

HIS
PLAN
OUR
PURPOSE

IS THERE MORE?

Understanding the Storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation

THE STORY OF **CHRIST: IN HIS OWN WORDS**

TEACHER GUIDE

28
nineteen[™]

THE WHOLE STORY

Warren Wiersbe writes, “When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.”



THE STORY OF **GRACE**

> *January*



THE STORY OF **DELIVERANCE**

> *February*



THE STORY OF **PROMISE**

> *March*



THE STORY OF **FAITH**

> *April*



THE STORY OF **RENEWAL**

> *May*



THE STORY OF **PURPOSE**

> *June, July + August*

FEATURED



THE STORY OF **CHRIST: IN HIS OWN WORDS**

> *August + September*



THE STORY OF **POWER**

> *October*



THE STORY OF **CHANGE**

> *November*



THE STORY OF **HEAVEN**

> *December*

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IS THERE MORE?



JESUS TELLS US
EXACTLY WHO HE IS
IN HIS WORD.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

In Matthew 16:13-20, as Jesus and His disciples are traveling on foot, He asks them an important question: *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* They respond with a few different answers and then He gets more direct, asking *“But you, who do you say that I am?”* How we answer this question affects how we will answer every other question asked in life. Fortunately, Jesus tells us exactly who He is in His Word. Over the next seven weeks, we will study who Jesus says He is by looking at His *I AM* statements in the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John is unique when compared to the other three synoptic gospels with approximately 90 percent of the writings being exclusive to this book. John uses the word “believe” over 98 times while never using the noun “faith” once.¹ In fact, John tells the reader exactly why he wrote this gospel, in John 20:31, *“but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John begins his gospel with the first three words we find in the book of Genesis, *“In the beginning.”* John bypasses the genealogy of Jesus, going back to the very beginning of Creation.

JOHN 1:1-2 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.*

John immediately introduces Jesus as the Word, who was not only with God but was God. He goes on to say in verse 14, *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”* God became flesh and was named Jesus. The Word began to speak. John captures the life, ministry, heart, and challenges of Jesus in a way that seems to whisper at times allowing the reader to be up close and personal on this journey.

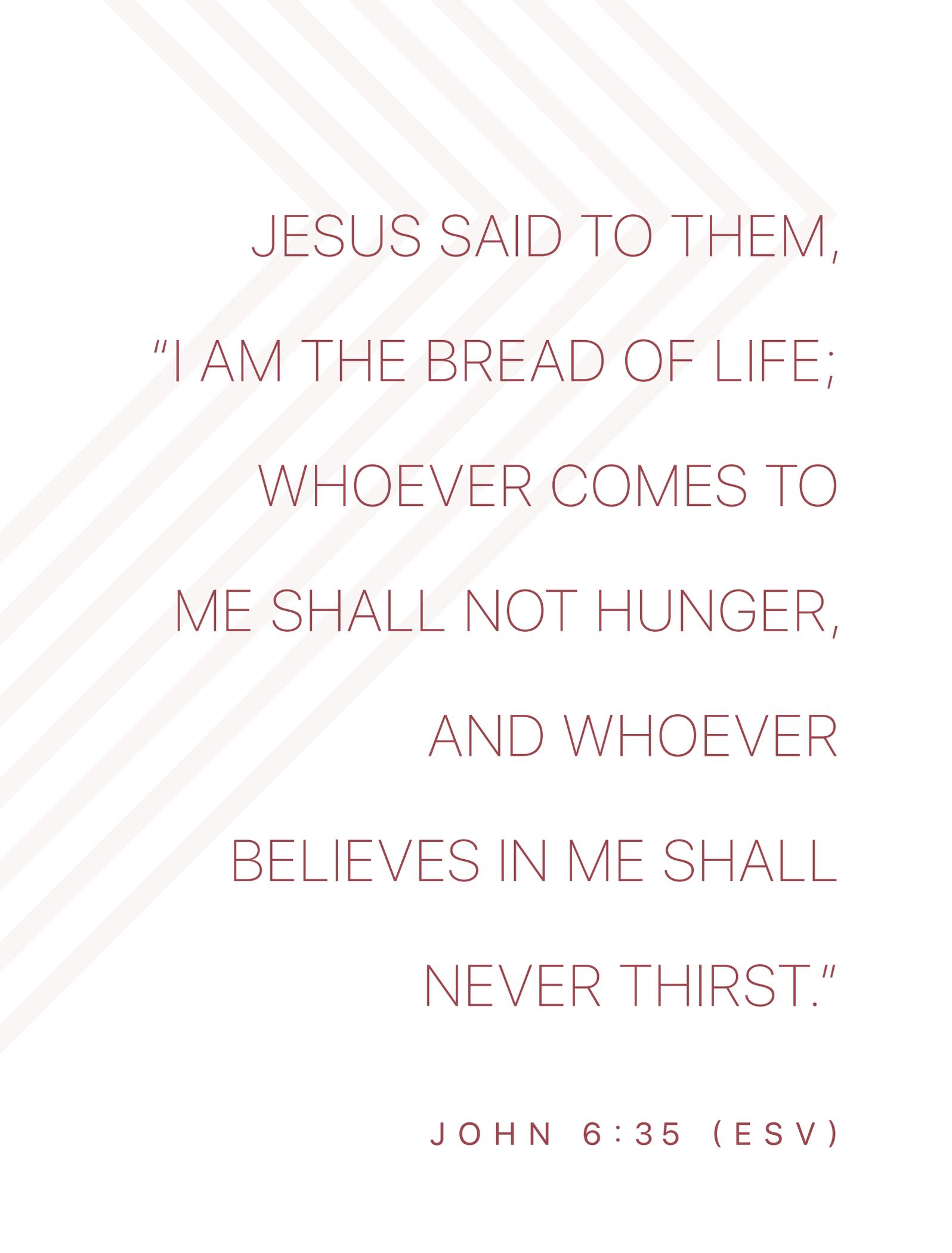
The Gospel of John shows us the divinity of Christ as well as the person of Christ. Whereas the other gospel writers record 20+ miracles each, John only records seven, which he refers to as “signs.” This compliments the seven *I AM* statements which we will study in the coming weeks. The miracles are powerful and show the divinity of Christ without a doubt. But it is the words of Jesus, specifically the *I AM* statements that give us life and hope. Jesus in the present tense reminds us that our Lord and Savior is still alive. Jesus does not say *I Was*, He says with confidence and authority, *I AM*. These seven statements reveal the depth of who Jesus is, the love Jesus has, and the relationship Jesus desires with us.

Join us for this life-changing study of the Word who became flesh, the great *I AM*.

This is the Story of Christ: In His Own Words

Aug 15/16	I AM the Bread of Life - John 6:35
Aug 22/23	I AM the Light of the World - John 8:12
Aug 29/30	I AM the Door - John 10:9
Sept 5/6	I AM the Good Shepherd - John 10:11
Sept 12/13	I AM the Resurrection and the Life - John 11:25-26
Sept 19/20	I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life - John 14:6
Sept 26/27	I AM the Vine - John 15:5

¹ soniclight.org/john



JESUS SAID TO THEM,
"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE;
WHOEVER COMES TO
ME SHALL NOT HUNGER,
AND WHOEVER
BELIEVES IN ME SHALL
NEVER THIRST."

J O H N 6 : 3 5 (E S V)

I AM

THE BREAD OF LIFE

DATE

August 15 & 16

WEEK

1 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 6

KEY VERSE

John 6:35

SETTING THE STAGE

Jesus performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 men, plus women and children, at the beginning of John 6. This miracle is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels other than the resurrection. John is the only gospel who gives an interpretation of the miracle in any form. By the time Jesus is in front of this crowd of people, His disciples had already seen Him perform miracles that changed people's lives in big and small ways. The disciples had already been exposed to the teachings of Jesus that were words from heaven. The disciples had seen Jesus up close and personal like no one else. They had seen the impossible become possible.

However in this setting, the stage was different. There was not a specific individual that had a need such as a man who could not walk or a woman who was hemorrhaging. There was a gathering of people that was enormous when adding together the men, women, and children. It could be argued there were easily 10,000-15,000 people and they all had the same need at the same time. Feeding these people would be impossible.

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. Consider Your Perishables
2. See the Imperishable
3. Consume The Bread of Life, Be Filled

THINGS TO KNOW

- There are two words for "life" in Greek: "*bios*" and "*zoe*." "*Bios*" refers to physical existence. "*Zoe*" refers to the quality of life.
- John uses the word "*zoe*" 36 times, which is more than the other three gospels combined. It is used 11 times in this chapter alone.
- Whenever Jesus speaks about life in this passage, He uses "*zoe*."

I AM

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Setting the Stage, continued >

Jesus was in the impossible business. Jesus, the Son of God, the One the prophets had foretold was in the business of making the impossible possible. Though a different context, the truth remains when Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, “*And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*” The disciples would be asked to participate in this miracle of feeding thousands on the side of a hill, even in the midst of their disbelief. Andrew gathered the small amount of fish and loaves from a boy willing to surrender what he had to Jesus. The other disciples were asked to pass around the food that miraculously kept coming to the masses of people. Then the impossible appeared to become more impossible. There were leftovers! The people were able to eat as much as they wanted and there were still 12 baskets of leftovers.

The thousands of people who were hungry had been fed by the Son of God, the Messiah. It was following this scene that Jesus proclaims His first *I Am* statement. And as was often the case, Jesus used something contextually to magnify the truth and allow it to become accessible. When Jesus says, “*I am the bread of life*” He is not limiting Himself to satisfying a physical hunger, but He is expanding the meaning to satisfy a spiritual hunger.

Introduction

Have you ever heard the saying, “You are what you eat?” This is a proverbial phrase in our culture that helps us consider the foods we are consuming. What the phrase does not suggest is that if you eat a hamburger, then you will slowly turn into a hamburger. Or, if you eat a salad, then your skin will gradually turn into a leafy-green shade. Rather, it suggests that your physical health is directly connected to the foods that you eat regularly.

To be sure, this saying is also overly-simplistic, as people are much more than what they eat. The Bible makes it clear that we are not defined by our bodies, nor is our physical health the barometer of our dignity and significance. However, this saying about the connection between physical health and what we eat does parallel a deeper, biblical truth: your spiritual health is inextricably connected to what you feed your soul. This is an idea that Jesus explicitly speaks about in John 6 when He refers to Himself as “*the bread of life*” (John 6:35). Jesus is driving home the connection that in terms of the soul, **who we are** is directly connected to **what we eat**. Truly, our spiritual diet is a great indicator of who we are and the greatest catalyst for who we are becoming.



1. CONSIDER YOUR PERISHABLES

Whenever you go to a grocery store, you really only have the option of choosing between two different types of foods: perishable foods and imperishable foods. Perishable foods consist of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, bread, meat, milk, yogurt, eggs; they are foods that will spoil or **perish** either quickly or eventually. Imperishable foods, on the other hand, consist of nuts and seeds, dried fruits and vegetables, canned foods, frozen meats, etc.; these foods can be kept for an extended amount of time without spoiling, **imperishable** over time.

Whenever a hurricane or pandemic sweeps across the city, people immediately rush to the grocery store, in search of the imperishable food. Why? Because they want to ensure themselves a stockpile of provision that will outlast the severity of circumstances around them. You want the imperishable food because you know it will last. There is security, stability, and longevity in imperishable foods because you know its sustenance will be available to you—in and out of season.

In John 6, Jesus takes this familiar, earthly concept of perishable/imperishable food for physical health and uses it to draw parallels about perishable/imperishable food for spiritual health. In fact, what is interesting is that Jesus sets up this entire conversation immediately after He miraculously feeds 5,000+ people with **perishable** food. And not surprisingly, the people come back to Him wanting more food. But Jesus' answer is both sharp yet surprising:

JOHN 6:25-26 *When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” (ESV)*

Jesus confronts them and says that they are not seeking Him for who He is to them, but for what He can give to them and do for them. How often do we do the same? Jesus is telling them that true satisfaction is not found by something He gives to us, but in who He is to us.

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In other words, the miracle for the stomach and their physical sustenance was designed to move them to consider their soul and their spiritual sustenance. Jesus' miracle of physical provision actually served to diagnose the problem of their notion of spiritual provision. Their endless quest for physical sustenance mirrors their endless quest for spiritual sustenance. And what they eat will show who they are. Jesus continues and says,

JOHN 6:27 *“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on Him God the Father has set His seal.”*

Jesus is saying that it is in the human condition to look for what will sustain us and give us life. And like a grocery store, there are only two options: perishable food for the soul and imperishable food for the soul. The question is not, therefore, **whether** you have sustenance, but **what** is your sustenance.

The Greek word Jesus uses for “life” is the word, “*zoe*,” which refers to quality of life both essential and ethical.¹ It does not communicate merely existing, but living life to the fullest. Jesus is essentially making the distinction that, similar to our two options in the grocery store of perishable and imperishable, there are only two options of food for the soul: perishable food that does not lead to “*zoe*,” and imperishable food that does lead to “*zoe*.”

¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

We are all seeking to find true sustenance for the soul somewhere: what we believe will finally make us feel significant; what we believe will finally make us feel secure; what we believe will finally make life as grand as it ought to be. What is that for you? What is that “thing” that you are endlessly working for and incessantly feeding upon in order to experience life to the full, *zoe* life?

- Job
- Relationships
- Approval of others
- Financial Security
- “Stuff” like a new car, new house, new clothes
- Physical appearance
- Alcohol or any other substance

We believe, though incorrectly, that consuming these types of “bread” will release energy and revitalization into our souls that we desperately need. But Jesus is saying that we should not see these things as sustenance for the soul because they will spoil. This means, each time, we will need more and more of it to get “the high.” We will keep chasing it over-and-over again because it will satisfy us only for a while. In other words, its effect upon us and the life it gives to us is **perishable** because it is perishable itself. Upon consuming it, the energy it imparts to us fulfills for a moment but perishes for a season. It is not “*zoe*” life because it demands lasting, ongoing work for earthly food and therefore perishable, finite fulfillment.

2. SEE THE IMPERISHABLE

This is why we need an imperishable food for the soul, to experience an eternal fulfillment for life. *Zoe* life is one that gives eternal, ongoing fulfillment because it comes from a heavenly source and it is not dependent upon our earthly, perishable work.

JOHN 6:28-29 *Then they said to Him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”*

²⁹ *Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (ESV)*

The immediate question the crowd asks is “what do we have to do?” They are thinking there must be some sort of work and effort involved to be right with God. They fixate on the word “work.” According to their works-righteousness belief system, they must find and perform the work that God requires.²

They were looking at the eternal while grasping at the finite. There is nothing but emptiness and hunger waiting for those who grasp for the finite.

For this crowd, it was not making sense. They could not grasp the fact that they did not have to do some sort of tangible, laborious work to find favor with God. They were looking at the eternal while grasping at the finite. There is nothing but emptiness and hunger waiting for those who grasp for the finite.

Jesus simply proclaimed to them that all they had to do was believe. John uses the word “believe” 98 times in his gospel, more than any other writer in the New Testament. In fact, John’s purpose for writing this gospel and relating these stories of Jesus was so that the readers would believe (John 20:30-31). The Greek word “*pisteuo*” is translated “believe.” It means to “think to be true/to be persuaded of/place confidence in.”³ The people had heard the teachings of Jesus and seen the miracles of Jesus up close and personal, yet still did not believe.

² Michael Card, *John the Gospel of Wisdom*, IVP Books; Downers Grove, IL; 2014, p. 91.

³ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

When Jesus proclaimed the simple truth of believing, they responded with yet another question.

JOHN 6:30 *So they said to Him, “Then what sign do You do, that we may see and believe You? What work do you perform?” (ESV)*

They had just participated in one of the greatest miracles of Jesus, the only one recorded in all four gospels. Jesus had fed over 5,000 men, plus women and children, with a basket of fish and barley loaves. And now they dare to ask, “*what sign do You do, that we may see and believe You?*” This question is the epitome of either arrogance or ignorance, sometimes there is a fine line between the two. So often we do the exact same thing, asking for something more recent; more tangible; more significant.

We often forget that God does the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary. It may appear to be an ordinary day, but it is a miraculous day of life. The sun came up the way God miraculously designed. The balance of oxygen in the air allows us to take the breaths we need to live, just the way God miraculously designed. Gravity keeping our feet on the ground takes place because of God’s miraculous design. What we have taken for granted as being ordinary are the extraordinary miracles of God we happen to experience on a daily basis. But we still want more, just like these people dialoguing with Jesus.

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The next verse (31) becomes a point of reference for Jesus in case He was “unaware” of what took place in the days of Moses with manna from heaven. Yet, another showing of their arrogance or ignorance.

JOHN 6:31 *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.” (ESV)*

This particular portion of the chapter is one of the longest dialogues Jesus has with any crowd of people beyond His disciples in all of Scripture.

Jesus responds to them as the dialogue continues,

JOHN 6:32-33 *Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (ESV)*

In a very subtle way, Jesus tells them something astonishing. He uses the term, “*My Father.*” In this dialogue, unbeknownst to this group of people, they have been conversing with the Son of God. Jesus shares this information in the context of His response concerning the manna “His Father” provided Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. It was the “bread of heaven” that was designed to provide daily nutrition. The manna from heaven was not imperishable; it was perishable. The manna from heaven had a one-day shelf life, except on day six of each week (see Exodus 16:4-5).

The other subtle distinction between the manna in the days of Moses and what was transpiring amid this dialogue was the realization of the **provider** and the **provision**, “*my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*” No longer do the people have to settle for the perishable, they can have the sustenance of the imperishable. This bread of heaven which Jesus speaks, gives “*zoe*” life to the world. It comes down to a matter of belief between the tangible temporary bread versus the intangible eternal bread from heaven.

Jesus is telling the crowd that “*zoe*” life is found in Him because God sent Him from heaven to be our provision, just like God sent manna from heaven to be provision for the Israelites. The notion

that something is “from heaven” denotes a sense of life, wholeness, eternity, and infinitude—it is imperishable, it will not spoil. These words captured their attention.

JOHN 6:34-35 *They said to Him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.” (ESV)*

Jesus is essentially teaching the crowds of people, “Unless I am your spiritual sustenance—whom you look to for ultimate satisfaction, security, and significance for your life—you will look to something else. And it will spoil.”

Interestingly, this “imperishable bread” is not a principle, practice, or performance; it is a person. It means our spiritual sustenance is located in the context of a relationship to another person, namely God Himself through Jesus Christ.

This form of sustenance is drastically different from every other religion or way of life in the world. If romance is your “bread,” then you will relate to it in terms of experience and emotions and actions, which will inevitably wear off. If gaining the approval of people is your “bread,” then you will relate to it in terms of appeasing and working and networking. If financial security is your “bread,” then you will relate to it in terms of working and accumulating more and more. All these things are things, and you will use people to get these things. This is a hamster wheel of life. It is a cycle of constant doing rather than being. It is works-based and more about the religion than a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

But what is different with the food that endures to eternal life? Jesus answers it in the following response:

JOHN 6:47-51 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.⁴⁸ I am the bread of life.⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven... (ESV)*

This “bread” is not about doing and working; it is about believing, trusting, and dependency. It means this “zoe bread” is accessible to anyone, indiscriminately and impartially available to everyone, no matter their moral performance, background, or ability. All other “breads” must be labored for in order to receive. And therefore, the result is that only the most moral or the most talented or the most intelligent or the strongest will attain it—and yet, even they will realize it will spoil. This “zoe bread”—Jesus Christ Himself—is offered to everyone but only those who know they are weak and hungry will believe and receive Him. It is a gift of grace, received by faith, not a reward achieved by works—so that no one can boast, except in Christ. (see Ephesians 2:8-9)

Jesus Christ is the imperishable “bread” and sustenance for the soul because your soul finally finds for what it is designed. Our infinite, eternal soul requires an infinite, eternal source that will not change or flux in circumstances. All other “bread” will perish and will not sustain you when you consume it. Only Jesus Christ is the “bread” who will sustain you towards eternal life, and life to the full.

The crowd could not quite grasp the truth of the analogy. They struggled with this concept.

JOHN 6:52 *Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”*

Honestly, it is a great question. How does this happen exactly? What does it mean to “feed” on Jesus, as one consumes bread? How is the “energy” of this bread, the imperishable bread, the Bread of Life, released into you?

3. CONSUME THE BREAD OF LIFE, BE FILLED

Jesus' analogy of bread highlights a parallel between one's physical and spiritual sustenance, but the analogy of bread also extends to physical and spiritual consumption as well. For example, imagine a piece of bread. It does nothing for you unless it is broken, eaten, and consumed. You can smell it. You can even lick it. You can buy it. You can talk about it. You can take an aesthetic picture of it and post it on social media. But as long as the bread remains intact, then it cannot nourish you. All the energy and nutrients of the bread mean nothing if it is not taken, broken, and devoured. And quite profoundly, Jesus says that the same is true of Himself, too.⁴

JOHN 6:53 *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (ESV)*

Jesus did not try to clarify their misconceptions. Their problem was not intellectual. Instead, He intensified their confusion by a heavier use of imagery.⁵ Though the words and phrases used by Jesus sound strange on the surface, Jesus is declaring the gospel message. He is painting a graphic illustration of the Lord's Supper which would become an ordinance of the church as a way to remember the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. Later in verse 63 He made it clear that His language was figurative and not literal.⁶ Jesus would be broken instead of us so that we could be made whole. He would die the death that we deserved to die because of sin, and yet, by His stripes, we could be healed (see Isaiah 53:5).

It is not a coincidence that Jesus is teaching this lesson in the synagogue during Passover (see John 6:59). At this time, the Jewish community would have been specifically looking back over the Scripture pertaining to the exodus out of Egypt and into the wilderness, which entailed God feeding the Israelites with manna from heaven.⁷ Thus, in doing so, Jesus is giving them a lens for understanding and interpreting the Old Testament in light of Himself. As bread symbolized God's presence, sustenance, and provision, Jesus was now saying something grand in connection to these things: "I AM this bread."

Salvation is possible because Jesus' body, like bread, was broken apart for us. And we access this salvation by believing and receiving His sacrifice as our righteousness before God. In this sense, we are eternally nourished. In fact, the word Jesus uses for "eat" is the Greek aorist tense—indicating that "eat" is a singular event, a decision to believe and appropriate the gift of eternal life.⁸

However, we can appropriate this "zoe" life not just for eternity, but in our day-to-day living by trusting and depending on Him in our daily situations as well. His body and blood give us more significance, security, and satisfaction than any other "breads" the world can offer. It is our livelihood for today's worries, concerns, and grievances. Applying the gospel of who Jesus is and what He has done for us infuses us with spiritual vitality each day, which will nourish us because it is imperishable.

This is why we take communion: eating the bread and drinking the grape juice illustrates symbolically what it means to feast our deepest needs and longings upon the finished work of Christ for our spiritual nourishment, sustenance, and vitality. Communion is a picture of the gospel pouring into us vigor and hope not only for eternity but for today.

⁴ Timothy Keller, "The Bread of Heaven" sermon from the series, The Gospel of John, Part 1 given at Redeemer Church in New York City, NY on April 14, 1991.

⁵ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI; 2010, p. 146.

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 251.

⁷ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 201.

⁸ *Ibid.*

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Consider how you are living your life. What is your true source of sustenance, for your sense of significance, security, and satisfaction? What is it, that if you did not have it on a regular basis would cause life to feel meaningless and empty? What is it in your life that contributes to your happiness more than anything else? For many of us there are two responses: 1) the church response and 2) the honest response. Perhaps it is time to focus on the latter, simply the honest response. What you are hoping in deeply and holding onto tightly is what you are feeding upon the most consistently. Are you satisfied?

Remember, only in Jesus is there “*zoe*,” a true quality of living and satisfaction—even in the valleys and storms—because only He can satisfy the deep needs of your soul. He gives full forgiveness, and no other bread does. He gives a new identity, and no other bread does. He loves you fully, aside from your performance. He arranges the events in your life with meaning and specificity, and no other bread offers you this kind of assurance and security.

The world is hungry and thirsty reaching out for the perishable. God’s plan is for us to reach out for the imperishable, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Heaven. Your eternal purpose begins when you personally eat the Bread of Life, broken for you, and find “*zoe*,” abundant life for the hereafter as well as the here and now.

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

DATE

August 22 & 23

WEEK

2 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 8:12-30

KEY VERSE

John 8:12

SETTING THE STAGE

To appreciate the words of Jesus in chapter 8, we must understand the context. In chapter 7 the Jewish people were celebrating one of their week-long feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles. One of the most jubilant feasts, it is filled with both celebration and remembrance, honoring God's provision and protection for the people of Israel during their 40 years wandering in the wilderness. For seven days of the feast, people live in temporary tent structures as they did in the wilderness during the time of Moses. The Lord Himself was present with the Israelites in the desert, in a tented temple called the Tabernacle. The feast also celebrates His presence as He tabernacles (dwells) with us. ¹

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place during the early fall in the harvest season. Harvest was another cause for celebration; honoring the Lord's provisions through their crops. Though this was a celebratory time for the people, it was a challenging time for Jesus. It was during this festival that the opposition began to grow and intensify towards Him and His ministry. However, this did not distract Jesus from His message. He used several observed rituals as teachable moments to talk about "living water" in chapter 7 and "light" in chapter 8.

Continued on page 15 >

LESSON OUTLINE

1. I Am
2. The Light of the World
3. Beyond the World

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Feast of Tabernacles was also known as the Feast of Booths. It was one of 3 major feasts for the Jewish people. The other two were Passover and Pentecost.
- In John 8 Jesus says in verse 32, *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."*

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Setting the Stage, continued >

A major feature of the Feast of Tabernacles was the lighting of giant lampstands (candelabras) outdoors in the women's court of the temple. The wicks were made from the priests' worn-out garments. The light illuminated the temple area and the people gathered to sing praises and dance. The light symbolized how God was with them in their wanderings in the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day which turned to fire at night. ²

It is believed that the glow from the lighted candelabras could be seen across the city. For many, it would bring a remembrance of Scripture such as Psalm 27:1, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation.*" Or perhaps, Psalm 119:105, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" It likely reminded them of these words found in Isaiah 60:1, "*Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*" Each evening of the seven nights of the Feast of Tabernacles the priests would light these giant candelabras penetrating the darkness with light. On the last evening they would blow out the candles, the light would be extinguished, and the darkness would return.

At the end of chapter 7, the festival is concluding, the lights have been extinguished. It is believed to be in this setting where Jesus says the second of the *I Am* statements found in John 8:12, "*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.*"

Introduction

In Genesis 1, we have the creation of the world when God created the heavens and the earth. And the very first words of creation spoken by God are found in Genesis 1:3, *Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light.* In the beginning, God spoke the world into existence. And "light" changed everything.

John begins his gospel with a parallel to Genesis 1 about creation. He introduces Jesus as the *Word* and the *Light*.

JOHN 1:1-5 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

John utilizes this metaphor of light and darkness throughout the pages of his gospel as he unveils the stories and truth of Jesus Christ. For instance, in John 3, half of the chapter is a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus which takes place in the darkness of night. It is during this dialogue that John 3:16 is spoken by Jesus Himself. The darkness is also referenced by Jesus in John 3:19,

¹ <https://www.wycliffe.org/feast/7-feasts-that-point-to-christ>

² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck general editors; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 1983; p. 303.



“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

Today we will be in John 8 with Jesus announcing the truth of this *Light*.

1. I AM

JOHN 8:12 *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*

The Feast of Tabernacles had just concluded which means that the giant lampstands that had been lighting the city from the temple court the past seven nights were extinguished. Jesus is speaking to the people who had been celebrating and remembering the presence and provision of God in the wilderness during the days of Moses.

Ironically, these people had just spent seven days and nights remembering, honoring, and celebrating the fact that God had tabernacled (i.e. dwelt) with His people during their darkest time of need as a nation. Yet, these people were face to face with the Son of God in their physical presence and ignored the truth looking them in the eye.

Jesus speaks, perhaps while looking around at the crowd of people, noticing they are functioning in their daily routines as if the feast had not happened; not unlike many of us the day after a holiday celebration. In this context, Jesus makes a proclamation that would be not only questionable to believe but could be interpreted as heresy. In fact, every time Jesus used the two words together, “I Am,” it could have easily been interpreted as heresy.

These two words, “I Am,” spoken together are holy. Ingrained in the minds of the Jews, the words, “I Am,” are exclusively used for the name and identity of God. From the Jewish perspective, the same God of Creation who said, “*Let there be light*” in Genesis 1:3 is the same God of Israel who told Moses in Exodus 3:14 “*I AM WHO I AM...Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’*” Throughout history, God’s people knew God, the one true God, Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be “I Am.”

Yet, Jesus uses those same two words seven specific times in the Gospel of John to make that connection with His Father. It was never by accident when Jesus used those two words, nor was it by coincidence. He spoke them knowing the holiness of those words. He chose to connect those words with a specific illustration as we saw last week when Jesus said, “*I Am the Bread of Life,*” following the feeding of the 5,000 men, plus women and children.

In this context, following a festival that literally and figuratively illuminated the city with giant lampstands from the courtyard of the temple, Jesus proclaims, “*I Am the Light of the world.*” It was unbridled truth that did not sit well with this particular audience.

They were religious people, active in worship, and following the Law of Moses. These are people who had participated in the Festival of Tabernacles. These were the faithful ones who would typically adhere to the teachings of the Rabbis and be influenced by the Pharisees, many were Pharisees themselves. They knew their Hebrew Bible, what we would refer to as the Old Testament. They knew the words of Moses and the prophets, the history of the judges and kings, the poetry of David and Solomon. These were not scripturally ignorant people.

Jesus makes a proclamation that would be not only questionable to believe but could be interpreted as heresy. In fact, every time Jesus used the two words together, “I Am,” it could have easily been interpreted as heresy.

However, they were religious people experiencing the lights of the festival, though living in spiritual darkness. The penetrating words of Jesus caught them by surprise because, in appearance, He was flesh and blood. God did not appear in flesh and blood even to Moses, but rather in a burning bush that was not consumed by fire. These people could see, hear, and touch Jesus. He appeared to be just a man with the audacity to use those two holy words in referring to Himself, “*I Am.*”

2. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

From the beginning of creation back in Genesis, God knew that light was necessary to overcome darkness. Darkness only exists with the absence of light. The only way someone can make a room dark is by doing one of three things; 1) turn a light off; 2) block out the light; or 3) choose not to turn a light on when it is already dark. Even darkness is at the mercy of light. Darkness itself has no power or authority. You cannot make a room darker by turning on the “dark.” Think about this: at night you are in your bedroom, the lights are out, the blinds are closed, and it is dark. But when the sun comes up and just barely comes through those closed blinds, it is less dark because the light has penetrated the darkness in the smallest of ways. Open the blinds fully and the light shines brightly into the room.

Jesus would utilize this metaphor several times in multiple settings explaining the need for light in a dark world. Whether it was a one-on-one dialogue with Nicodemus in the darkness of night, or a crowd of Pharisees the day following the Festival of Tabernacles, Jesus exposed the true light. The world was and is a dark place as people continue to reject Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

The Jews were confident in the knowledge that they were the people of God. Even before Moses, there was Abraham who had a covenant with God about a nation. This nation would be a chosen people, a holy nation (*Exodus 19:5-6*). God, *I AM*, was associated exclusively with the Jewish people. God was known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the heritage of the Israelites and no other nation. God had repeatedly commanded His people to not be drawn away from Him

by intermarrying, compromising, and working with the other nations who had false gods and idols.

So not only is Jesus testing the boundaries by using the two holy words, “*I Am;*” but Jesus is also claiming to be the *Light of the world*. The concept of God being “for the world” at that time was not only an unusual concept to them, it also seemed to be in sharp contrast to how God had moved in the Old Testament exclusively with the nation of Israel.³

Jesus is claiming to be *I Am*. Jesus is saying that He is the *Light*. Jesus is telling them that He is the *Light of the world*. That includes every person from every nation who speaks every language. This was a radical statement, yet consistent with the message of Christ. The most famous and beloved of verses, John 3:16 says, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*” This truth was mind-blowing for the Jews of the day. Jesus was saying those words to one of the top teachers of the Pharisees in the context of the darkness of the night.

John wanted to make sure the readers of this gospel understood the inclusivity of the message of Jesus Christ. John uses the word “world” 57 times in this gospel alone; it is only used 15 times in the other three synoptic gospels combined. John wanted the world to realize that God sent His

But from the beginning of creation back in Genesis, God knew that light was necessary to overcome darkness. Darkness only exists with the absence of light.

³ *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, Tyndale House 2001 p. 410.

Son because He loved the world. Jesus was the light **to the world**. Jesus was going to give His life for the world. Jesus offered His love and the gift of salvation to the world.

The Christian message has never been one of exclusivity in terms of not being for all people. Though Jesus is the only way **exclusively** to God and eternal life in heaven, (John 14:6) the salvation He provides and the light He shines is **inclusively** freely offered to the entire world.

Because of this truth, Jesus made the claim using the analogy of light. Jesus said, *“I am the Light of the world.”* It was an easy object lesson. Our world has one source of physical light, the sun. Even the brightness of the moon is completely dependent on the light from the sun. The sun provides light for all people of all backgrounds who speak all languages living in all nations of the world. There is no exclusivity to the light beaming down from the single source of the sun. The exclusivity of the single source does not diminish the inclusivity of light it provides. And for those who want to reject the light from the sun, they close doors, put up blinds and use darkening drapes in certain rooms. But none of those things actually stop the light shining from the sun. None of those actions cause the light from the sun not to be available to neighbors, friends, strangers in your neighborhood, and around the globe. It is an individual choice to reject the light of the sun. Just as it is an individual choice to reject or accept the light from God’s Son, *the Light of the world*.

The exclusivity of the single source does not diminish the inclusivity of light it provides.

The good news of the Gospel is that the life Jesus offers is for all people everywhere, regardless of age, race, finances, skill sets, language spoken, religious background, or lack thereof. And the purpose of the light is the same for every single person who chooses to let the Light in.

JOHN 8:12 *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*

Jesus implies a simple choice between two outcomes. A person can either walk in the darkness or have the Light of life. Notice that Jesus makes it clear that it is a free choice to follow Him. No one is forced to follow, nor is anyone prevented from following. However, the implication is also very clear; if one chooses not to follow Jesus, then the result would be walking in darkness. This statement is ultimately about abundant life, where the light covers the darkness.

3. BEYOND THE WORLD

The Pharisees respond to Jesus with the charge of false testimony. Jesus boldly replies:

JOHN 8:13-19 *So the Pharisees said to Him, “You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.”¹⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.¹⁵ You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. 16 But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.¹⁷ Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.¹⁸ I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”¹⁹ So they were saying to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.”*

Warren Wiersbe comments on these verses,

“The Pharisees were responding to this testimony of Jesus based on the law found in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15 as well as in Numbers 35:30, that the testimony of two men was required to validate a judgment. Jesus had those two testimonies: *He* gave witness and so did *His Father*. How tragic that these experts in the law did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them! They claimed to know the law of God, but they did not know the God of the law.”⁴

Jesus knew the truth for He was and is the Truth (John 14:6). Jesus also adamantly proclaims in the latter part of verse 14, *“for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.”* The Pharisees had no clue where Jesus had come from or where He was going. At best they would have thought of Joseph the carpenter who married Mary and raised Jesus. But the truth of this testimony was based on where Jesus truly came from and where He was truly going, His heavenly home.

Consider this description of the New Jerusalem found in Revelation 21 in view of the context of John 8:

REVELATION 21:22-23 *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

From the very first words spoken by God in Genesis 1:3, *“Let there be light”* to John 8 where Jesus says, *“I am the Light of the world”* to the description of heaven in Revelation 21, *“for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb,”* there has always been and will always be light. The temporary light we experience from the sun will be extinguished and no longer needed. The eternal light of heaven will be more magnificent than we can imagine. Notice the connection between God and His Son Jesus, the Lamb. Both are shining brightly. Jesus made it very clear to the Pharisees that He and His Father are connected.

JOHN 8:20-24 *These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.²¹ Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.”²² So the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’”²³ And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.²⁴ Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”*

Throughout the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus hints at the fact that He will be going away to a place that they would not be able to follow on their own. But He also makes it clear that they have a choice to believe, follow, and be forgiven. In verse 24 Jesus says, *“for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* Jesus has planted this seed of something more than what they can see tangibly. Jesus has clearly stated the radical truth, *“I am the Light of the world.”* Jesus has said that unless you believe you will die in your sins. These are words of hope to those who believe. These are words of judgment for those who choose not to believe.

JOHN 8:25-30 *So they were saying to Him, “Who are You?” Jesus said to them, “What have I been saying to you from the beginning?²⁶ I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.”²⁷ They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”³⁰ As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.*

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 257.

Their response is the exact question every person has to ask for themselves. *Who is Jesus?* This is the bottom line question of all questions. In these verses, Jesus again connects Himself with His Father. He alludes to the crucifixion in verse 28 which will be the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. But that sacrifice only makes a difference in your life if you believe in Jesus. And notice in verse 30 that is exactly what happens. The light came on, so to speak. We are not given a specific number of people, but many came to believe in Him.

***Who is Jesus?
The bottom line
question of
all questions.***

This dialogue with these Pharisees and perhaps others came after a weeklong feast and celebration remembering God's faithfulness to His people in the wilderness, reminding them of His presence by a pillar of fire which provided light. Now the Light of the World says, "*I am He.*" And just as in the beginning of creation as well as in the wilderness, light penetrates and transforms darkness.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

In our age of technology, we are very spoiled by the fact that light is so prevalent and available. Our smartphones can be adjusted to dim the brightness of the screen if it is too bright. There is a feature that literally turns the phone into a flashlight. Thanks to Thomas Edison most every home in the western world has electricity and light is available 24 hours a day. We drive cars with headlights to allow us to see along the dark roads at night. We even have the option to put our lights on timers to come on and go off at preset times.

And yet in a world filled with light, there is vast darkness. We are a culture that has turned its back on Judeo-Christian values. A society that has erased the boundaries and parameters set up for a biblical worldview. This is nothing new for our world.

JOHN 1:4-5 *In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

The darkness of our world does not comprehend or embrace the true Light. They are blindly satisfied with the imitation and temporary light. God's plan for our lives is to provide the eternal Light that transforms the darkness of our lives through His Son, the Light of the World. God's plan becomes our purpose as we walk in the light. As John says in his epistle,

1 JOHN 1:7 *but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

I AM THE DOOR; IF
ANYONE ENTERS
THROUGH ME, HE
WILL BE SAVED,
AND WILL GO IN
AND OUT AND
FIND PASTURE.

JOHN 10:9

I AM

THE DOOR

DATE

August 29 & 30

WEEK

3 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 9:13-10:10

KEY VERSE

John 10:9

SETTING THE STAGE

We have seen the progression of the *I Am* statements with *I Am the Bread of Life*, *I Am the Light of the World*. Jesus has always given very practical illustrations and comparisons for understanding the context of the situation.

Jesus has been teaching, preaching, and performing miracles throughout the region and beyond. His reputation has been established as one who cared not only about the masses, but also the individuals. In John 9, Jesus and His disciples are passing by and a blind man catches their attention. The disciples ask Jesus who had sinned, this man or his parents. This discourse allowed Jesus to enlighten and teach them, and ultimately to heal this blind man. John 9, is a transitional chapter that leads to the next two *I Am* statements found in John 10, which we will cover over the next two lessons.

Jesus heals a man who had been blind since birth. Jesus uses His spit and dirt to make mud, putting the mud on the man's eyes and telling him to go wash it off. It was an unusual thing to do and ask, yet it was an incredible miracle that took place. The man was able to see for the first time in his life and in telling his story speaks these amazing words in John 9:25b, *"...this one thing I do know that I once was blind, now I see."*

Continued on page 24 >

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Question (John 9:39-41)
2. The Teaching (John 10:1-6)
3. The Result: Salvation (John 10:7-10)

THINGS TO KNOW

- **Greek word Amen:** "*Amen*" at the beginning of discourse means "truly, surely, of truth." At the end of discourse it means, "so it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled." ¹ When used two times in a row, it is emphatic to call the attention of the listener.

I AM THE DOOR

Setting the Stage, continued >

Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath which meant the Jewish leaders of the day, the Pharisees, were once again not happy with Jesus. In response, Jesus paints a picture that would be very understandable in the first century, explaining the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Note that John 10:1 literally picks up where John 9:41 leaves off. In fact, if you have a “red letter” edition of the Bible you will notice that Jesus is speaking in John 9:41 and continues in John 10:1. That is important to remember because of the context of the situation.

We will pick up the lesson with the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees at the end of John chapter 9.

NOTE FOR TEACHERS ONLY: Please make sure you do not go beyond John 10:10 in this lesson. Next week’s lesson will pick up where this leaves off, as Jesus says, “*I am the Good Shepherd*” in John 10:11. You may consider coordinating with your co-teacher on these two lessons, *I Am the Door* and *I Am the Good Shepherd*.

1. THE QUESTION

In John chapter 9, Jesus has a rather combative moment with Jewish leaders known as Pharisees. Much of it centered around them questioning Jesus’ authority to heal the blind beggar, restoring his sight on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders were so hard-hearted, that they could not accept the fact that Jesus had the authority or ability to accomplish the miraculous, much less the audacity to do it on the Sabbath.

They began an investigation and alleged that the young man was not truly blind. That theory was exposed as wrong when they interrogated his parents and discovered he was indeed born with the disability (John 9:18-21). Since that did not work, they chose to intimidate the young man and demand him to renounce the power of Jesus. Amazingly, the healed man stands strong and invites the Pharisees to become disciples of Jesus alongside him! (John 9:27)

The Pharisees become furious and cast him out from the synagogue (John 9:34). This ban was far worse than it sounds. He would be kicked out, not only from a building but from Jewish life altogether.² Jesus heard about this fallout, so He came to find the dejected young man and engaged in a brief discussion with him. Jesus revealed His messianic identity as the “Son of Man” to the

¹ biblehub.com/greek

² Michael Card, *John the Gospel of Wisdom*, Inner Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2014, p. 121.



once blinded young man. At that moment, the ostracized Jew immediately began to worship Jesus, seeing clearly now both with his eyes and his heart. (John 9:35-38)

The Pharisees observed this happening and once again go on the offense against Jesus, with a surprising question.

JOHN 9:39-41 *And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”*

⁴⁰ *Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “We are not blind too, are we?”* ⁴¹ *Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”*

Remember, they recognized that Jesus did heal the man who had been blind since birth. They understood it was not just physical sight, but also spiritual sight, as the young man began to worship Jesus.

In this story, we are not told these are “blind Pharisees” so it is safe to say they can physically see; yet, they were moved to ask Jesus, “*We are not blind too, are we?*” It is a great question and a question we ought to ask ourselves.

The Pharisees were educated in the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The Pharisees were the most “religious” people in all of Israel, holding to the letter of the law in specific detail. These are the Jewish leaders to the Jewish people, and these are the ones asking, “are we missing something?”

- We are educated; but are we missing something?
- We are religious; but are we missing something?
- We observe the Sabbath unlike “some” people; but are we missing something?
- Are we blind too?

Notice the response of Jesus in verse 41.

JOHN 9:41 *Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”*

They had a sin of pride, a feeling that they did not need a Savior and Lord, not recognizing their own spiritual blindness. Jesus very simply tells them if you are asking the question, then the answer is “yes,” you are missing something.

This leads Jesus to turn His attention to the Jewish leaders in chapter 10. He knows they need to understand His true identity, so He tries to explain it in terms they can understand. And Jesus proceeds to say in John 10:1, “*Truly, Truly I say to you.*” Jesus in essence is saying, “Hear Ye, Hear Ye” or “Pay Attention, this is what you are missing.”

Jesus revealed His messianic identity as the “Son of Man” to the once blinded young man. At that moment, the ostracized Jew immediately began to worship Jesus, seeing clearly now both with his eyes and his heart. (John 9:35-38)

They had a sin of pride, a feeling that they did not need a Savior and Lord, not recognizing their own spiritual blindness.

2. THE TEACHING

JOHN 10:1-6 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.”² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.⁵ A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.*

Jesus tells them a story about sheep and a shepherd. Even though they were not shepherds themselves, as Pharisees they were professional religious people, they knew and understood the job of a shepherd. They understood the concept of a shepherd in ways that we do not. For many of us when we think of a shepherd we think of a drawing or a painting of a shepherd with a staff sitting on a rock with a lamb or a few sheep within sight, neatly groomed, hair in place, beard trimmed, clothing clean, and either smiling or looking contemplative.

In the first century, they knew differently. They knew that being a shepherd was not easy, not a path to financial independence, not contemplative, and definitely not clean. Shepherds lived the vast majority of their lives with the sheep, often weeks at a time. They smelled like sheep. They did not trim their beards or press their clothes. Their skin was not smooth, more than likely it resembled worn out, weathered leather. Their hands were probably callused and even scarred. It was a hard way to make a living. It was lonely. And yet it was vitally important to the economy.

The relationship between the sheep and the shepherd was unique because the sheep were not being raised for slaughter. The sheep were raised for their wool. Year after year, season after season they would be sheered, and the shepherd would take the wool to market. The shepherd and his sheep were together for years. There was a very real relationship between the shepherd and his sheep. The sheep were his source of income and each sheep was important for not only the

present season but also to build for the future. Therefore, he nurtured and protected each sheep for years, some say even decades. The shepherd would sacrifice his own comfort and even his own safety to provide a safe environment for the sheep to graze on the land and not be in danger.

John chapter 10 revolves around a metaphor that every listener would have been familiar with that even goes beyond the actual life and duties of a shepherd because of the secondary meaning. “Why? Because to the Jewish mind, a ‘shepherd’ was any kind of leader, spiritual or political. People looked at the king and prophets as shepherds. Israel was privileged to be ‘the flock of the Lord.’”³ Jesus uses this culturally relevant illustration to communicate His authority to the Israelites.

In the first six verses of John 10, Jesus focuses on a specific part of that illustration: the sheepfold. The sheepfold was an enclosure of some kind with only one entrance, often built with rocks, and it served to keep the sheep contained at night. After the shepherd took his sheep out to graze the fields, he would return them to the sheepfold for protection at night. Jesus mentions that thieves and robbers would try to come in and attack the sheep, but they always had to climb over a wall.

Now with that understanding of a shepherd, his sheep and the sheepfold, look at the words of Jesus again.

JOHN 10:1-2 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.”*

Jesus makes sure He has their attention with the phrase using the Greek words “Amen, Amen,” *“Truly, truly I say to you.”* Then He talks about the door into the fold of the sheep. There was always only one way into a sheepfold, and that was through one door. And that opening was not accessible to the general public, instead, it was guarded by a shepherd. In fact, it was common for the shepherd to lay down across the opening of his sheepfold at night to protect the flock from outside attackers.

³ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 263.

The shepherd would sacrifice his own comfort and even his own safety to provide a safe environment for the sheep to graze on the land and not be in danger.

The sheepfold was intended to be a place of security, where the sheep implicitly trust the shepherd. Jesus plants this seed of the “door,” which would protect the sheep and graciously allow the sheep to enter the sheepfold. This is contrasted with the thieves and robbers who bypass the door in order to ultimately harm the sheep, which will be developed later in these verses.

The sheepfold was intended to be a place of security, where the sheep implicitly trust the shepherd.

JOHN 10:3-6 *To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.*

The shepherd knew his sheep, and perhaps even named them like we would name our pets, knowing if one was lost or lagging behind. He would know when they were thirsty or hungry. And they would “*know his voice,*” the voice of their shepherd.

There was an amazing relationship between sheep and shepherds. When the door (the shepherd) would arrive at the sheepfold, he would begin calling for his sheep. His familiar, comforting voice would draw the sheep into his fold, where he planned to protect them and give them rest at night. When morning came, that “door” would rise up to call them out once again, leading them to nourishment at green pastures.

Now conceptually and intellectually the Pharisees knew all of this, they knew the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, but they did not have a clue to why Jesus was telling them this. They had asked, “Are we blind too?” as if they were missing something.

And Jesus starts talking about sheep and shepherds in answer to their question. They were not physically blind, but they were spiritually blind, they could not see what Jesus was trying to tell them.

3. THE RESULT: SALVATION

Jesus realized they did not understand, and so Jesus tells the same story, but this time makes it very plain and very simple. One can almost picture Jesus using hand gestures and motions to help tell the story.

JOHN 10:7-8 *So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.”*

Jesus starts out again, “Truly, truly; Hear ye, hear ye; Pay attention.” Picture Him speaking very slowly and articulating every word and saying, “*I am the door of the sheep*” while He is patting His chest to make sure they “see” He is talking about Himself.

And then He goes on to say, “*All who came before Me*” and probably using His arms and hands pointing in various directions as He continues, “*are thieves and robbers.*” Perhaps pausing for a moment and then says “**BUT**” and again pauses to make sure they are with Him “*the sheep did not hear them.*”

Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that He IS the door to salvation for Israel. Our Savior is asserting that the only way the Jews will be able to find rest, is if they go through Him. He is establishing His messianic identity and inviting them to enter the fold following His voice, walking through the door.

There is only one way to find salvation and rest for our souls. It is through “the door,” Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to call on the Jewish flock and invite them to enter His fold. However, their rejection did not close the door to the sheepfold. Instead, it swung the door open further to all the Gentiles of the world (Romans 1:16). So now the church is welcomed into Jesus’ fold through that exact same door. But just like any other sheepfold, there is no secondary entrance. There is only one way to find salvation and rest for our souls. It is through “the door,” Jesus Christ.

All other religions would dispute that statement. Other belief systems teach that there are many doors that lead to eternal life and security. However, the Bible is clear that there is only one sheepfold that leads to eternal life, and that is the one with Jesus Christ as the door. All things were made by Him, through Him, and for Him, and He alone has the authority to grant entrance to eternal life (Colossians 1:16). Romans 10:9 explains, *“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* It does not matter what culture says, the Bible is clear that there is only one door to salvation.

And repetition is the key to learning as Jesus repeats Himself in vs. 9-10, emphasizing the truth once again.

JOHN 10:9-10 *I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*

If you miss verses 9 and 10 you are indeed missing something significant. Jesus is telling the Pharisees that He is the door emphatically when He says for the second time, *“I am the door.”* He is the protector. He is the provider. He is the only way to salvation. The thieves and robbers, in the context, are false prophets along with other religious teachers who deny Jesus Christ as the Messiah, including the Pharisees.

Again, Jesus uses the word “thief,” taking it a step further saying the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Anything or anyone who distracts you from your walk with Jesus Christ is a thief and robber. Anything or anyone who distracts you from prayer and worship is a thief and robber. Anything or anyone who distracts you from fellowshiping with other Christians and giving of your time and money to the Kingdom of God is a thief and robber. Anything or anyone who distracts you from your Shepherd is a thief and a robber.

Jesus makes the contrast very clear in these verses. Through Jesus we have salvation and because of that salvation we will *“go in and out and find pasture.”* Because of that salvation, we have freedom, security, and purpose in Jesus Christ.

Because of that salvation, we have freedom, security, and purpose in Jesus Christ.

When we are listening to the voice of our Shepherd we experience freedom. In verse 9, it says *“go in and out”* which means we have freedom. We can come and go, we are not pinned down in legalism or hibernating in our closet, we have freedom in Christ. We hear the voice of our Shepherd, guiding us, encouraging us, and teaching us: Freedom to be creative. Freedom to be faithful. Freedom to be obedient. Freedom to follow our Shepherd, Jesus Christ throughout the pasture of life.

But we also have security. Jesus is our Shepherd and we can have security that He will provide for our needs when He says, *“find pasture.”* The sheep must find pasture in which to graze and live day by day. The Shepherd makes sure that happens for the sheep, guiding and

⁴ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁵ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s New Testament Insights: John*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 190-101.

directing them along the way. This is the daily nutrition of food and water for the sheep; without the pastures, they would fade away and die. We can be secure that Jesus will meet our daily needs.

Here we see the security of daily provision. He will allow us to find pasture. And that means it is partly our responsibility. It does not say the Shepherd will bring the pasture to us. Part of the freedom and security means we are responsible sheep. Make no mistake we are sheep that need a shepherd, but it is the responsibility of the sheep to graze, feed and drink the water.

And then we also have purpose, in the words of Jesus, *“that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* The NIV says *“life to the full.”*

This verse oftentimes is misquoted and misinterpreted for “prosperity.” It does not mean prosperity. The Greek word, “*Perissos*” literally means: “exceeding some number or measure or rank or need; over and above.”⁴ It is a picture of being filled to the brim and then overflowing.

In our western culture when we think of abundance we think of “stuff;” more stuff, bigger stuff, and even nicer stuff. Instead of thinking of it as “abundance of prosperity” it would be more accurate to think of it as “abundance of purpose.” Purpose to bear fruit, please the shepherd, show kindness, gentleness, joy, and peace to others. To live life to the fullest. Chuck Swindoll puts it this way,

“The abundant life is life that never ends; yet we do not have to wait until the end of our physical life to receive this abundance and to enjoy it. Abundant life includes peace, purpose, destiny, a genuine purpose for living, the joy of facing any adversity—including the grave—without fear, and the ability to endure the hardship with confident assurance.”⁵

Considering the illustration of Jesus and the sheep; year after year the sheep would grow their wool and be sheered; grow it again and be sheered; grow it again and be sheered, that was their purpose. When the sheep were with their shepherd, they experienced freedom, security, and purpose, season after season, year after year. Likewise, we are to follow our Shepherd in all seasons of life as He continues to lead, provide, and protect.

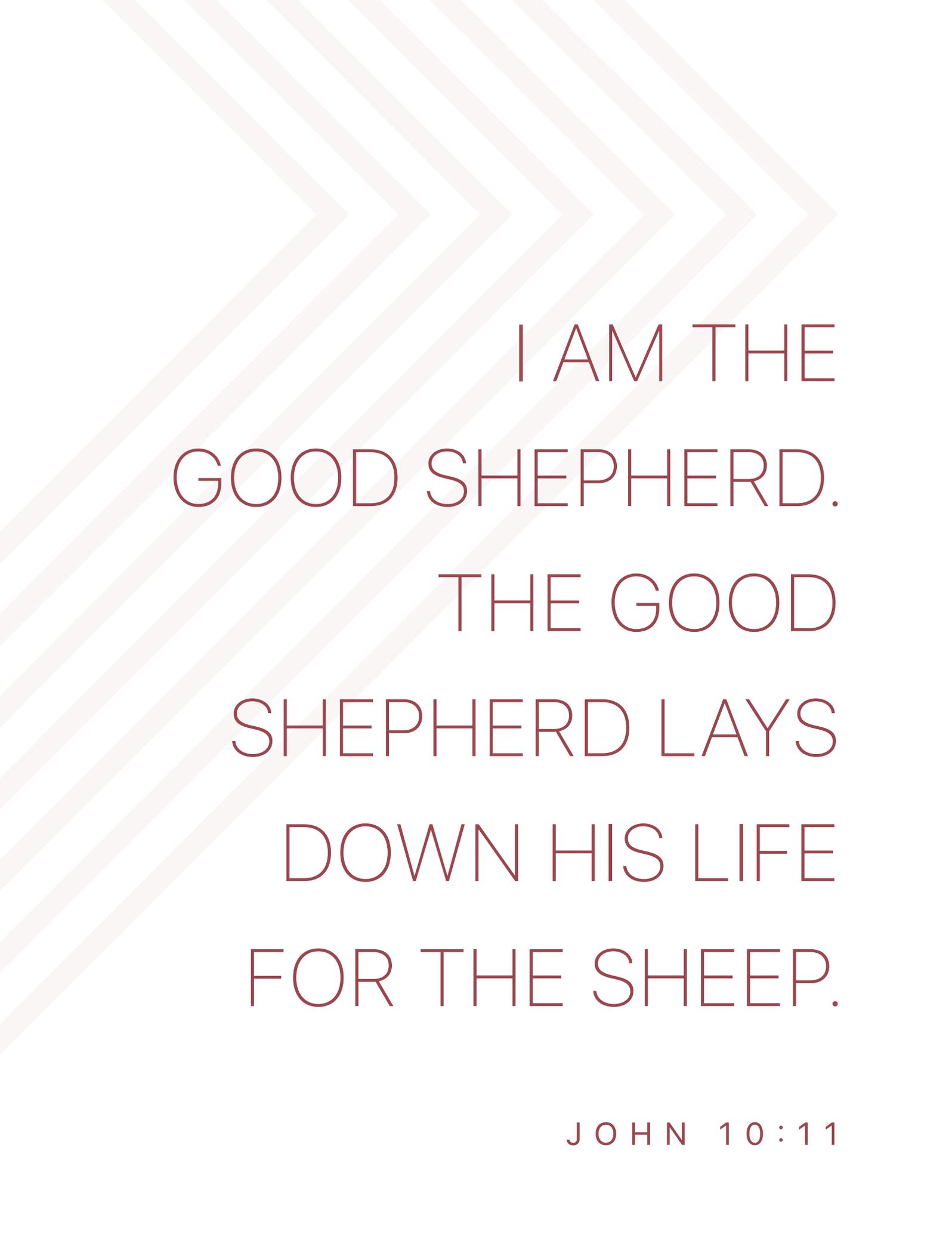
Instead of thinking of it as “abundance of prosperity” it would be more accurate to think of it as “abundance of purpose.”

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

So often people want to focus on the miracles of Jesus, which are without a doubt extraordinary. The Gospel of John records only seven miracles, which John refers to as “signs.” And as we have been studying there are seven “I Am” statements. It was just as important for John to communicate the relational Jesus as it was the miracle worker Jesus.

From the beginning of creation in the Garden of Eden, God has wanted to establish a relationship with men and women. In this lesson, we see Jesus saying *“I am the Door”* which leads us to enter into the sheepfold of His-story. Life change takes place when we fully understand Jesus as the Door. He wants to let us into a relationship that will change our life for all eternity.

The good news for us is that our eternity has already begun. We can experience abundant life here and now as sheep who have a Shepherd regardless of circumstances. God’s plan for a personal relationship should shape our purpose for life as we embrace true freedom, security, and purpose by walking through that door, the door named Jesus.



I AM THE
GOOD SHEPHERD.
THE GOOD
SHEPHERD LAYS
DOWN HIS LIFE
FOR THE SHEEP.

JOHN 10:11

I AM

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

DATE

September 5 & 6

WEEK

4 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 10:10-30

KEY VERSE

John 10:11

SETTING THE STAGE

Last week we looked at the end of John 9 and the beginning of John 10, where Jesus is proclaiming the third *I Am* statement while talking to a combative group of Pharisees. Jesus gave a word picture of a shepherd, sheep and the sheepfold with only one entrance. Jesus very clearly stated, not once, but twice that “*I am the Door.*” Jesus is the door into the sheepfold, representing salvation. It is in salvation that there is freedom, security, and purpose.

Today we pick up where we left off. Jesus is still talking, which you will notice if you have a “red letter” edition of the Bible. Jesus is still painting a word picture. Jesus is still using the example of a shepherd and sheep but shifts positions from a door to a shepherd, focusing more on the relationship between shepherd and sheep.

In these verses Jesus proclaims the fourth *I Am* statement in the very same context with the very same audience as last week. Jesus says, “*I am the Good Shepherd*” thus becoming not just positional as the door, but relational to the sheep as their provider and protector. Shepherds were known to be loyal to their sheep and even sacrificial. In the agricultural and rural culture of the first century, people were familiar with the roles of shepherds; and like any other profession, some were good and others were less than good. Jesus gives a clear contrast as He declares what it means to be a Good Shepherd.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Who the Shepherd Is
2. What the Shepherd Does
3. What the Sheep Need to Do

THINGS TO KNOW

- Whenever the name “*The LORD*” is used throughout Scripture, it is referring to the covenant name of God, “*Yahweh*,” God’s personal name.
- The Greek word “*Kalos*” is translated as “good”. The literal meaning is: excellent, honorable, commendable, surpassing.¹
- We will only know Jesus as Shepherd when we begin to see ourselves as sheep.

I AM

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Introduction

The rural imagery of shepherds and sheep is difficult to imagine in our largely metropolitan and increasingly suburban culture. In the United States, the closest profession that could relate would be ranching. But even that profession falls short of conveying the nature of shepherding in ancient times.

The image of shepherding is nevertheless an important one in Scripture, as there are over 500 different references to sheep and over 200 different references to shepherds.² Thus, one could argue that this rural image might be God's favorite analogy in describing the nature of His unique relationship to us.

Perhaps the most popular passage in the Bible that invokes this rural imagery is Psalm 23, which may be the most well-known chapter in the entire Bible. Whether you have spent your entire life in church or are brand new to Christianity, you are likely familiar with it.

PSALM 23:1-6 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

He leads me beside still waters.

³ *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

⁴ *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ *You prepare a table before me*

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever. (ESV)

You can find this passage sketched on paintings, glazed on coffee cups, stamped on bookmarks, printed on T-shirts, and stitched into quilts. What is interesting is that BibleGateway.com, the world's leading and most used online Bible, reports that Psalm 23 is the most searched chapter in



¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

² www.studylight.org

the Bible year after year; and even more astonishing, that all six of its individual verses each rank in the top 20 most searched verses in the entire Bible year after year.³

One thing is certain, regardless of whether or not we are familiar with the rural image of shepherding and sheep, the image of the Lord as our Shepherd resonates deeply within us. It gives us a picture of God who provides comfort, deep satisfaction, and real peace. It touches our deepest nerve, and it awakens our deepest yearning. And in John 10, Jesus steps into our context and says, *“I am He. I am the Good Shepherd.”*⁴

In the following lesson, we will observe John 10:10-18 and study what it means for us to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd He promises to be for us, literally picking up where we left off last week when Jesus said with compassion and confidence, *“I am the Door.”*

1. WHO THE SHEPHERD IS

JOHN 10:10-11 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

In explaining to us who He is as our Good Shepherd, Jesus first draws a contrast to who He is not: the thieves and robbers, who come to steal and kill and destroy. In fact, Jesus is the exact opposite of them. Instead of taking our life, He lays down His life for us.

Jesus continues by employing another contrast as well. He contrasts Himself not against obvious evil (thieves and robbers), but interestingly against even the best “hired hands”—those who are good employees working for the shepherd. Read His words:

JOHN 10:12-13 *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (ESV)*

The difference between shepherds and thieves, robbers, and hired hands is that shepherds have a vested interest in their sheep.

A. Our Shepherd Invests In Us.

Robbers and thieves do not have an investment in the sheep. They only want to exploit the sheep for their own gain. Additionally, even though hired hands are positioned to care for the sheep, even they do not have an investment in the sheep, their interest in the sheep is simply work-related as they are compensated for their time in caring for them. This is why whenever hired hands see trouble that could potentially threaten them, they run and abandon the sheep because they value their lives over the lives of the sheep.

But the shepherd is different from the robbers, thieves, and hired hands because the shepherd has ownership of the sheep. The shepherd’s wealth is the sheep. The quality and quantity of the flock is the shepherd’s pride and joy, bringing him honor and wealth.

This is why Jesus says in the parable found in Luke 15:1-7, a good shepherd will temporarily leave the 99 sheep and fetch the one sheep that wandered off. Every single sheep matters because they

³ <https://www.BibleGateway.com/year-in-review>

⁴ Timothy Keller, *The Good Shepherd* (Redeemer Church, NYC), July 14, 1991.

are inextricably tied to him. In rural ancient cultures, the shepherd would live, sleep, and spend every moment with the sheep.

Timothy Keller says, “when Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, He is making the grand statement that “His people are His joy and pride and glory.” In being our shepherd, God has bound up His honor and glory and joy with our honor and glory and joy.”⁵

Thus, as we are navigating life, we must ask ourselves a couple of questions:

- Who is my shepherd? Does my shepherd care for me like this?
- How ought I perceive my circumstances in light of this great truth, that my Good Shepherd’s glory and honor and joy is bound up into mine?

The question is not **whether** we have a shepherd, but rather **who** or **what** is our shepherd. We are all following something or someone that we believe will care for us deeply, protect us completely, and empower us. We are all looking to something or someone to give us that “abundant life, life to the full” for which we yearn.

And Jesus is boldly saying, “*I am the Good Shepherd.*” And if He is, then no one else nor nothing else is. Jesus does not only have ownership investment in you; He has a double-ownership investment in you because He laid down His life for you. His investment in your life is His very own life.

In contrast, all other shepherding figures—robbers, thieves, or hired hands—do not have any investment in you like the Good Shepherd does. So, when trial or tribulation comes, they leave because they have no investment in you. All other potential shepherds—things we are living for and following relentlessly for life and happiness—cannot love us in a way that we deeply desire. Romance does not have any investment in you. Job security does not have any investment in you. Approval from others does not have any investment in you. Good looks do not have any investment in you.

What makes all false shepherds similar is that none of them willingly lay down their life for us, yet we often lay down our lives for them.

If we put our stock in them, the “market”—whatever our circumstances may be—may crash and we will lose our investment. What makes all false shepherds similar is that none of them willingly lay down their life for us, yet we often lay down our lives for them. We so easily invest in them, even though they do not invest in us.

But the Good Shepherd readily invests in us and voluntarily lays down His life for us. When trial or tribulation come, the Good Shepherd feels our pain, feels our worry, feels our fret because His welfare is connected to our own. And soberingly, unless we find Jesus as our Good Shepherd, we will try to find some distorted, cheap type of shepherding somewhere else.⁶

B. He Knows Us Fully.

We can also see another glimpse of who our Good Shepherd is by how He knows us.

JOHN 10:14-15 *I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know Me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (ESV)*

These verses are easy to read quickly. Instead, take a moment and think intently about Jesus’ statement.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *The Good Shepherd*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Jesus knows us in the same way that He knows the Father. Jesus has known the Father from eternity past and delighted in that perfect relationship forever. They know each other deeply and perfectly. And then Jesus, remarkably, says that He knows us—His very own sheep—in the same kind of way. He knows us and delights in us and cherishes His relationship with us with great loyalty and sacrifice.

In other words, Jesus knows the deepest, most wicked, and shameful parts of us and loves us deeply enough to still lay down His life for us. Romans 5:8 says, “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” When we were at our weakest and most sinful—Jesus still loved us enough to count us as the one who wandered from the 99 and laid down His life for us.

Also, if the Good Shepherd knows us this intimately and deeply, there is not the smallest detail in your life in which He is not aware, both good and bad. David realized this truth when he wrote Psalm 139.

PSALM 139:1-3 *O LORD, You have searched me and known me.*

² *You know when I sit down and when I rise up;*

You understand my thought from afar.

³ *You scrutinize my path and my lying down,*

And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

We can trust the Good Shepherd, therefore, with every detail, every confusion, hurt, pain, and uncertainty of our lives as we follow Him. This truth should motivate us to remove any wall that we have attempted to put up between us and our Shepherd. Jesus already knows the depths of our soul, our greatest fears, and grandest dreams. He is not only willing but desiring to walk with us every step of the way all the days of our lives.

Jesus already knows the depths of our soul, our greatest fears, and grandest dreams.

This is who the Good Shepherd is: He loves us deeply, and He knows us fully. Being led by this kind of shepherd is an experience our hearts desperately long for. To be fully known and yet fully loved. If this is who the Good Shepherd is, let us see what He does for us as an expression of who He is to us.

2. WHAT THE SHEPHERD DOES

JOHN 10:15B *and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Ultimately Jesus is foreshadowing what is going to take place on the cross, when He lays down His life for you and me. This would be the ultimate sacrifice for our Good Shepherd. However, the good news of the Gospel is that our Good Shepherd not only laid down His life but rose from the grave and lives today! Therefore, we have this relationship with a living Savior, Jesus Christ as our personal Good Shepherd.

Any shepherd who is a good manager always bears in mind one great objective: that his flock may flourish. The continuous well-being of his sheep is his constant preoccupation.⁷ Jesus as the Good Shepherd wants the best for the sheep for whom He laid down His life. The responsibility of the shepherd is to both protect and prod the sheep depending on the situation.

King David was a shepherd, both literally and figuratively. He was tending sheep as a teenage boy when Samuel came to anoint him to be King of Israel. Because of his background as a shepherd,

⁷ Phillip Keller, *The Shepherd Trilogy*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 228.

David wrote Psalm 23, his experience allowing him to say with boldness and confidence, “*The Lord is my Shepherd.*” In describing God as his shepherd, David goes on to say in Psalm 23:4, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*”

In the darkest of times, in the valley of the shadow, when we have the Good Shepherd we never have to fear evil because we are not alone. The Good Shepherd is prepared to protect us when needed and prod us when necessary. He does that with His rod and staff. Sometimes these are two separate items. A rod can be a small club like a piece of wood, while the staff is the long stick

with a hook or crook at the end you see in so many pictures of shepherds in biblical times. But it would not be unusual for a shepherd to simply have one of those which would be the long stick with the hook which could serve as both the rod and the staff.

The stick portion would be used to protect the sheep from wolves and anything that would try to harm the sheep. But it could also be used to prod the sheep if they were just standing around sulking becoming stagnant. The hook portion of the staff served two purposes. One purpose would be to extend the arm length of the shepherd and the second purpose would be to pull the sheep back if they were wandering off, they would use the hook to gently wrap around the neck of the sheep and pull it back into the flock.

Jesus, as our Good Shepherd does the exact same thing because He knows us, loves us, and wants the best for us. He will protect us from danger and harm if we allow Him to do so. He will prod us when we become stagnant and sulking in our circumstances or even wandering in the wrong direction if we allow Him to do so. This is a relationship, both the shepherd and the sheep have responsibilities.

3. WHAT THE SHEEP NEED TO DO

JOHN 10:16-18 *I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*¹⁷ *For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.*¹⁸ *No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”*

A. Trust in the Shepherd.

Sheep are not like most animals. There are wild horses, wild pigs, wild dogs, wild cats. For example, if you let one of these animals go, two things will either happen: 1) They will go wild and never return; or 2) they will return home.

But sheep just wander around. They have no sense of being wild and independent because they are so dependent on being cared for, protected, and guided. Their going “wild” leads quickly to their death. Sheep have no sense of direction nor discernment about what to eat. They are completely dependent upon the shepherd.

Similarly, we are like sheep who are completely dependent on the Lord. We often think we can be independent and survive without His care and supervision, but we are mistaken. Keller notes that “We like the sound of the Lord being our Good Shepherd, but we hate the truth of it.”⁸ This is because it means utter surrender and complete lordship. For Jesus to be our Good Shepherd, we have to come to Him releasing our own terms and conditions.

The Good Shepherd is prepared to protect us when needed and prod us when necessary.

“We like the sound of the Lord being our Good Shepherd, but we hate the truth of it.”⁸

⁸ Timothy Keller, *The Good Shepherd*.

He is trustworthy. We are to lay down our life in surrender for the One who laid down His life surrendering to the cross for us.

B. Stay in the Fold.

When Jesus describes His relationship with us like a shepherd to his sheep, there is one fundamental necessity being implied: that we are to belong to the flock. It is important to recognize the difference between a flock and a fold. The shepherd is said to have only one flock. The flock is the sum total of all the sheep which belong to him. Put another way, we can say one shepherd's flock is made up of many different folds.⁹ In the context of this passage, Jesus is saying that there are other sheep in His flock. The Pharisees thought the Messiah would be strictly for the Jews, the nation of Israel. They not only missed the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, they missed the fact that the salvation of Jesus was for all people, both Jew and Gentile. There would be other folds beyond the nation of Israel, but there would only be one flock. It is not uniformity which is promised, but unity.¹⁰

Paul would describe this to the church in Ephesus.

EPHESIANS 4:4-6 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

Sheep need to be part of a fold within the flock. For sheep, a “herd-mentality” is a good thing because there is nothing more threatening to its welfare than isolation. Sheep are highly vulnerable and defenseless, so isolation makes them easy targets for predators.

Similarly, the Christian life is not to be a solo event. We are called to live in the context of the local church, in community with other believers because independence and self-sufficiency make us highly irrational and extremely vulnerable to attacks from the enemy. God designed us to depend on one another for strength and guidance and wisdom, as we corporately depend on our Good Shepherd.

If connecting deeply with the Shepherd's flock is not a priority for us, this means that our Good Shepherd does not mean everything to us. Otherwise, we would follow His leadership in all aspects of life. He wants the best for His sheep because He has invested His very life into us after all. And His joy, honor, and glory are bound up into our own.

We must never forget that Jesus willingly laid down His life for us. His voluntary death was followed by His victorious resurrection. Jesus was not only the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep of the entire world, He is the Good Shepherd who lives today and wants to have this intimate life-changing relationship with each one of us, calling us to be part of His flock for all eternity.

God designed us to depend on one another for strength and guidance and wisdom, as we corporately depend on our Good Shepherd.

⁹ Phillip Keller, *The Shepherd Trilogy*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 261.

¹⁰ biblehub.com/commentaries/John10

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The image of a shepherd and sheep has been used throughout Scripture, literature, artwork and beyond. There is a reason that Psalm 23 is used at so many funerals, because of the comfort the words and the image bring in times of grief. But it is also one of the most hopeful of all scriptures because of the truth revealed in that first verse, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*

Jesus said, *“I Am the Good Shepherd”* instantly bringing to mind this image of a shepherd and sheep. And as our Good Shepherd He protects and prods; He comforts and consoles; He laid down His life only to live again, that we might have life abundantly for eternity.

When we are lost, the Good Shepherd finds us. When we are confused, the Good Shepherd enlightens us. When we are neglecting being part of the flock, the Good Shepherd brings us back into the fold. When we are stagnant in life, fearful to move forward, the Good Shepherd prods us to take that next step. When we are overwhelmed by the circumstances of life, the Good Shepherd will protect us from evil and harm.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd wants to do all of these things for His sheep, if we truly allow Him to be our Good Shepherd; our life-changing, life-giving Shepherd that leads us each step of each day. Are you willing to trust Jesus to be your Good Shepherd? Will you demonstrate sheep-like faith in His guidance and provision?

God’s plan as our Shepherd, will always shape our purpose as His sheep. The author of Hebrews knew the power of the image of a shepherd and sheep as he closed out the letter with a benediction that is fitting for us even today.

HEBREWS 13:20-21 *Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

I AM

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

DATE

September 12 & 13

WEEK

5 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 11:1-55

KEY VERSES

John 11:25-26

SETTING THE STAGE

By chapter 11 in the Gospel of John, we are near to the last week of Jesus' life leading to the cross. Jesus had already turned water into wine, healed a lame man, fed the 5,000, walked on water, healed a man born blind, and crossed racial and cultural boundaries by talking to the Samaritan woman at the well.

The reputation of Jesus was firmly established and His life was becoming increasingly in danger at the hands of the Pharisees. Jesus had been traveling for three years or more with His 12 disciples and though we do not know many personal relationships beyond those 12 and the parents of Jesus, this particular chapter unveils dear friends of Jesus. Throughout this gospel, John has been very specific in wanting the reader to believe in Jesus. This gospel writer clearly wants the life of Jesus to be communicated even more so than the miracles of Jesus.

Perhaps no other chapter in the Gospel of John communicates both the divinity and humanity of Jesus as does John 11. We will see Jesus delay a response. We will see Jesus challenged by a friend. We will see Jesus moved to the point of tears as He weeps openly for His friends. Yet in this same story we will see the power of God and the glory of God fully exposed through resurrection and life, paving the way for what would happen in a matter of days on the cross and in the tomb.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Friend in Need
2. Friendship Challenged
3. Truth Revealed
4. Relationship Redeemed

THINGS TO KNOW

- Bethany is a small town about 2 miles outside Jerusalem.
- John chapters 1-11 cover approximately 3-3 ½ years of the ministry of Jesus. John chapters 12-21 cover one week, plus some appearances after the Resurrection.
- John 11 is the true turning point on the road to Calvary.

I AM

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Introduction

Friendship is a wonderful aspect of life. Friends are people you can depend on in any given situation. A true friend is often more reliable than a family member. Proverbs 18:24 “A man of too many friends come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Friends are those people whom you laugh with, cry with, and simply do life with by choice.

It is very typical for us to think about Jesus as a teacher, preacher, religious leader, miracle worker, and of course the Son of God. We quickly think of stories of Jesus walking and talking with His disciples, teaching them while traveling to various villages, towns, and cities throughout Israel. Some stories may come to mind of Jesus talking with strangers without revealing names, such as the woman at the well or the leper who was healed. Jesus was always accessible to the people, but we still envision Him in a role that is on a pedestal of sorts.

We rarely think of the human side of Jesus as one who had friends and normal life to some degree. Jesus was the son of a carpenter; therefore, it is likely He was a carpenter during His teenage years and early adulthood. Jesus likely grew up fishing with His dad Joseph and friends. That is what I said, friends. Jesus was fully human, and He had friends. He had a sense of humor as evidenced in some of the phrases and wordplay that He used, which is sometimes lost in the English translation.

Today as we look at John 11, it is contextually a story about friends of Jesus. Three siblings lived in a small village named Bethany outside of Jerusalem. These siblings were among the closest friends of Jesus outside of the apostles. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were the kind of friends who would hang out, eat dinner, share stories, catch up on life, and laugh. These siblings were very aware of who Jesus was as a teacher, preacher, leader, miracle worker, and most importantly the Son of God. They knew Jesus to be not only approachable but accessible, just as any close friend would be that you could truly count on in times of need.

1. FRIEND IN NEED

JOHN 11:1-3 *Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, “Lord, behold he whom You love is sick.”*

These three siblings, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, were friends of Jesus. Mary and Martha had a reputation for both hospitality and worship. Their brother Lazarus was sick, and they reached out to their friend, Jesus. They knew the power and authority of Jesus. They knew the reputation of Jesus. Jesus healed the multitudes and the individuals. Jesus healed the anonymous and the familiar. Jesus even healed those who were complete strangers.

But now, His friend, whom He loved is sick. The word translated as “love” is the Greek word “*Phileo*” which means “regard with affection, kindness, delight, love.” It is the concept of “brotherly love.” The word translated as “sick” is the Greek word, “*Astheneo*” which means “deficient, weak, ill.”



There was no doubt in the minds of Mary and Martha who to call to help their brother in this time of physical need. Jesus, being such a good friend, would certainly come quickly to heal Lazarus of this sickness. They did not ask for a specific response from Jesus, merely presented the need. Perhaps they expected Jesus to be on the same page as them and come immediately. Not unlike what we do when we pray, expecting God to be on our page, meeting our need, based on our timetable.

JOHN 11:4 *But when Jesus heard this He said, “This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”*

Their friend Jesus received the message about the need of Lazarus. Jesus knew something that Mary and Martha did not know, there was a greater purpose for this situation. *“This sickness is not to end in death.”* Words spoken by the One referred to in this gospel as the Word of God. Words said with confidence. Words said with boldness and assurance. The end result of this sickness will not be death.

In fact, there is a twofold purpose for this situation that Jesus mentions at the very beginning of this story of friendship. This response sets the agenda and provides an approach to what will take place.¹

1. It is for the glory of God.
2. It is so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

From the perspective of Mary and Martha, they had a sick brother who needed to be healed.

From the perspective of Jesus, He had a Heavenly Father who needed to be glorified.

So often we see the immediate need of a situation and how we can best benefit from the outcome we desire. Mary and Martha are not to be blamed in this scenario; they were loving sisters to their brother. He was likely their sole means of support. They did not want Lazarus to suffer and they should be commended for turning to Jesus in their time of need. However, their time of need did not override the timing of Jesus. The tension remained, unbeknownst to Mary and Martha, that Jesus had a different purpose than what they had proposed in their minds.

JOHN 11:5-6 *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.*

A friend loves at all times. Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This is the same word used in verse 3, at least in English. In Greek, it is a different word, *“Agape,”* which is the highest form of love, as in the love God has for us. It is referred to as godly love or sacrificial love, as used in John 3:16. In verse 3, Mary and Martha were underestimating the love Jesus had as their friend. They were settling for brotherly love, which is wonderful and fulfilling, though limited. But Jesus knew His love for all of them, including their sick brother Lazarus, far exceeded brotherly love, it was godly love which is limitless.

Jesus had this godly, heavenly love for Lazarus who was sick, as we will learn, to the point of death. Yet, upon hearing this news, Jesus intentionally stayed two days longer in the place He was when He received the message. Jesus was confident, while Mary and Martha were concerned. The response of Jesus was not based on callousness or lack of compassion. When Jesus receives the bad news, He reveals the same point of view He had in John 9:3 when confronted with the

There was no doubt in the minds of Mary and Martha who to call to help their brother in this time of physical need. Jesus, being such a good friend, would certainly come quickly to heal Lazarus of this sickness.

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¹ Biblegateway app, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, John.

man born blind. Sickness, disease and even death have lost their power, have lost their sting in light of Jesus coming into the world. In Him, death has simply become a sleep from which He will someday awaken us. ²

Do not miss the promise Jesus made in verse 4. Jesus did not promise that Lazarus would not die; He promised that his sickness would not end in death. His point? Death may claim the life of Lazarus, but death will not have the final say in the matter. ³

2. FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGED

Jesus and the disciples eventually made their way to Bethany. Along the way they had conversations about the danger that awaited Jesus in general as the religious opposition was increasing and intensifying. The disciples were being protective of Jesus; though Jesus was being persistent in the ministry before Him, knowing He was ultimately approaching Calvary in the coming weeks.

JOHN 11:17-19 *So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.*

Take note of who was with Mary and Martha compared to who was not. Many of the Jews had come to “console them concerning their brother” who had died. This would be similar to what we do with friends who have lost a loved one. We visit them, take them meals, listen to them, share stories and memories together. Noticeably absent is Jesus; teacher, preacher, miracle worker and supposed friend.

The expectation was that Jesus would come and heal Lazarus of his sickness. The expectation was that Jesus would care enough to do what Mary and Martha had desired. The expectation was Jesus, as a friend, would drop everything and come running right away. The expectation simply was not met. Thus, their friendship was challenged in spirit and in words.

JOHN 11:20 *Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. ²¹ Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*

Martha had a reputation of being task-oriented and orderly. She did not hesitate to go and confront her friend, Jesus. Look again at the words she said in verse 21, and you can almost imagine her standing toe to toe with Jesus, challenging their friendship. It seems as if she is casting blame on Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” And if not blame, she was

expressing her grief in how things would have been, could have been, and should have been different if only Jesus had come sooner.

If we are honest with ourselves we have probably cast blame on Jesus for not answering a prayer in the way we had expected.

If we are honest with ourselves we have probably cast blame on Jesus for not answering a prayer in the way we had expected. Perhaps casting blame on Jesus for a job that was lost, or a marriage that ended in divorce, a death of a child, or a prognosis of a disease. We may not have stood proverbially “toe to toe” with Jesus, but more than likely we have cast blame; we have expressed grief in how we pictured outcomes differently.

And again, if we are honest, true friends can take it. True friends can handle the emotion, the blame, the pointing of the finger; letting the anger and hurt be released rather than stifled. Jesus was a true friend.

² Michael Card, *John, the Gospel of Wisdom*, IVP Books, Downers Grove IL, 2014, p. 132.

³ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights: John*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI; 2010, p. 199.

Martha continued in this encounter, with verse 22.

JOHN 11:22 *“Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”*

The challenge Martha had against Jesus was not based on a lack of faith. In fact, her faith was strong. Even in this time of grief and loss, she knew in her heart that Jesus, as the Son of God, could ask God anything and it would be done. Being honest with Jesus to the point of exposing your emotions, frustrations, and pain is not necessarily a lack of faith. In fact, that kind of honesty and openness is oftentimes based on a very strong and confident faith as in the case of Martha.

Notice the response of Jesus was not one of lecture, shame, or belittling towards Martha. Jesus listened. Jesus stood there with Martha. Jesus was a friend letting Martha get her feelings out openly. This is a wonderful model of how to respond to someone in times of intense grief. And it was at that moment that Jesus spoke words of life.

The challenge Martha had against Jesus was not based on a lack of faith. In fact, her faith was strong.

3. TRUTH REVEALED

JOHN 11:23 *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”*

That is good news! Though there was double meaning in His words. The first was an immediate healing of Lazarus being raised from the dead, which Jesus knew was going to happen, Martha did not. The second was that Jesus would raise up those who believed in Him on the last day (John 6:39-40, 44, 54). Martha knew this to be true based on His teachings, as we see in her answer to Jesus.

JOHN 11:24 *Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”*

And this sets up the moment of revelation for Jesus in the very next verse.

JOHN 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

“I am the resurrection and the life,” is the fifth of the seven *I Am* statements. Jesus was revealing truth beyond what Martha had expressed. Martha was focused on the future promise of eternal life. There is both tremendous confidence and great faith in that future promise. However, Jesus was reminding her there is more to the truth than just a future promise. There is the present reality. Jesus wanted Martha to think about the person who would do the resurrecting, rather than the event itself. Jesus’ own power raises people to life, just as Jesus’ own Person satisfies people spiritually as bread satisfies physically, and *He Himself* is, therefore, the essential element in “resurrection.” Without Him, there is no resurrection or life. This was really a double claim.⁴

Jesus wanted Martha to think about the person who would do the resurrecting, rather than the event itself.

The focus of all the *I Am* statements is the very first word, “I” where the focus is exclusively on Jesus. There is no doubt Who has the power and authority over death and life. In this statement, Jesus insists that He is the only One who can raise the dead and give life, both of which are the sole prerogatives of the absolute God, whose name is “I AM.”⁵

⁴ www.soniclight.com/john

⁵ Jey J. Kanagaraj, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*; OM Books Secunderabad; Andhra Pradesh, India; 2005, p. 364.

As a friend, Jesus wanted to make sure Martha understood this truth personally and practically. Jesus presents this double meaning which initially sounds like double talk. Some die but will live. Others will live, but never die. In these words, Jesus provides hope for both the future and the present. Some have died as believers in Jesus Christ. Their physical death was not the end, spiritually they continued to live. Likewise, for those who are living and breathing physically, yet believe, they will never die spiritually.

Jesus did not want Martha to focus on just the miracle worker Jesus, but to embrace the person Jesus.

Jesus does not leave any room for speculation. Everyone most certainly will die. In addition to unavoidable physical death, we are all dead spiritually. There is nothing we can do on our own to change this fact. Jesus provides the solution to our sin problem Himself. He tells Martha that He Is (I AM), the Resurrection, and the Life. Notice that Jesus does not say that He “has” resurrection and life. Jesus says that He, in fact, IS both “*the Resurrection and the Life.*” Resurrection and eternal life are who Jesus is and what Jesus offers. In other words, rescue from the sting of sin and death is tied to the very essence of Jesus.

Without taking a breath, Jesus then asks His friend, “*Do you believe this?*” Perhaps one of the most important questions that anyone can be asked by a friend. Jesus did not want Martha to focus on just the miracle worker Jesus, but to embrace the person Jesus. The One who was there at the beginning with His Father at creation. The One who taught to the masses of people. The One who had delayed coming to heal his friend, her brother Lazarus. Jesus did not want Martha to miss the life-change in the present.

4. RELATIONSHIP REDEEMED

It was in this “toe to toe” encounter that Martha declared her confession of redemption.

JOHN 11:27 *She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”*

With these words, Martha proclaims the truth of the ages which was lost on so many religious leaders of the day. Notice how personal and emphatic her declaration is. “*I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.*” With these few words, she proclaims Jesus, her friend, to be the Messiah. Anytime you see the word translated as “Christ,” it is the Greek word “*Christos*” which means “Messiah, the Anointed.”

Her brother was still dead. Her circumstances had not changed. Her prayers and hopes of healing had not become reality as of yet. But Martha professes with clarity and confidence her redemption of belief. There is no doubt. There is no blame. There is no wavering or compromising. This friend standing before her was Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus is still the Christ. Jesus is still the Son of God. Jesus is still the One who comes into the world even today through the Holy Spirit. This same Jesus that stood toe to toe with a grieving friend still redeems those who believe in Him.

After this confession of redemption, Martha went back inside to tell her sister Mary that Jesus was outside. Mary went out to see Jesus as everyone followed her outside thinking she was going to the tomb of her brother. When Mary saw Jesus, she fell at His feet as she did each time she was in the presence of Jesus, a posture of worship and humility. We are told Mary says the same words to Jesus, “*if You had been here...*” but the exchange went in a different direction.

JOHN 11:33-35 *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept.*

This is the context for the shortest verse in the Bible, “Jesus wept.” He was among friends who were grieving the loss of their beloved brother. Jesus showing His humanity through emotions wept as close friends do.

No one knew what was about to happen, other than Jesus. Remember the reason for the delayed departure when He received the message. There was still unfinished business.

JOHN 11:38-40 *So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”*

Jesus could have easily rolled away the stone Himself. But He wanted them to participate in this miracle. Jews were not to open up a sealed tomb, and after four days the body would have begun decomposing. Martha is the one who challenged her friend, Jesus again. And Jesus responded by talking about belief and glory; not raising her brother from the dead. This story of friendship and ultimate resurrection was to see the glory of God. The power of God.

Jesus could have easily rolled away the stone Himself. But He wanted them to participate in this miracle.

JOHN 11:41-44 *So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.” ⁴³ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” ⁴⁴ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”*

Not knowing anything other than the glory of God was about to be revealed, they removed the stone unleashing that which had never been experienced before in this manner. Jesus prayed so all could hear which was so that they may believe in God, thus giving glory to God.

Then Jesus called for His friend Lazarus to come forth, though still wrapped and bound in cloth. Once again, Jesus calls upon them to participate and unbind him, and let him go.

This was the final miracle recorded in the Gospel of John before Jesus was crucified (aside from healing the soldier’s ear in the garden when He was arrested). This was a turning point in the ministry of Jesus as He was getting closer to the cross. He was going to lay down His life for His friends, including you and me, so we might also have a redeemed relationship with Him.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

How close Jesus was with His friends in Bethany was not determinative of their relationship. It did not matter how many times they laughed together, ate together, or simply hung out together. Nor did it matter whether they were in the same town or miles and miles away. It did not even matter that one of them had fallen ill and died.

No matter how often we attend church or listen to a Bible Study, or take part in any other religious activities, the truth of the matter is we are all dead in our sins and separated from God without a personal surrender to Christ as Lord and Savior. Death is a diagnosis; as Dr. Young frequently emphasizes, “we are all terminal.” A diagnosis demands a decision and requires a response.

What Jesus conveyed to Martha is that if we have been given the cure to our spiritual death, the only way that cure becomes ours is by taking action; believing the truth of the Gospel. When Jesus says, “*I am the resurrection and the life*” He gives us a new life for the present and the future. Christ can raise the dead and meet every need of the new life that follows that miracle because He is both “*the Resurrection and the Life*.” The Lord can move into “dead” and seemingly hopeless human situations, and by His resurrection power, transform people and circumstances and infuse life that makes everything new.⁶ That still happens today and can happen in your life if it has not already. Jesus is still the great “I AM.”

ROMANS 6:4 *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Jesus in the Present Tense*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2011, p. 98.

I AM

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

DATE

September 19 & 20

WEEK

6 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 14: 1-7

KEY VERSE

John 14:6

SETTING THE STAGE

The Gospel of John spends nine chapters on the last week of Jesus' life, including the resurrection; more than any other gospel. This last week began with Jesus visiting Mary, Martha, and the recently resurrected Lazarus for a dinner where Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with oil. And then there was the Triumphal Entry. People lining the streets, waiving palm branches, shouting "*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!*" It was a celebration like the disciples had never seen. A celebration fit for a king except for one minor detail; Jesus was riding a donkey instead of a stallion.

It was going to be quite a week for this group of thirteen. The disciples were there with Jesus each step of the way. Jesus was questioned and ridiculed by the religious authorities. Jesus cleansed the temple of the moneychangers. It was a long, draining, and challenging week leading up to the Passover.

The setting for this sixth *I Am* statement is a large furnished room upstairs where Jesus met for the last time with His 12 disciples. It was in this room that Jesus taught the group one last time around a table in which they would share their last meal, unbeknownst to the disciples.

Continued on page 48 >

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Transition and Trouble
2. Believe in Me
3. I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life
4. No One Comes to the Father Except Through Me

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Gospel of John gives the most detailed information of what takes place in the Upper Room the night before Jesus was crucified.
- Jesus modeled what it means to finish strong as a leader.
- This *I Am* statement summarizes the major recurring themes in the Gospel of John.

I AM

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Setting the Stage, continued >

It was in this room that Jesus washed the feet of Andrew, Peter, James, and John (the sons of thunder), Phillip, Nathaniel, Matthew, Thomas, James the lesser, Simon the Zealot, Judas Alpheus and the other Judas, Iscariot. Jesus, the Son of God, became their servant as He picked up the foot of each disciple that had traveled with Him for over three years pouring water and cleansing the dirt off each one and then drying it with a towel. One would betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. One would deny knowing Jesus three times before sunrise. All of them would scatter when Jesus was arrested, each running on the feet that had just been washed by their Savior. It was in this Upper Room that Jesus would speak words that were both haunting and comforting, yet all the while life-changing.

Introduction

Times of transition can bring a troubled and anxious heart. Transition into uncharted territory can cause uncertainty, worry, stress, and doubt. But it does not have to be that way. In fact, one of the greatest privileges we have as Christians is that we can enter times of transition with confidence. We have a living hope. We are called to be people of assurance in the face of uncertainty. This was Jesus's command to His disciples and to us today.

1. TRANSITION AND TROUBLE

In John 14, Jesus' words about Himself provide confidence during uncertainty. Jesus brings stillness to a troubled heart. Jesus replaces anxiety with peace.

JOHN 14:1 *"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me."*

If there was ever a time of transition and trouble in the disciples' life it was at this moment. They left everything to follow Jesus. They left the comforts of their home, their former identities as fishermen, a tax collector, and religious zealot all because they believed Jesus was worth following. They had set their hopes on Jesus that He would deliver them from Roman oppression and establish Himself as the Messiah for whom Israel had longed. They followed faithfully for three years, perhaps a little longer. But now the events that transpired this night would be burned into their hearts. They would never forget their Upper Room experience with Jesus.

It is in this moment that Jesus sees beyond the external circumstances and gazes into the inward reality of the disciples' hearts. He commands them, *"Do not let your heart be troubled."* (John 14:1) While the disciples are stunned and disillusioned by the external circumstances, Jesus' heartfelt words are sobering.

It is in this moment that Jesus sees beyond the external circumstances and gazes into the inward reality of the disciples' hearts.



The Greek word for ‘troubled’ is insightful. It is the word ‘*tarasso*.’ It means to be ‘disturbed or stirred up.’¹ Throughout the New Testament, this word is used mostly in a figurative way. For example, in John 5:7 the serene pool of Bethesda was ‘stirred up’ before the sick stepped in to be healed. This is a picture of what happens in our own hearts. Problems, worries, and anxieties are like giant boulders that plunge into a peaceful heart and cause it to be stirred up.

The word ‘troubled’ is in the passive voice in the Greek. This is incredibly helpful because there are troubling moments that occur in our lives that we cannot avoid, nor do we cause. The phone call from the doctor’s office with a bad report is troubling. The loss of a job is troubling. The death of a loved one is troubling. Financial difficulties are troubling. While we are not actively pursuing difficulties, we can still be passively troubled by our circumstances.

But Jesus commands His disciples to *“not let your hearts be troubled.”* He gives them a solution on how to fight their troubles. As believers in Christ, we triumph over our troubles with our trust in Him. He commands His disciples, *“believe in God; believe also in Me.”*

2. BELIEVE IN ME

It should come as no surprise that “believe” is one of the most used words in the Gospel of John. In fact, John tells us his purpose in writing this gospel was so that people may “believe” (John 20:31). And here in this intimate setting of the Upper Room, Jesus is emphatically saying “believe” in the present tense, which means continuously, not wavering based on circumstances.

No matter what you may be facing during this season of life the key to navigating the troubles of life is to trust and believe God. One of the best ways we can place our trust in God in the face of our present troubles is to remind ourselves of our past deliverance. We can recall all that God has brought us through. His track record is impeccable. Perfect. Our trust and belief in God will turn our gaze from looking at the size of our problems to looking at the size of our God.

No matter what you may be facing during this season of life the key to navigating the troubles of life is to trust and believe God.

Often, when life’s troubles come, we look inwardly and place our faith in the tangible such as ourselves and our accomplishments. We place our faith in our finances, but money cannot deliver us from sickness. We place our faith in our careers, but our notoriety and reputation in the office cannot resurrect a broken marriage. We place our faith in our sheer determination, but willpower cannot win back a wayward child. Only God can deliver us from our troubles. When we stop looking in and start looking up to God He can lead us in navigating life’s trials and troubles effectively. Throughout Scripture, we see the Character of God. Isaiah tells us that God has measured the waters in the hollow of His hands and has marked off the Heaven’s by the breadth of His hands (Isaiah 40:12). When we feel like life is falling apart, we can place our lives in the capable and loving hands of God. The same hands that marked off the span of the universe were pierced by nails for us.

In the Upper Room, Jesus makes God tangible. *“...believe in God, believe also in Me.”* Just a few verses later in that same setting, Jesus makes this statement, *“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”* (John 14:7) Jesus is connecting the dots for the disciples and for us. He knows that their circumstances are going to change drastically in less than 24 hours. He knows that the disciples are going to be troubled. Jesus knows that what they think is the end; is not the end. Jesus is preparing them for the place that He has prepared for them.

¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

3. I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

As He talks with the disciples around the table in the Upper Room, Jesus continues to connect Himself to God the Father.

JOHN 14:2-4 *“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way where I am going.”*

It was after these words that Thomas asks the question that allowed Jesus to answer with the sixth *I Am* statement.

JOHN 14:5 *Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?”*

Jesus gives four truths about Himself in response to Thomas. The first three truths help to relieve a troubled heart, but the last truth helps to relieve a troubled soul.

JOHN 14:6 *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*

A. The Way

About a month before our wedding, we got our first apartment. I moved all my stuff into the apartment while my wife stayed at her parents until the wedding day. I did not have much to bring or set-up. My whole life was easily packed into two trips with my Toyota Corolla. All I had to my name were some clothes (most of which are now donated to Goodwill or on the “you cannot wear that in public” list), a chair, a mattress, and some cleaning supplies. There was not much to pack or prepare, and it certainly was not comforting to view. But it was our first apartment, so I tried my hardest to make sure things looked welcoming when she arrived. I wanted the carpet to have those vacuumed lines running up and down the living room and for there not to be any dishes in the sink. That was easy, considering all I had were paper plates, plastic silverware from restaurants, and a coffee mug.

Jesus comforts His disciples, explaining that He is going to prepare a place for them in their Father’s house. In the ancient Near East when young men were betrothed to their bride, they did not go rent an apartment or buy a house. They built an addition on to their father’s house. They would make all the preparations necessary so that they could begin their life together in the new addition to the house. Once the groom was done making his preparations, the wedding and marriage would commence.

**Jesus prepared
the Way for us to
have life forever in
the Father’s house
through His work
on the cross.**

To be clear, although Jesus was a carpenter, He is not in heaven with a golden hammer and nails building us mansions. Jesus prepared *the Way* for us to have life forever in the Father’s house through His work on the cross. He went to the Father by *the Way* of the cross. He not only shows us the way to the Father, but He also prepares the way to the Father through His sacrificial death and His resurrection.

When we look at our life’s troubles they pale in comparison to the outpouring of trouble that Jesus faced preparing the Way for us to the Father. He was beaten beyond recognition so that we could be recognized before the Father. He was mocked so that we may be adored. He was beaten so that we would be accepted. Jesus was cursed so that we could be blessed. He died so that we might live.

In the midst of life's troubles when we seem to have lost our way, we can look to Jesus. He prepared the Way for us to know the Father. The true trouble that Jesus faced brings us peace with God even in life's most dire circumstances.

B. The Truth

One of the greatest modern actors in cinematic history is Daniel Day-Lewis. Day-Lewis has been nominated for over 200 acting awards and has won 139 times. What sets Daniel Day-Lewis apart from the rest of the actors is his commitment to get into, and stay in character – called method acting. In his 1997 film, *The Boxer*, Day-Lewis trained for 18 months preparing for the role. His trainer claimed that he was skilled enough to compete as a professional. In his 1992 role as Hawkeye in *Last of the Mohicans*, he became so immersed in his role that he learned to build canoes, fight with tomahawks, cook and skin animals, and to shoot a twelve-pound flintlock gun on the run. He even carried the weapon to his family's Christmas dinner. For his role in *My Left Foot*, Day-Lewis plays an Irish writer and painter with cerebral palsy. He spent eight weeks in a cerebral palsy clinic in Dublin and learned how to paint with his toes. He never left his wheelchair. He forced his fellow actors to carry him and insisted on being spoon-fed food. On Set during *Lincoln*, he demanded everyone call him Mr. President. He wrote letters to his fellow colleagues and signed them "Abe."²

Day-Lewis was so committed to being in character that the lines between the role and reality often blurred in his everyday life. He was committed to becoming somebody he was not. It is a startling commentary on the human condition. We often go to extreme lengths to get in character and become somebody we are not. We are troubled by building our brand and keeping up the image that we have created for ourselves.

Jesus' words to us are refreshing to the soul. He tells his disciples "*I am... the truth.*" Jesus is not trying to portray a brand image or to act out the truth about God. He IS the Truth. He is always truthful in His claims and always authentic in His interaction with His people.

One of the things that made Jesus a revolutionary religious figure in the first century was truthfulness. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were playing a part. They were trying to project an image of righteousness and holiness but behind closed doors, they were sinful and corrupt. For Jesus, there was no duplicitous lifestyle. His public life and private life were consistent.

Truth is not merely a set of facts and propositions. Truth is reality that is rooted in the mind of God. Author Jen Wilkin writes, "God is truth. He is its origin and its determiner. What He defines as true is eternally true, unchangingly true. Because He is truth, all of His actions reveal truth and all of His words declare it."³ Every syllable that Jesus ever uttered was true 2,000 years ago and is still true today. His words are unchangingly true. The longer that time passes, the longer His words will continue to be true. He is the embodiment of truth.

Truth is not merely a set of facts and propositions. Truth is reality that is rooted in the mind of God.

Jesus' declaration that He is the Truth is also a declaration that any other source of salvation and lasting satisfaction is a lie. Sometimes when we experience a troubled heart in life it is because we have been listening to the whisper of the liar. He has convinced us to listen to his lie that following the Way will never lead to lasting fulfillment and ultimate joy. Just like in the Garden, Satan whispered lies to our original parents, Adam and Eve, telling them that sin will not have lasting consequences and can bring deeper happiness than obedience ever could. In those moments when

² <https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/film/g15335475/daniel-day-lewis-craziest-method-acting-stories/>

³ Jen Wilkin, "God Most Truthful." *In His Image: 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character*, Crossway, 2018, p. 123.

the serpent whispers to our hearts, we must run back to the truth of Scripture. We must harken to the words of Jesus.

C. The Life

When Jesus states that He is the Life, He is making a bigger claim than first comes to mind. We must peel back the layers and investigate the original language to get a better understanding of how Jesus defines Himself. As we learned earlier in this series, in the original Greek language, there are two distinct words used for “life.”

The first term that is used for life is the word “*bios*.” It is where we get our word for biology. Everything living possesses “*bios*.” We know from Scripture that God is the Giver and Sustainer of “*bios*” life (Colossians 1:16-18). We saw this truth on full display when Jesus called His friend Lazarus out of the tomb and into life. If there is an area in your life that you feel is dead, Jesus need only say the word, and beauty can rise from the ashes.

**Eternal life begins
the moment we
begin our personal
relationship
with Jesus.**

The second term that is used for life goes past the physical realm and into the spiritual; Jesus uses the word “*zoe*.” *Zoe* is one of the favorite words used in John’s Gospel. In fact, he uses it thirty-six times.⁴ The type of life that Jesus is referring to is more than physical life, it is eternal life. Eternal life is not just something that we enter after we die and get to heaven. Eternal life begins the moment we begin our personal relationship with Jesus. Eternal life is not so much about the quantity of life as it is about the quality of life.

Jesus declares to His disciples in the Upper Room that He is how we can possess eternal life. Jesus would later define what eternal life is. “*This is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” (John 17:3) Eternal life is not achieved by our merits, our good deeds, our church attendance, our heritage, or even by how much money we put in the offering plate each week. Eternal life is wrapped up in the person of Jesus.

Many of us put our life in the hands of our retirement account, our friendships, our career, or even in our personal health. As recent events have shown us, these functional saviors cannot bear us up. Our retirement account can take a major hit. Our careers can be lost in a day, and our health can be affected by the smallest germs. If we put our life in the hands of the temporary, we will be disappointed.

In the troubling moments of life when we feel like everything is out of control, when we feel alone, confused, and afraid we must remember Jesus’ proclamation that He is the Life. The hope that we have as Christians is we can take our lives out of our frail hands and place them into the hands of the One who not only possesses life but IS Life. Jesus allows us to enter into eternal life, by His grace.

4. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME

The first three truths help relieve the troubles of life. They are a healing balm to a hurting heart. Jesus does not just tend to our present circumstances. He provides the way for us to experience heaven with Him for all of eternity.

My Dad has been a chaplain for my entire life. For many years he worked at Memorial Hermann Hospital, but over the last decade, he began to work as a chaplain for a hospice company. Families grieve as they watch their loved ones slip away slowly. The dying person is often consumed with

⁴ D. H. Johnson, “Life: The Fourth Gospel.” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel B. Green, by Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, IVP Academic., 1992, p. 469–471.

anxiety and fear; not necessarily because of death, but what lays on the other side of that threshold. Many are worried because they have no certainty where they will spend eternity. Will their good deeds outweigh their bad? Are they a good enough person? Their last days are often spent with a great amount of unrest and uncertainty.

Thankfully, Jesus is loving, kind, and direct. Jesus tells His disciples that no one will enter Heaven to be with the Father for all of eternity unless they come to Him first. Jesus is the only way that we will experience salvation and long-lasting assurance.

Many in our culture believe that Jesus' claim here is inconsiderate, unloving, and not tolerant of other religions and viewpoints. But, in truth, it is one of the most loving of Jesus' declarations. It would be unloving for Jesus to lead us down the wrong road. It would be unkind and untruthful for Him to suggest that all religious roads lead to heaven.

Jesus is tenderly guiding us to where salvation can be found. It is an exclusive claim, but truth in its very nature is exclusive. Jesus is warning us that salvation can only be found in Him. This truth is inclusive in that His salvation is available to anyone and everyone who believes. This truth gives us bold and calm assurance during life's troubles that our future is with the Father if we have come to the Son.

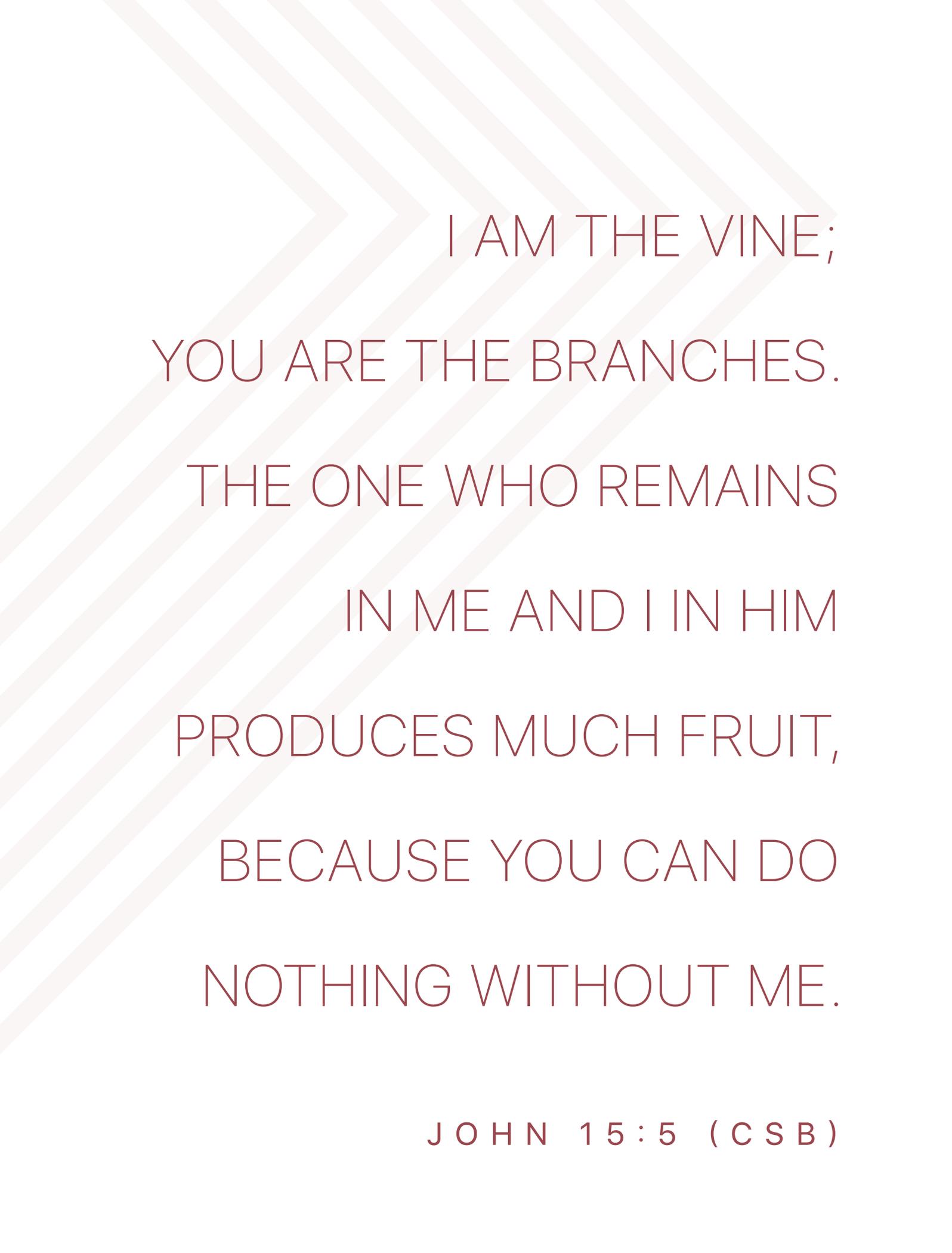
HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Troubles in life will come. They have the potential to rob us of our effectiveness and to derail us from knowing God and reaching others. But Jesus' claim in John 14 provides solace during life's storms. Because Jesus is the Way, He has made a way for us through the cross to have peace with God. Because Jesus is the Truth, we have an authentic Savior whose words to us are honest and true in a world plagued with lies. Because Jesus is the Life, we have entered into eternal life so we can be encouraged in temporary troubles. Jesus' plan for us is to draw near to Him during times of distress. Jesus' words in the Upper Room encourage us to let faith arise and troubles shrink.

In the Upper Room Jesus' words comforted His disciples amid one of their toughest hours. Not because He gave them a set of rules to follow or provided a worldview for them to adhere. No, Jesus was offering more than religion. He was offering Himself. He is a loving Lord and a faithful friend. We can know Him and run to Him when life's challenges seem daunting. The late Ravi Zacharias writes in *Jesus Among Other Gods*:

“I came to Him because I did not know which way to turn. I remained with Him because there is no other way I wish to turn. I came to Him longing for something I did not have. I remain with Him because I have something I will not trade. I came to Him as a stranger. I remain with Him in the most intimate of friendships. I came to Him unsure about the future. I remain with Him certain about my destiny.”⁵

⁵ Ravi K. Zacharias and Kevin Johnson. *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*. Thomas Nelson, 2017.



I AM THE VINE;
YOU ARE THE BRANCHES.
THE ONE WHO REMAINS
IN ME AND I IN HIM
PRODUCES MUCH FRUIT,
BECAUSE YOU CAN DO
NOTHING WITHOUT ME.

J O H N 1 5 : 5 (C S B)

I AM

THE VINE

DATE

September 26 & 27

WEEK

7 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 15: 1-11

KEY VERSE

John 15:5

SETTING THE STAGE

This is the final of the seven *I Am* statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The first four were proclaimed in public formats, the fifth was privately said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus; the final two were said to only the disciples on the night Jesus was betrayed. John 13-17 is known as the Upper Room Discourse and describes the evening and early morning hours before Jesus was crucified. It is the most intimate of settings, the most somber of moments.

By the time of this passage, Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples, broken bread, and passed the wine for their last supper together. Jesus informed them that one would betray Him and that Peter would deny Him. Judas Iscariot had already departed, and it appears that at the end of John 14, Jesus and the remaining disciples left the room as well.

Jesus and the remaining 11 disciples walk from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane, which could have taken them by the Temple of Herod. The Temple was known to have two-leaved doors with gold plating and the symbol of Israel hanging above with a gigantic vine of pure gold, each cluster the height of a man.¹ This may have been the visual object lesson leading to the words in chapter 15, in addition to the garden itself.

Continued on page 56 >

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Position
2. Pruning
3. Production
4. Promises

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Greek word "*Menō*" means "remain, stay, abide, live, dwell, or continue." It is used ten times in John 15:1-10.
- Throughout the Old Testament, God refers to His people Israel as a "vine" or a "vineyard" (Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10; Ezekiel 15; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1; Psalm 80:8-19).
- This passage is spoken to the disciples and believers.

I AM THE VINE

Setting the Stage, continued >

Jesus is teaching knowing that these words would be among the final words He would speak to the disciples before He would be arrested, in the darkness of the early morning hours on the night He was betrayed.

Introduction

The world's best apples grow in the Columbia Basin of eastern Washington State. About half the apples we eat grow in this small region. If you visit in late summer, you will see rolling hills lined by neat rows of apple trees sagging under the weight of ripe Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Gala, and Honeycrisp apples.

Ask any Washington apple farmer the secret to growing such delicious fruit and he will tell you: location, location, location. The cool, dry, sun-kissed Columbia Basin—where the Yakima, Columbia, and Snake rivers come together—makes a perfect place for growing apples, along with grapes, cherries, pears, and dozens of other crops too! ² The climate is incredibly consistent. If a farmer remains in the fertile basin, he can expect to reap good fruit season after season.

Jesus has a similar message for His disciples in John 15. He offers a blessed, fruitful, abundant life to His followers—if only they remain right where they are, connected to Him.

In this passage, we will hear the seventh and final “I Am” statement in John’s gospel. Jesus declares this statement and the one before it (“*I am the way, the truth, and the life...*” John 14:6) on the night of His betrayal. Both statements reveal Jesus as the only source of peace with God and a life of eternal significance. To illustrate this in the seventh statement, Jesus paints an unforgettable picture. He begins simply: “*I am the true vine.*”

JOHN 15:1-11 *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me.” ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples.*



¹ www.soniclight.com/john

² <http://treefruit.wsu.edu/orchard-management/>

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love. ¹¹ “I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” (CSB)

1. POSITION

In these precious last hours of Jesus’ life, the Lord is revealing staggering truths to His disciples that will encourage them in the difficult days ahead. Jesus begins in John 15 with two images familiar to all Jews: a gardener and a vine.

God was known to be a “gardener” as He planted a garden in Eden. (Genesis 2:8) The people of Israel were known to be God’s “vine.” Out of all the people on earth, God had treated the Israelites with special care as a gardener by providing, protecting, and pruning that which He had planted. However, the vine was not faithful to the gardener.

ISAIAH 5:7 “For the vineyard of the Lord of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, the plant He delighted in. He expected justice but saw injustice; He expected righteousness but heard cries of despair.” (CSB)

PSALM 80:14-16 “Return, God of Armies. Look down from heaven and see; take care of this vine, the root your right hand planted, the son that you made strong for yourself. It was cut down and burned; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.” (CSB)

So, when Jesus uttered the words of John 15:1, the disciples already understood that God was a good gardener, and they knew that Israel had been an unfruitful vine. But what they were not prepared for was Jesus declaring Himself to be the “*true vine*.” He does what Israel could never do because Jesus Himself “*came from God*” (John 8:42) and has “*life in Himself*” (John 5:26).

Jesus makes clear the position He has; the position God has; and the position of the disciples. Jesus as the *True Vine* is connected to God in a vital, permanent, and fruitful way. Throughout His ministry, Jesus would connect His position with the Father. (John 5:19, 10:30, 14:9-11) Yet here, in this allegory, Jesus provides the disciples with a visual picture of what that positioning looks like. There are certain responsibilities based on the position.

Jesus makes clear the position He has; the position God has; and the position of the disciples.

God is the gardener, or as some translations say, the vinedresser. God, the Father, loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, the *True Vine* to this world. The *True Vine* was planted and grew and developed branches. The *True Vine* was dependent on the gardener and would not do anything without the direction and approval of the gardener.

The *True Vine* had branches, which in this allegory are the disciples. The position of the branch is directly connected to the vine. The phrase “*in Me*” appears nine times in the first eleven verses of this chapter. A key to understanding what Jesus meant by “abiding/ remaining” is the expression, “*in Me*,” which reflects a theological concept called “positional truth” or “identification.” Paul the apostle often described believers as being “in Christ.” ³

The vinedresser would always look at the branch as it is connected to, abiding or remaining with the vine. The branch gets its nourishment from the vine. The fruit that the branch would eventually bear was not based so much on the branch but the nourishment from and connection to the vine.

³ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s New Testament Insights*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010; p. 257.

The disciples received nourishment from Jesus over the course of the previous three or more years of ministry. Imagine how different it would have been if they had not remained with Jesus after the wedding in Cana where Jesus changed water into wine. But by remaining “in Him” they heard the truths of the beatitudes, they saw the healing of the lepers, they were able to have their feet washed by Jesus just a few hours earlier in the evening. Their lives were changed because of their position in Christ and remaining with Him on the journey that took them in and out of villages, some welcoming them with open arms, others chasing them out of town. Their position, however, would also lead to times of pruning.

2. PRUNING

JOHN 15:2-3 *Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (CSB)*

The pruning process is not done by accident or without purpose. The branch does not ask for the pruning, it is done at the discretion and direction of the gardener. The Farmers Almanac says, “Pruning isn’t just for shape and style. Pruning helps to manage the growth and structure of shrubs and trees, removes dead or diseased stems and branches, and encourages the development of flowers, fruit, and new foliage.” ⁴

Notice in verse 2 that two processes are going on, removal and pruning. The branches that are not producing fruit are removed. That does not mean they cease being branches. They are and will always be branches, but they have merely been removed. The word translated “remove” is the Greek word, “*Airo*” which means, “to raise, elevate, move from its place.” ⁵ This movement as well as the pruning is done by the gardener, God. I would submit that both processes could be described as deliberate grace.

Grace is often seen as something kind, comforting, and even casual. Deliberate grace is not always easy to receive. A branch that is being raised, elevated, or moved is probably a branch that has become complacent, stagnant, and comfortable with the status quo. The moving from its place would be uncomfortable to say the least, but necessary based on the discretion of the gardener.

Dr. Young once said in a sermon on this passage, “as a branch we must submit to the knife of the gardener.”

However, a branch that is producing fruit, receiving proper nourishment because of abiding, and remaining connected strongly to the vine, also receives this deliberate grace that seems invasive. Dr. Young once said in a sermon on this passage, “as a branch we must submit to the knife of the gardener.” ⁶ There is submission involved in the pruning process. The knife of the gardener deliberately cuts the branch not because it has no value, but because the gardener sees it has greater potential. The pruning takes place so that the branch will produce more fruit. The pruning process of deliberate grace can be painful, confusing, and sometimes embarrassing; that which was full and healthy becomes bare, vulnerable, and exposed. However, it is through the pruning process that the branch grows even stronger and healthier in every way. God as the gardener wants each branch to not only stay connected to the vine but to flourish with fruit, maximizing the potential and purpose of that branch.

⁴ <https://www.almanac.com/content/pruning-guide-trees-shrubs>

⁵ Biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁶ Dr. Ed Young, *Who is Jesus Series*, 2001.

Jesus immediately goes from pruning to cleaning. *“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”* In Greek, the word for “clean” is *“katharoi.”* In verse 3 it forms a wordplay with the word “prune,” *“kathairei”* in verse 2. It literally means clean and pure. Remember, Jesus is talking to the 11 remaining disciples, they are not perfect, but they are clean based on their relationship to the “word” spoken by Jesus.

“Word,” is a rich idea in John’s gospel. Jesus Himself is identified as the “Word” made flesh in John 1. The quickest way to understand the cleansing “word I have spoken” in John 15:3 is to look at John 14:10 where Jesus says, *“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who lives in Me does His works.”* So, God does works through Jesus’ words. When Jesus says *“you are already clean...”* He is telling the disciples that if someone believes Jesus’ words, God does a cleansing work in their life. It is by grace through faith in Christ that we are cleansed. It is by believing the Word of God that we are washed. It is by trusting the Promises of God that we are made clean.⁷

3. PRODUCTION

JOHN 15:4-6 *“Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (CSB)*

Jesus is letting the disciples and us know that this is all about our relationship with Him. We are to remain and abide in Jesus. In these verses Jesus reconfirms the fact of His position and our position by saying, *“I am the vine; you are the branches.”* And for those branches who remain and abide in Jesus, fruit will be produced. In fact, Jesus goes as far as to say, *“much fruit”* will be produced.

Just like grapes from a vine or apples from a tree, a life connected to Jesus Christ will produce fruit. Jesus chooses not to expand on what specifically the fruit is or what it looks like or how you can monitor the production. But He does make it clear there are those branches who try to make it alone, apart from Jesus that are *“unable to produce fruit.”* Then, some branches remain and abide in Jesus and produce *“much fruit.”* Notice it is not about the branch, it is all about the connection. As long as the branch is connected to the vine, there will be fruit.

This is not a contest between the branches, nor is it about the amount of fruit; this is about staying connected to the vine, Jesus. And as a result of that connection, there will be fruit. Warren Wiersbe says this about the production of fruit in a broader sense,

“Several different kinds of spiritual fruit are named in the Bible. We bear fruit when we win others to Christ (Romans 1:13). We are part of the harvest (John 4:35-38). As we grow in holiness and obedience, we are bearing fruit (Romans 6:22). Paul considered Christian giving to be fruit from a dedicated life (Romans 15:28). “The Fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23) is the kind of Christian character that glorifies God and makes Christ real to others. Even our good works, our service, grow out of our abiding life (Colossians 1:10). The praise that comes from our hearts and lips is actually fruit to the glory of God (Hebrews 14:15).”⁸

This is not a contest between the branches, nor is it about the amount of fruit; this is about staying connected to the vine, Jesus. And as a result of that connection, there will be fruit.

⁷ dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/John-15-3

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe New Testament Bible Commentary*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, 2007; p. 285.

Of course, the “fruits” of living a godly life, giving, praising, and making new disciples are so closely related, it is better to think of them as different uses of the same fruit—like applesauce and apple juice. The ingredients are almost identical, and this is why Jesus keeps telling His disciples that the main thing is to remain in Him as the source, which is the vine.

Beyond producing fruit, Jesus also has a sober warning for those who choose not to remain connected to Him. Not only will they fail to produce fruit, but they will also be removed, withered up, and finally burned. This is not about nonbelievers, remember Jesus is talking specifically and intimately to His disciples. This also should not be looked upon as someone losing salvation because it would contradict other Scripture that shows the security of the believer. Since the subject is the bearing of fruit and not eternal life, the burning is a judgment upon fruitlessness, not an abandonment to eternal destruction.⁹ In verse 6, notice that the branch is singular, “*he is thrown aside, he withers.*” But then it changes to plural, “*They gather them, throw them, they are burned.*” It has been suggested that it is the works done in the flesh while the person is not abiding in Christ that is being burned. There are many interpretations of this particular verse, which should be considered in light of the totality of Scripture. It is unwise to build a theological doctrine on a parable or allegory.¹⁰

Jesus then shows what life will be like when you do remain and abide in Him.

4. PROMISES

JOHN 15:7-11 *If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples.”⁹ “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love.¹⁰ If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love.¹¹ “I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. (CSB)*

If you look at verse 7 and get excited because it appears to be a promised blank check to the bank of heaven; you have misunderstood the meaning and context. The very first word, “*If,*” lets us know there is a condition involved. “*If you remain in Me and My words remain in you,*” is the essence of this entire passage about a relationship with Jesus. We, as His disciples, are to remain and abide in Him. We are to be connected to Him. We are to listen to Him. Honestly, we have this easier than the 11 disciples did who had to rely on their memories of those three years. We have the words of Jesus at our fingertips. We have the revelation of God, the Gardener, and Creator of the Universe at our fingertips. The Bible is the Word of God where we find and embrace the words of God. The Greek word of “word” in verse 3, is the word “*Logos,*” the same word John used in John 1:1 to describe Jesus as The Word. The Greek word for “word” in verse 7 is “*Rhema*” which means “that which has been uttered by a living being, words spoken.”¹¹ The words spoken and taught by Jesus are to remain and abide in us, giving us the nourishment provided as to branch from a vine.

If that is true, then do you receive a blank check? No! If that is true, then you will be walking in rhythm and purpose based on what Jesus wants for your life. Your prayers will not be prayers based on selfishness, conceit or envy. Your prayers will be prayers as Jesus prayed, “*Not My will,*

⁹ www.soniclight.com/John

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe New Testament Bible Commentary*, p. 285.

¹¹ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

but Thy will be done." (Luke 22:42) When you are remaining in Jesus and His words are remaining in you, your prayer life changes. As we think as God thinks, we ask for what is consistent with His plan, which results in His giving us what we ask.¹²

The promises continue in that God will be glorified as we remain in Jesus. Jesus then promises that He has loved us as His Father has loved Him. That is a kind of love that is beyond our comprehension. This is a sacrificial and provisional love that is truly supernatural. Because of this kind of love, we naturally will want to keep His commands and teachings. His teachings will become an effortless overflow in our lives and relationships. Obedience to God's Word shapes our heart into a conduit for divine, fruit-bearing, love.

And then we come to one more promise about joy. Jesus lets us in on why He has told us this story, using an analogy in verse 11; *"I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."* Jesus wants us to live a life of joy. Joy that comes from a connection to Him, the Vine. Joy that will give us strength during those times of pruning. Joy that will give us endurance during those seasons leading to the fruit. Joy that comes in the evening when the sun goes down and meets us in the morning when the sun comes up on a new day of challenges and opportunities.

Jesus wants us to live a life of joy. Joy that comes from a connection to Him, the Vine.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

One of the most peculiar things about the apple orchards in Eastern Washington is the trees themselves. They are rather unimpressive. Squat-like, knotted, uneven-looking overgrown bushes might be a better description. They are the last place you would rest under for shade. And they do not make a very good background for photos.

But come September, the fruit on those ugly trees is incredible. The glory of the Columbia Basin is not the squatty apple trees, it is the abundant fruit they produce.

Like those knotty apple trees, Jesus does not promise to make His people impressive to the world. He promises to connect them to a life-giving relationship with His Heavenly Father. This happens because of our position in Him. This happens when we are willing to submit to the knife of the gardener in the pruning process. This happens when we bear fruit and much fruit as we remain in Him. This happens as His promises nourish us now and forever with divine love.

His plan as a gardener is to provide a vine that allows us to be the branches, branches of purpose, and promise.

¹² Chuck Swindoll; *Swindoll's New Testament Insights*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010; p. 259.

THE STORY OF **CHRIST:** **IN HIS OWN** **WORDS**

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

I AM THE DOOR

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

I AM THE VINE



COMING UP NEXT:

THE STORY OF **POWER**