



Small Group Guidebook

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity rises or fails with Jesus. If He is who He claimed to be, His life – and death – change everything. If not, the global impact of His deceit is unrivaled.

In “I AM” – a nine part sermon series based on the Gospel of John - we will explore a number of the most significant claims Jesus made about Himself. Some are comforting. Some are unsettling. Most are surprising. Indeed, given how simply and selflessly Jesus lived, many assume He was humble in His claims. Nothing could be further from the mark. Those Jews who knew their Bible immediately recognized His ‘I am’ statements for what they were: bold, radical, and disruptive claims to be God

-Pastor Mike Woodruff

THE PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied,
“The most important one is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹

Small Groups are one of the primary places for us to grow in our love of God and others. As we study God’s Word in community, He draws us closer to Himself and to each other. We learn to listen, to serve, to ask good questions, to pray, to share our lives. We begin to look more like Jesus, as we discuss how to faithfully live out the gospel—wherever He’s placed us—for His glory.

Yet Christian community does not happen by accident. In our broken world, it is nothing short of a miracle. Small Groups require humility, honesty, trust, curiosity, commitment, faithfulness in prayer, and the continual extension of grace to one another. They require us to show up, both physically and spiritually.

As you study Jesus together through this series, remember that you are on holy ground. But the good news is you are not alone! You have the Holy Spirit to point you to Christ, to help you understand His Word, to build up your community, and to transform you into His likeness.

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”²

¹ Mark 11:29-31 ² 2 Corinthians 12:14

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended for Small Group discussions. Ideally, group members will worship in-person or online on Sundays and view the sermon, so that they are prepared to talk about the message. However, the discussion guides are primarily scripture-based, allowing for meaningful participation even among group members who missed the sermon.

After taking a few minutes to greet everyone, leaders can guide the group through these 5 guide components:

WORSHIP

Open with a Psalm or another reading to begin your study and recenter in God's Word.

FELLOWSHIP

Start with a relational, conversational "warm-up" question to get everyone talking.

DISCUSSION

Move through several discussion questions focused on pertinent biblical passages with opportunities to interpret the Word together, share personal reflections and experiences, and apply God's truth to your lives.

Leaders should feel free to omit, add, or tweak questions, based on the make-up of their group and the Spirit's leading.

PRACTICE

The suggested practices offer a means of going deeper or reflecting further on the I AM statement of the week. They are intended for individual use, but leaders can check-in to see if any practices have been meaningful to group members during or between meetings.

PRAYER

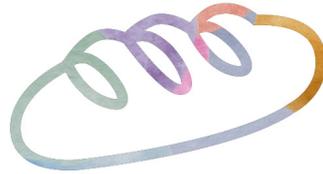
Close in prayer, trying to draw in themes from the study, as well as personal and community needs that have been raised. Leaders can pray, ask someone from the group to pray, or allow for "popcorn" prayer.

If any group members are new to faith or prayer, try encouraging each person who feels comfortable to pray for one thing, utilize prayer partners or break-out rooms, or ask everyone to write down a 1-2 sentence prayer and read it aloud.

Check in on requests from last week, if you can, and be mindful of any practical ways that group members may be able to care for one another.

Finally, there is a Closing Reflection at the end of the Discussion Guides intended for individual and/or group use.

Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or Katie Edwardson if you have questions or would like to share a story from your group!



I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Week 1: March 7, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 104:24-32 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

What is one thing that is "life-giving" to you?

DISCUSSION

1. Jesus' I AM statements will make more sense when we consider them both in their immediate context in John and in the larger context of the biblical story. Begin by briefly reviewing the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-15) and the Israelites eating manna from heaven (Exodus 16:11-18).

-How might these miracles relate to Jesus being the Bread of Life?

2. Read John 6:25-40.

-Does Jesus give the crowd what they expect?

-Have you ever "looked for signs" or "worked for food that spoils"?

-What does Jesus teach about the Father's will?

3. When has God provided for you physically and/or spiritually?

4. Read John 6:48-58.

-What does it mean to eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood (v. 53-56)?

-What does Jesus promise those who do?

-How would you answer the crowd's question in verse 52?

5. What does Jesus invite His followers to do in this passage? How might it look for us to reflect His image as the Bread of Life?

6. How can you feed on Jesus every day? Is there anything you'd like to commit to this week, or that your group can commit to together?

PRACTICE

This week, meditate on Jesus as the Bread of Life as you bake a loaf of bread or slowly eat a slice.

PRAYER



THE GREAT I AM

Week 2: March 14, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 97:1-6 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

What title or role that you've held are you most proud of?

DISCUSSION

1. Read Exodus 3:1-6, 13-17.

- How does God identify Himself in this passage?
- What does the name "I AM" suggest about God?

2. Read John 8:48-59.

- What does Jesus say about Himself in this passage?
- How do the Jews respond to Jesus' claims?

3. Do you believe Jesus' claim to be God is true?

- Why or why not?
- What are the implications of Jesus' divinity for our world? For you personally?

4. When have Jesus' claims been challenging or disruptive in your life?

5. How do you respond to the idea that God would reveal Himself, not only in the sharing of His name, but also in the sharing of Himself through Jesus?

6. Is there a way you can honor Jesus as God this week, or share Him with others?

PRACTICE

Read this list of some of God's names listed in scripture. If there is a particular name you are drawn to, try praying to God using that name.

PRAYER



I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Week 3: March 21, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 100 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

If you could have any job for one day, what job would you choose?

DISCUSSION

1. What do you think a day in the life of a shepherd might be like?

2. Read John 10:11-18.

- How is a shepherd different from a "hired hand"?
- What might Jesus have meant by "other sheep" (v. 16)?
- Why were these words shocking to Jesus' audience (v. 19-21)?
- Is there anything or anyone you're willing to lay down your life for?

3. How do you feel about being described as a sheep?

4. Read Ezekiel 34:11-16.

- What does this prophecy tell us about Jesus as our shepherd?
- Which sheep do you most identify with in v. 16?
- Do you know any lost or injured sheep who Jesus might be calling you to care for?

5. Read Psalm 23.

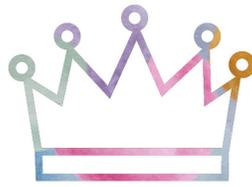
- What stands out to you in this familiar passage today? Where do you sense Jesus' invitation?
- How does the image of sheep following their shepherd compare to other common understandings of religion or ways of relating to God?

6. How can you follow the Good Shepherd more closely this week?

PRACTICE

Read Luke 15:3-7. Reflect on Jesus leaving the ninety-nine to go after you and rejoicing when you were found.

PRAYER



I AM THE KING OF KINGS

Week 4: March 28, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 47 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

Have you ever seen/met a celebrity or person of influence?

DISCUSSION

1. Read Matthew 21:1-11.

- What does this passage tell us about Jesus?
- Who did the Jews think Jesus was?
- How would you greet Jesus if you were welcoming Him into your city?

2. Read Psalm 72.

- What were the Jews expecting the King and His Kingdom to be like?
- How does Jesus fulfill Jewish expectations? How might He have looked different than they expected?
- How does His power generally differ from power in this world?

3. Respond to the quote below from Scot McKnight. In what ways did the Kingdom of God arrive with Jesus? In what ways are we still waiting for it?

"From the promises to Abraham of a land and a people and kings, to God's promise to David for an eternal king and kingdom, right on through the prophetic visions of shalom and justice and heartfelt Torah observance, all of this and more, Jesus balled up into the word kingdom and said, 'Get ready, it's almost here. In fact, in some ways it is already here.'"³

4. As you've gotten to know Jesus or learned more about Him in this series, is He what you expected? What has surprised you about Jesus?

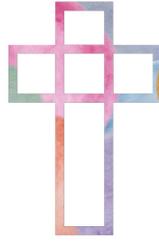
5. How open are you to the reign of Jesus over your life? What can you do this week to submit to Jesus as King of Kings?

PRACTICE

Watch a video of a coronation ceremony (such as Queen Elizabeth II's [here](#)) and think about Jesus' place as the King of Kings. Read John 18-19, and consider attending a Good Friday service to help you reflect on Jesus' crucifixion this week.

PRAYER

³ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 96.



I AM THE RESURRECTION

Week 5: April 4, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 118:22-29 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

How do you celebrate the big moments in life?

DISCUSSION

1. Read John 11:1-7, 17-27.

- Why didn't Jesus go to see Lazarus?
- What does Jesus mean when He calls Himself "the Resurrection" (v. 25-26)?
- Do you believe this about Jesus?

2. Read John 11:32-44.

- What is the significance of Jesus' tears (v. 35)?
- Why does Jesus pray before raising Lazarus (v. 42)?
- What does this passage reveal about Jesus?

3. Read Luke 24:1-12.

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- Who do you most identify with: the women, disciples, or Peter?

4. What does Easter mean to you?

- What hope does Jesus as the Resurrection give you for the future?
- What hope does Jesus as the Resurrection give you now?

5. How can you join Jesus' work of bringing something dead to life this week? Is there something that needs to die in you that you might walk in the new life He offers?

PRACTICE

Enjoy a special meal to celebrate the hope and joy of Easter. Reflect on or talk with your feasting companions about the difference that the Resurrection makes in your lives.

PRAYER



I AM THE GATE

Week 6: April 11, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Ephesians 1:3-10 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

What are you most grateful for today?

DISCUSSION

1. Read John 10:1-10.

- Compare the shepherd to the thieves and strangers Jesus mentions.
- What does Jesus claim is His purpose in coming?
- What does "life to the full" look like? Are you walking in it?

2. Read this explanation of the change in metaphor in verse seven:

"When the sheep returned to the fold at night after a day of grazing, the shepherd stood in the doorway of the pen and inspected each one as it entered. He anointed any who were scratched or wounded and gave water to those who were thirsty. After all the sheep had been counted and brought into the pen, the shepherd lay down across the doorway so that no intruder—human being or beast—could enter without his knowledge. The shepherd became the door, the sole determiner of who entered the fold and who was excluded."⁴

- Which of the shepherd's responsibilities stands out to you?
- How does this description of the shepherd's role enrich your understanding of Jesus?

3. Have you ever tried to attain "life to the full" by another way than through the gate of Jesus?

4. Read Matthew 7:13-14.

- How is Jesus using the concept of a "gate" here?
- Why do so many choose "the road that leads to destruction"?
- Which road are you on? What might keep you from following "the road that leads to life"?

5. How would you characterize where you are spiritually, drawing from the shepherding imagery Jesus uses in John 10:1-10? For example, have you entered through the Gate? Do you know the Shepherd's voice? Have you found life to the full in Jesus?

PRACTICE

Journal, pray, or talk to a mature believer more about your answer to question 5 above. Consider signing up for a [Steps to Discover Life with God group](#) or a [Spiritual Check-In](#).

PRAYER

⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, "John," from *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume 2: New Testament*, edited by Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 330.



I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Week 7: April 18, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 1 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

What is one memorable walk you've taken?

DISCUSSION

1. Read John 14:5-7.

- What does this passage reveal about Jesus?
- How is Jesus the "way" to the Father?
- Do you relate to Thomas' question (v. 5)?

2. How does Jesus' identity as the Way, the Truth, and the Life relate to:

- Religiosity (attempts to earn our way to God, especially through good works)?
- Religious Pluralism (accepts many religions as valid with multiple paths to God/gods)?

3. How do you respond to the exclusivity of the claim in verse six?

- Do you think this idea is welcome or offensive in our society?
- Is Jesus' claim good news for you? Why or why not?

4. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6.

- What does this passage tell us about God?
- If Jesus is the "one mediator between God and mankind," how does that affect how you perceive and talk about your faith?

5. Is there something God is calling you to do this week in response to what you're learning?

PRACTICE

Take a walk around your neighborhood. Meditate on Jesus as the Way, as you pray for your neighbors and others you know to put their trust in Him.



I AM THE TRUE VINE

Week 8: April 25, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Ephesians 3:14-19 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

Do you enjoy gardening? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION

1. Read John 15:1-11.

- What does Jesus say about His followers ("the branches") in this passage?
- What does it mean to remain in Jesus (v. 4) and in His love (v. 9)?

2. What does it mean to bear fruit (v. 8)?

- How would you characterize your fruitfulness in this season?
- Have you ever receiving "pruning" to be more fruitful (v. 2)? What was that like?

3. How do you respond to the idea that "apart from [Jesus] you can do nothing"(v.5)?

4. Read John 15:12-17.

- What example of love does Jesus set for His followers?
- What does loving one another have to do with the vine metaphor?
- Is there someone God is calling you to love, out of the abundance of love you've received from Him?

5. How can you order your life this week to stay connected to the True Vine?

PRACTICE

Spend some time in a garden or greenhouse this week. Imagine walking with Jesus as you notice how things grow.

PRAYER



I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Week 9: May 2, 2021

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 27:1-6 aloud. Take a moment to reflect on God's Word and center in Him.

FELLOWSHIP

Which of the I AM statements of Jesus have been most impactful to you?

DISCUSSION

1. Imagine life in Jesus' day before electricity was discovered. How might His audience have thought about light and darkness differently than we do?

2. Read John 8:12; 9:1-7. Then read Isaiah 42:5-9.

- Where do you notice light and darkness?
- What do these passages tell us about Jesus?
- When has God healed you of spiritual blindness, or brought you from darkness to light?

3. Jesus spoke these words during the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2). Read the description below of the Illumination of the Temple Ceremony traditionally included in this festival. How does this affect your understanding of Jesus as the Light of the World?

"When the Temple was still standing, great pillars like candelabra were erected and illumined in the Court of Women... Because the Temple stood atop a hill, the blazing candles illuminated the city below, so that the denizens of Israel could see from afar. This glorious blaze of fire recalled to Israelites God's Shekinah, the pillar of fire by day and smoke by night that accompanied them throughout their wanderings in the wilderness. Men of great skill danced bearing torches (one, Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel, is said to have juggled eight at a time) while the Levite orchestra played on. The Talmud says of the Temple illumination that accompanied the water-drawing ceremony, 'He who has not beheld this celebration has never seen joy in his life.'"⁵

4. Read Ephesians 5:8-14.

- How do light and darkness function in this passage?
- What does it mean to "live as children of light" (v.8)?

5. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

- What is the correlation between our deeds and our witness?
- How can you reflect the light of Jesus this week?

PRACTICE

This week, sit in darkness, and then light a single candle as you contemplate Jesus as the Light of the World.

PRAYER

⁵"Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles," <https://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/jewish-holidays/sukkot/>.

CLOSING REFLECTION

1. What is one thing you want to remember from this study?

2. Is there an I AM statement that you would like to think about more in the next month?

3. How has your knowledge or love of Jesus grown?

4. How have you grown to be more like Jesus?

5. Do you sense any invitation from God as you finish this study?

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