explain that our human spirits are *dead* before we believe in Jesus but are made alive when we receive *His Spirit* within us. Practice your simple explanation in your group.

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

— Hebrews 7:25 (NIV)

Week 7 — I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life



READ & WRITE John 14:6 —

I'm guessing this verse isn't a new one to most of you. According to **TopVerses.com**, it's ranked the third most popular verse in the book of John. I can think of a few good reasons for that ranking — it's clear, it's brief, it's complete! Bible verses don't get much better than that! This week will be a great study, as we unpack this simple, yet profound statement from multiple angles.

Our last **I AM** statement in chapter 11 was spoken to Martha at Lazarus' graveside near Bethany. Between these two **I AMs** are 124 verses that cover about a week (or a bit more). It would be great if we could study straight through, but we just don't have time for a verse-by-verse study like that, so we'll list the events in bullet points below. *(If you're able to read chapters 12-13 for a continuous thread, do that now — otherwise, skim these highlights.)*

- Jesus stayed for a time near Ephraim with His disciples. **(11:54-57)**
- Jesus went to Bethany and had dinner with Lazarus, Martha, Mary and others, six days before the Passover. Mary anointed Him. **(12:1-11)**
- Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of **Hosanna**, just days before the Passover. **(12:12-19)**
- Jesus interacted with those gathered for the Passover. **(12:20-50)**
- Jesus gathered with His disciples in the Upper Room to share the Passover meal. **(13:1-30)**

And, that is where we'll begin our study this week, in the Upper Room at the Passover meal with Jesus and His disciples.

Day 1: "The Way"

There are some events that happened during Jesus' ministry, which ALL the Gospel writers included with amazing consistency in their narratives. The Passover, which Jesus shared with His disciples, is one of those events and it's the setting for our key verse.

Before we dive into John's writing, read all of the Gospel accounts below. Note things like **WHO** was there, **WHAT** was happening, **WHAT** was being celebrated, **WHERE** they were, along with any details that capture your attention:

Matt. 26:17-19 ***Mark 14:12-17*** ***Luke 22:7-14*** ***John 13:1-2***

Each of the authors wrote of Jesus predicting Judas' betrayal as well as Peter's denial. But it's the simple phrase at the end of **John 13:30** that I want you to notice. Write the final four words of that verse here:

We can't be sure why John wrote that, but it's a curiosity, because we already know that it was night — a Passover meal was observed at night in keeping with its original context (**Exodus 12:8**). Why were those words used?

Perhaps, John was echoing Jesus' contrasts of *day/night* and *light/dark* to describe the time available for *doing the works of God* (**John 5:17, 9:4**).

Perhaps with Judas' betrayal set in motion, John was drawing a closing curtain to the time available for Jesus' public ministry, and preparing us to listen to the intimate conversations of Jesus' final hours with His remaining faithful disciples.

Whatever the reason, we'll begin this week's study right at **John 13:31**, where the *red-letter* section of your Bible really takes over!

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☞ READ **John 13:31—14:6**. Did you sense a change in Jesus' tone from previous passages? These verses seem more tender and personal. The corner has been turned from confronting Pharisees and addressing large crowds — now Jesus' words simply express the future path for those who love Him.

That word — *path* — describes how we'll view our key verse today:
"I AM the Way...no one comes to the Father except through me."

One definition for ***the Way*** is: *the path, the road, the route*.

Go back over the entire text above, and mark words that have to do with travel: *going, come, follow, place*, etc. In some ways, we can understand these words more easily than those listening that night — mostly because we know the end of the story.

- From **v.36**, what did Jesus mean about *where He was going*?
- From **v.2**, what did Jesus mean when He said, ***my Father's house***?
- Since Jesus was telling them about a *place*, it makes sense that there should be a *route* to get there, and yet Jesus didn't really give them a plan or a road map. What *did* He give them so they wouldn't be left behind?

Day 2: "The Way"

Another dictionary definition for **'the way'** (other than the *path* or *road*) is the *method* or *example*. The *way* something is done means the *method* used to achieve those results.

If you're teaching your teen how to use the lawn edger, you would probably go out to the yard together. You would demonstrate its use by doing a small portion, and then you would say, '*Do it that same way*'. You would expect them to watch, observe and follow your example.

Jesus became our example for Godly living, but He also stated often where He got *His* example from — His Father in Heaven.

 READ **John 14:7-14**. Mark the words *Father* and *works*.

- Read **v.7, 10** again and **John 5:19-21**. In what way did Jesus follow the example of His own Father? What was the result?

- Read **John 13:34-35**. In what way should believers in Jesus follow His example? What will be the result?

- Read **John 14:12-14**. In what way should believers in Jesus follow His example? What will be the result?

- Read **John 15:10**. What example did Jesus set that we should follow? What will be the result?

Day 3: "The Truth"

"What is truth?" asked Pilate during Jesus' trial (**John 18:38**). That is an excellent question! What *is* truth? People for centuries have searched for truth. Yet, like Pilate, many have seemed to stumble over it, even when it stared them right in the face.

Jesus said, "*...for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.*" (**John 18:37a**) Jesus' mission was to *testify to the truth*.

- Look up the word *testify*, and write a definition that applies to the above verse.

- READ **John 18:37b**. What did Jesus say was the result of those who embraced truth?

Jesus came first to *the lost sheep of Israel* (**Matthew 15:24**). His mission was to affirm the truth about God, to reveal His own relationship as God's Son, and to announce that those who listened to the truth and believed, could also have a close relationship with God. That relationship would happen through the *Spirit of Truth!*

✪ READ **John 14:15-20**

- Who was promised to come live with those who believe (**v.16-17**)?

- What does that relationship look like (**v.17**)?

- What will the world's reaction be toward Him (**v.17**)?

Jesus said that the Spirit of Truth would **be in them (v.17)**. Skip down to **v.20** to better understand, and fill in the blank lines:

*In that day you will know that _____ am in my _____,
and _____ in _____, and _____ in _____.*

No wonder Jesus went to such lengths to explain that He was One with the Father. He wanted His disciples to understand the possibility of being united with Him. Jesus IS the Spirit of Truth. That's why He said, the Spirit of Truth **will be in you (v.17) and I in you (v.20)**. The ministry of testifying to the truth would continue!

- READ **John 14:26** and **John 15:26**. What are the roles of the *Spirit of Truth*?
- How is this similar to what Jesus' description of His own role in **John 18:37**?
- READ **John 16:13**. What ongoing work can a believer expect from the *Spirit of Truth*?
- READ **John 12:49**. How does the role of the Holy Spirit parallel what Jesus did and didn't do on earth?

Jesus said, "**I AM the Truth.**" If we were to answer Pilate's question, "*What is truth?*" the simplest answer would be "*Jesus!*" How can we know truth? Know Jesus and truth will be revealed to you!

Day 4: "The Life"

LIFE is the last word in this *I AM* trilogy from **John 14:6**. Jesus said, *I AM the Life...no one comes to the Father, except through me.*

Life is a relational word. Think about it — how is human life made? Well, unless you are God and have the ability to create by speaking, life is made through the intimate union of a husband and wife. The relationship of love produces a child, and life is created!

It's the same in our spiritual lives, as a union with Christ produces new life. We do not become God's children through Biblical study, accumulating knowledge about God or performing acts of kindness. We become God's children by believing in His Son and entering into a relationship of life.

✞ READ **John 14:18-24**. Mark the words *live*, *love* and *orphans*.

- In the same way that a relationship of love produces the life of a child, what was Jesus teaching about a relationship of love toward God in these verses?

- In a healthy family, the goal is never to leave children as orphans — that would be a reversal of the relationship that gave life. However, in a fallen world, it's sometimes unavoidable. Explain what these verses teach us about God's design so that we never find ourselves spiritual orphans.

Those in a family relationship usually live together. So, let's use our trilogy to also celebrate what Jesus shared about our Eternal Home:

The Way: *"You know the way to the place where I am going"*

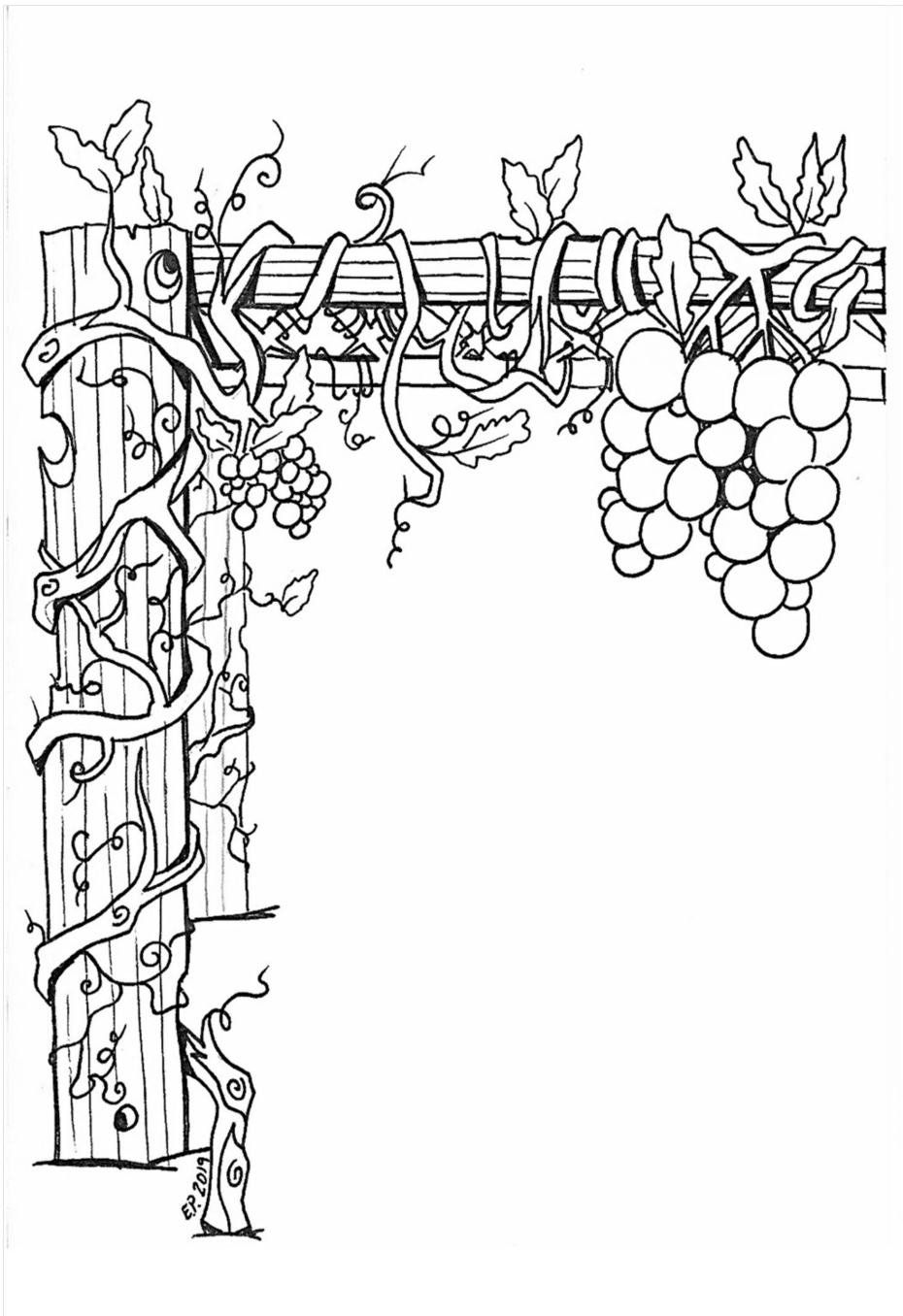
The Truth: *"I am going there to prepare a place for you"*

The Life: *"That you also may be where I am"*

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Simply quoting **John 14:6** probably wouldn't be a sufficient answer to someone, who claims there are *other ways* to God. Based on your study this week, how would you explain Jesus' exclusive claim to being **THE WAY** to know God?
2. Even though Jesus spoke a lot about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that night in the Upper Room, Christians today may tend to shy away from talking about that reality. Why do you think that may be?
3. **John 14:14** says, "*If you ask anything in my name, I will do it*". Do you think there is more explanation to that verse? (If you are able, use other Scriptures rather than your opinions to answer.)
4. This chapter causes us to think about our home in Heaven. Which do you find easier to do? Yearn for Heaven or strive to create Heaven on earth? Why?

Week 8 — I AM the True Vine



READ & WRITE John 15:5 —

Are you willing to do something a little different for this lesson? We've enjoyed the lovely illustrations that my friend Liz made for our Study Guide, so if you still have your colored pencils handy, we'll use them this week to aggressively mark these 17 verses in our study.

I think we'll find the setting of this **I AM** passage intriguing. Some of the earlier **I AM** statements followed attention-getting events like miraculous bread, sight given to a blind man and the resurrection of Lazarus. They were intended to be witnessed by the crowds. But these last two statements were part of a more intimate setting — just Jesus and His disciples sharing the Passover meal, talking about *where* He was going and *how* they would follow.

Now, on that same Passover evening, during the same conversation, Jesus said in **John 14:31**, "***Rise, let us go from here.***" Some Bible scholars wonder if they all left the Upper Room at that point, and began walking to the Garden of Gethsemane. Could it be that Jesus, the Master Teacher, always looking to make spiritual concepts understandable through ordinary objects, pointed out a large vine just outside of the house? A vine like that would provide the perfect visual as He told them, "***I AM the true vine!***"

The passage that follows that sentence has become a favorite metaphor for Christians to help us picture how God intends us to flourish in our union with His Son Jesus Christ. So, we want to slow down and really unpack these verses in **John 15** for our grand finale.

Since some Bible translations choose different words to express the original text, I thought it would be useful for us to work with the exact same word choices. The following page has the text from the ESV, which you will be able to mark with your colored pencils.

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

Day 1:

With closed eyes, compose a mental image of a grapevine. Go big, make it a large, ancient vine that's been in production for decades! Do you see large, sweet clusters of grapes dangling from the branches? Do you see the gardener meticulously inspecting the branches he pruned earlier in the year? Can you see the smile on his face as he approves of the fruit? If your imagination can go there, you're ready to dig into this passage...

📖 READ **John 15:1-2** on the previous page.

- Circle the word *vine* and *me* with a brown pencil.
- Circle the words *Father*, *vinedresser* and *he* with blue.
- Square the words *branch* with green.
- Square the words *fruit* with purple.
- Put a squiggly line under the word *prunes*.

Jesus made it pretty clear who He was talking about in those first two verses, but let's list the answers anyway...

Who is the *vine*: _____

Who is the *vinedresser*: _____

Who are the *branches*: _____

Even though Jesus started the metaphor by declaring Himself **the True Vine**, the main relationship in **v.1-2** is between which of the two above parties? Draw a connecting {*bracket*} between those two.

- What action does the vinedresser take when a branch isn't producing the way it was created? (Use the word in the passage)
- Does he take that action on disconnected branches or on branches connected to the vine? (Use words from the passage)
- What is the goal of the pruning action? (Use words from the passage)

Wild vines normally yield small, sometimes dry, sour grapes. The fruit can be found, but it's typically not good for much. On the other hand, vines that are groomed, tended to and pruned by an able gardener, are more productive, and their fruit is useful.

Read this following explanation of the pruning process, as described in *The Sunset Gardening Book*.

Pruning is both a skill and an art. The skill is in making proper cuts that will heal well. The art is in making cuts in the right places so the plant will develop its potential beauty or produce an optimum crop. No matter how much or how little pruning you do on an established plant, the objective is to modify the growth of the plant. The modification can be done for any of the following reasons:

- * to maintain plant health—removing dead, diseased, injured wood;*
- * to control or direct growth;*
- * to increase quality or yield of flowers or fruit.²*

Isn't that intriguing? You can see the parallels with our spiritual life, right? Jesus was highlighting the necessity of pruning for fruitfulness.

- What type of people are pruned?

- For what purpose does our Heavenly Father prune us?

Your Heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when He is pruning you. Sometimes He cuts away the dead wood that may cause trouble; but often He cuts off the living tissue that is robbing you of spiritual vigor. Pruning does not simply mean spiritual surgery that removes what is bad. It can also mean cutting away the good and the better so that we might enjoy the best.¹

—Warren Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary

- When God is pruning, would you consider that punishment?
- Why do we sometimes feel like it is?
- Has God been pruning in your life recently and have you readily accepted it — especially if He’s been pruning away something that seemed fruitful to you?
- Have you shrunk back and interfered with His good work? It’s not really a yes/no answer, it’s something to consider, to reflect on and talk over with the Lord!

Day 2:

✞ READ John 15:3-5.

- Circle the word ***vine*** with a brown pencil.
- Square the words ***branch*** with a green pencil.
- Square the words ***fruit*** with a purple pencil.
- Double underline the phrases, ***abide in me, abide in the vine,*** with a red pencil.

It’s the phrases with red underlines that we want to focus on today — ***abiding in the vine***. The NIV uses, ‘**remain in me**’ and that’s good too, but one reason I wanted us all to use the ESV text is that I rather like the poetic and relational sound of the word **abide**.

- Skim through **v.3-10**, and count how many times John used the word translated *abide/remain* in those few verses: _____

- Look up the meaning of *abide* in the dictionary:
- List two or three antonyms (opposites) for *abide*:

In nature, a branch doesn't really have the choice to abide. It just stays connected unless some unfortunate act disconnects it. Jesus said that branches disconnected from the vine could not produce fruit by themselves (**v.4**). Go back to that mental image from yesterday. Would anyone picture a branch lying off to the side of the vine that still held beautiful, healthy leaves and fruit ready for harvest? Of course not. We've all observed what happens in nature — the wind blows a large branch off a tree, the leaves are wilted within 12 hours, and if there *was* any fruit, it would soon begin to rot.

Through the abundant use of the command, ***Abide in the vine***, Jesus taught us we DO have a choice in our lives. We choose to connect, we choose to stay connected, and we can choose to disconnect.

- What is the benefit Jesus listed for ***abiding in Him*** in **v.5**?

Tomorrow, we'll talk about *all things fruit*, but, for today, we'll just assume that you *want* to bear fruit, that you believe it's good for you to bear fruit, that you believe God wants you to bear a lot of fruit and that you wouldn't want to live your life without bearing fruit.

- Write out the last seven words from **v.5**:
- Does that offend you...even just a little? Why do you think it might be offensive to hear that?

If you told a non-Christian, “*Apart from Jesus, you can do nothing,*” what would their response be? I mean, we see people who reject Jesus do great stuff all the time — inventors, doctors, and athletes.

- How then would you explain this concept?

Day 3:

✞ READ John 15:6-11.

- Square the words *branch* with a green pencil.
- Square the words *fruit* with a purple pencil.
- Circle the word *Father* with a blue pencil.
- Double underline the phrases, *abide in me*, and *abide in my/his love*, with a red pencil.
- Double underline the phrases, *keep my commandments*, and *kept my Father’s commandments*, with a blue pencil.
- Go back to your text on p.70. In v.2, 5, 8, put a check mark over the adjective that precedes the word *fruit* that indicates quantity.

By now, you’ve already marked *fruit* six times and there will be two more in tomorrow’s text. Clearly, FRUIT is the main point of this passage — who bears it, how much is expected, the fate of fruitless branches, etc. Let’s check other passages, where Jesus talked to His disciples about fruit.

- READ **Matthew 7:15-20** — Note insights about fruit:

- READ **Luke 8:11-15** — Note insights about fruit:

- READ **Luke 13:6-9** — Note insights about fruit:

Those passages add dimension, but they don't *exactly* define what **fruit** means. Perhaps, something as common as **fruit** is self-evident. We all know the difference between a good apple compared to a rotten apple; a bushel basket filled with apples compared to an empty basket.

Some might think **fruit** means reproducing — winning souls for God's Kingdom. While that is most certainly a part of the meaning, we can also lean on a great descriptive list the Apostle Paul shared with the Galatians for a broader understanding.

READ **Galatians 5:22**. List all of the **fruit** that should be expected from a life that is **abiding in the vine**:

- As you consider this list, put a *smiley face* next to two qualities, where you believe the Lord has allowed you to bear *much fruit*.
- Now consider two that you would have to admit that the quantity or quality of the fruit has been lean. Put a little *crown* over them.

With this list in mind, consider again, *how* fruit is grown on a plant in nature and in our lives. Biology teaches us that it's the stalk/trunk/vine that takes up the nutrients and water from its surroundings and distributes it to the branches to ultimately form fruit. This is why we water and fertilize our plants. The branches cannot reach down into the soil for themselves, they are dependent upon the vine to deliver to them what they need.

It's this *dependence* that Jesus was driving home to His disciples — ***Apart from me, you can do nothing!***

- Do you find that dependence on Jesus comes naturally to your flesh?

- In what practical ways is the Lord showing you how to live with a greater *dependence on Jesus* in order to bear more fruit? (Specifically in those characteristics that you marked with a *crown*)

Day 4:

🔗 READ John 15:12-17.

- Circle the word *father* with a blue pencil.
- Double underline the phrases, *my commandments*, and *command you*, with a blue pencil.
- Square the words *fruit* with a purple pencil.
- Draw a heart over the words *love* and *friends* with a red pencil.

Here, we are on our final day of study and the words in this passage reinforce what Jesus said earlier in the evening (**John 13:34**) about a *new* commandment.

- What is the clear command from **v.12**?
- And what is the promised result from **v.10**?
- What is the ultimate demonstration of love from **v.13**?
- Do you think those men could grasp how Jesus was hours away from truly walking out that kind of love?

Did you notice we stopped marking the word *branches*? That's because Jesus switched to a new word toward the end of this passage — *friends*!

- In v.15, what is characteristic of a *servant*?
- In v.15, what is characteristic of a *friend*?
- In v.16, what does Jesus expect from the friends He chooses?

So there you have it — YOU have been appointed to bear fruit for God's Kingdom. In fact, put that down in words: _____
(your name) *has been appointed to bear fruit that would abide.*

How will you do that? Jesus is Enough, Jesus is all you need, Jesus is essential, *you can do nothing without Jesus!* You Simply Need Jesus!

As one final exercise, fill in the missing words for the Scriptures on the next page. They are all part of the intimate, and yet instructive, talk Jesus had with His close disciples...those He called friends.

We want to appreciate the circular link between *love, obedience, abiding* and *fruit*. If you believe in Jesus, and have accepted His forgiveness of sins you probably want to make the years of your life count for something. You probably want to bear fruit, you probably want to abide.

It's all very *simple*, it's not always *easy*, but remembering two words will help us tremendously:

Simply Jesus!

FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST BEGINS WITH LOVE:

John 13:34 A new command I give you that you _____.
Just as I have loved you, you also are to _____.

ADDS OBEDIENCE:

John 14:15 If you _____ me, you will _____ my commandments.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and _____ them, he
it is who _____ me.

John 14:23 If anyone _____ me, he will _____ my word, and
my Father will _____ him, and we will come to him and make our
_____ with him.

John 14:31 But I do as the Father has _____ me, so that the
world may know that I _____ the Father.

RESULTS IN ABIDING:

John 15:4-5 As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it _____
in the vine, neither can you, unless you _____ in me. I am the vine;
you are the branches. Whoever _____ in me and I in him, he it
is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do _____.

ENDS WITH LOVE:

John 15:8-10 By this my Father is glorified, that you _____ much
_____ and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so
have I loved you. _____ in my love. If you keep my
commandments, you will _____ in my love.

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. We've learned there are many types of fruit. Through studying this passage and praying, do you sense any particular type of fruit that the Lord may be desiring to produce in your life?
2. Can you identify any type of pruning that God has done in order to bring that fruit about? Is there something you sense He is cutting out of your life to make room for a fresh bloom of fruit?
3. Do you think it's possible for Christians to produce fruit that wasn't created through a connection with Jesus? Perhaps synthetic fruit that looks similar, but isn't real or satisfying? Explain.
4. How would you respond to someone who says, "Christians should focus on love, focusing on obedience is legalistic"?
5. What would you say are two reasons that Christians struggle with *abiding in the vine*? In other words, what causes distance with God?
6. What would you say is your most significant *takeaway* from all seven of the **I AM** statements?

References

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2— **Sunset Gardening Book.** *Sunset Western Garden Book*, edited by Kathleen Norris Brenzel, Menlo Park, CA 2001

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Women of the Word Bible Studies

The following WOW Bible Studies written by Sue LeBoutillier are available through the **Calvary Chapel Ontario bookstore**, and through our online store at **www.ccontario.com**.

Old Testament:

- **Genesis**—Divine Design, From Eden to Egypt
- **Exodus**—Divine Deliverance, From Egypt to Sinai
- **Numbers**—The Wilderness Way, From Sinai to the Jordan
- **Joshua** —The Path of Promise, From the Jordan into Canaan
- **Judges** — A Time of Turning
- **Ruth**—Rescue and Rest
- **1 Samuel**— The Coming King
- **2 Samuel**— The Reigning King
- **1 Kings (Part One)** — Solomon and the House of the Lord
- **Jonah**—The Call of Compassion

New Testament:

- **The Way of Jesus** —The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew)
- **Simply Jesus**—The “I AMs” of Christ (John)
- **Acts**—Walking in the Spirit, The First Days of the Last Days
- **Galatians**—Finding Grace in a Demanding World
- **Philippians**—Finding Joy in a Disjointed World
- **Colossians**—Finding Stability in a Changing World
- **Titus**—While We Wait
- **James**—Real Faith for Daily Life
- **1 & 2 Peter**—Hope, Holiness and Humility in a Hostile World
- **1,2,3 John**—Light, Love and Logic

