

L A B E L E D



B A S K I N T H E L I G H T O F H I S L A B E L

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INTRODUCTION

AND OVERVIEW

LEADER NOTE

This section is about introducing the overall topic and giving an overview of the concepts we'll discuss. Highlight the topics that will be covered in the series, but be careful not to go into great detail, because you'll do that over the next three weeks. This is simply an introduction to the main elements of the series. Emphasize that "Labels" is a 3-week study that explores Jesus' seven "I AM" statements. "I AM Bread and Light" is only the first week, but each "I AM" statement is a big part of understanding who we are in Christ. No one gets to label us but the One who made us. You can lead learners to think of it this way: I AM defines, declares, determines, and changes who I am.

SESSION 1:

I AM the Bread of Life

I AM the Light of the World

SESSION 2:

I AM the Door

I AM the Good Shepherd

SESSION 3:

I AM The Resurrection and the Life

I AM The Way, the Truth, and the Life

I AM The True Vine

WHICH "I AM" STATEMENT DO YOU RELATE TO THE MOST AT FIRST GLANCE? WHY?

WHICH "I AM" STATEMENT ARE YOU MOST CURIOUS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT? WHY?

I AM

THE BREAD

& LIGHT

SESSION 1

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

LEADER NOTE

This passage begins in John 6:22 and continues through the end of the chapter when many who had been following Jesus turned away. Before leading the session, read the passage in its entirety to better understand Jesus' full message. Help learners see that even Jesus' disciples found the message He gave about Himself difficult. The truth about who Jesus is and who we are will always be offensive to us when we allow worldly, fleshly desires to define, declare, and determine what to believe and how to live. But worldly, fleshly desires lead only to dissatisfaction and death. Jesus explained it this way in verse 63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."

KEY VERSES

JOHN 6:25-27

²⁵ 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. 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."

Why do you think Jesus challenged the people's motive for seeking Him? Why isn't it enough to simply want some measure of a relationship with Jesus?

What are some things the world says you need to be content and happy in life?

In what ways do you struggle with Jesus' instruction to "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"?

The people were looking for Jesus because it was morning and they thought He might feed them again. They weren't looking for Him because what He had done the day before meant He was their Messiah. Instead, they wondered what else He might do for them, what other physical need He might provide. Before Jesus delivered this first "I AM" statement, He cautioned the people to consider their wants and needs more carefully. He didn't come to only take care of a few temporary issues; He came to take care of eternal needs.

KEY VERSE

JOHN 6:35

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.”

Has there been a season in your life when you felt truly content and satisfied? If so, what reason can you attribute that “fullness” to? If not, why do you think that is?

Explain what Jesus meant when He said that whoever comes to Him would never hunger or thirst.

Of course, if you’re searching for worldly satisfaction, you’re going to stay hungry. If you’re searching for people to fill you up, you’re going to stay thirsty. But if you’re searching for righteousness, peace, contentment, and confidence that lasts, you need to look no further. Jesus alone satisfies our deepest longing. Jesus alone makes us truly content—not Jesus plus something or someone else. It is not Jesus plus money, success, other people, possessions, knowledge, or fame. Jesus, in and of Himself, is enough to satisfy our souls. Nothing can take His place, and nothing can make Him more filling than He already is.

KEY VERSES

JOHN 6:48-51

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. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

What point was Jesus making by contrasting Himself with the manna that came down from heaven in the wilderness?

Explain Jesus’ metaphor. What does it mean to “eat of this bread” or “feed on” (v. 57) Jesus?

We are to receive Jesus and consume Him; He is the true bread from heaven. He did not teach that eating His body and blood physically brings people eternal life. Rather, He made it clear that believing in Him gives eternal life. We feed on Jesus when we treasure His Word, humbly come to Him in prayer, and give ourselves in daily sacrificial service to Him, believing that He supplies what we need, sustains us in our need, and satisfies our deepest need.

What are you holding on to most tightly—the Bread of Life or something else?

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

KEY VERSES

JOHN 8:4-12

⁴ “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it,

they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” ¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

What labels had the religious leaders given the woman they brought before Jesus? In what ways were they wanting and expecting Him to label her?

From verse 7, what label did Jesus imply the religious leaders shared with the woman?

In what way has Jesus given light to the world’s labels you have received and believed?

Jesus sees and knows everything about us. The woman’s guilt was without question. She was a sinner. And so were her accusers. And so are we. But rather than letting us remain in darkness and shame, Jesus brings light to the situation, because He is the light. In His light, we no longer walk in the darkness of our labels, but in the light of truth and life. I AM changes who I am. Jesus sees and Jesus saves.

KEY VERSES

MATTHEW 5:14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the

same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

What struggles do you have in labeling yourself the way Jesus does here, “the Light of the world”?

How does this passage help you understand what it means that “I AM changes who I am”?

Jesus sees and saves. He also shines through us. As we discover the identity of Jesus, we discover our own identities. Because Jesus is the Light of the world, then if we are in Him, we are the Light of the world. His light is meant to shine in and through us!

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD BREAD AND LIGHT

LEADER NOTE

If we're anything like the original hearers of Jesus' teachings in John's account, these are difficult truths on various levels. We don't want to impart knowledge only, but life change. Use this section to help learners examine what it means practically that Jesus is the Bread of Life and the Light of the world. Each person has a next step to take.

List every label you can think of that you have heard or believed about yourself.

How do Jesus' statements, I AM the Bread of Life and I AM the Light of the world, change how you see yourself?

What is a situation where you need to believe Jesus is the Bread of Life—able to supply, sustain, and satisfy your needs? How can this group help you in that?

What is a situation where you need to allow Jesus to show Himself as the Light of the world? How can this group help you in that?

COMMENTARY

JOHN 6:35, 37, 44, 48

6:35, 48. I am the bread of life is the first of Jesus' seven "I am" sayings in John. Subsequently He said He is "the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5); "the door" of the sheep (10:7,9); the "good shepherd" (10:11,14); "the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6); and "the true vine" (15:1). Apart from these sayings, there are statements where Jesus referred to Himself as "I am" (6:20; 8:24,28,58; 18:5), a clear allusion to God's identification as "I am" (Ex 3:14).

6:37, 44. Jesus affirmed the twin themes of election and perseverance of the saints, prominent topics in John's Gospel. Those predestined by God will come to Jesus, and Jesus will preserve His own. No one can come to Jesus apart from the Father's drawing him. These themes continue in the Good Shepherd discourse (10:28-29) and Jesus' final prayer (17:6,9,11-12).

6:51, 57-58

Imagine the shock verse 51 must have had on the ears and minds of the hearers that day in Capernaum. One can talk in general terms about eating the bread of life; it is quite another matter to say, **this bread is my flesh**. The word for flesh is different from body or self because it focuses on physical death and clearly points to the cross. There the bread of life was offered by Jesus universally— **for the life of the world**.

It is crucial for us to understand the significance of spiritual appropriation in these verses. Jesus claimed that his death and its atonement for sin are effective only when people reach out and apply that substitutionary sacrifice to themselves in a spiritual sense.

It is interesting that a short verse like this can consist of three complete sentences. And there is an order or design to the sentences. The first states the source of the living bread; the second discusses the manner in which the life

is received when one eats the living bread; and the third focuses on how that eating is available through the vicarious death of Christ on the cross.

6:57-58. The terminology of verse 57 changes just a bit to speak no longer of flesh and blood, but just of eating Christ—the present tense feel of chapter 15. We might paraphrase Jesus' words as, "The one who keeps on feeding on me will live because I live within him."

Finally, we learn that spiritual appropriation provides eternal life. The real bread that came down from heaven was not manna but the life of God's Son given on our behalf. Eating the physical bread of the Old Testament ultimately led to death. But eating the spiritual bread of the New Testament, participating in Christ's death at Calvary, provides eternal life.

JOHN 8:4-11

John left no doubt regarding the Pharisees' motivation: They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. So the chapter begins with public accusation, but it also goes on to talk about personal guilt. In one sense the Pharisees stood on solid ground with their appeal to the Law of Moses (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24), but the law was not as clear as their accusation seems to imply. For example, her marital status would be a defining factor.

8:6b-8. Interpreters seem fascinated by Jesus' writing in the sand, certainly a reaction unexpected by the Pharisees. Why did Jesus do this? What did he write? One answer suffices for both questions: We do not know. It is useless to speculate, as some have done, that he wrote the names of other adulterers who were standing there among the group of accusers. We are bound to the text which tells us nothing more than that Jesus refused an immediate or reactionary response to the Pharisees' accusation. The centerpiece of this scene is the Lord's

answer: If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

The writing in the sand was followed by the wisdom of the Son. This rubric is certainly valuable for judgmental Christians in our times. The perfect reply preserved both Jewish and Roman law while exposing the wickedness of the accusers. As Jesus began writing on the ground a second time, they had time to think about their own lives and God began to speak to those who were open to hear his voice. Again the accusers were brought face to face with the law they themselves had quoted. According to Deuteronomy 17:2-7, the witnesses of a crime who had reported it to the authorities would be the first to cast the stones.

8:9. What followed was the withdrawal of the sinners, one at a time, the older ones first. Did the older ones leave first because they had more time to accumulate sins of their own? Was it their maturity and sense of impending judgment that made them fleet of foot to escape this embarrassing predicament? Did they recognize that perhaps their sin was greater than the woman's and Jesus knew that full well? Again, the text does not tell us. But conscience must have played some role in this scene as the accusers left Jesus alone with the woman.

8:10-11. The first two scenes of the story described the charges and their response. Now we come to the verdict. With the accusers gone, there remained no condemnation. The Son of God refused to press the issue. Her sin was not just set aside; soon Jesus would pay the penalty for both the woman and her accusers.

Jesus asked a rhetorical question and the woman answered it simply. Forgiveness rests upon the Lord's understanding. In this vignette we find recognition, repentance, regeneration, restitution, and reconciliation.

A second important lesson in these two verses is that forgiveness rests upon the Lord's grace. Remember the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? The father showed unconditional forgiveness and restoration when the

son returned. Salvation does not come from suffering; it comes from grace—from the suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf.

Finally, we see that the verdict rests upon the Lord's forgiveness. Forgiveness demands a clean break with sin. In Matthew 9:2 we read, "Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.'" In searching for a way to translate this, a missionary linguist working among the Guajira tribe in Colombia rendered the Lord's words, "I forgive you. Let's be friends again."

The same Jesus offers forgiveness today to sinners whose sins equal that of the woman or those of the Pharisees. And not only forgiveness for initial salvation but also for daily sins of anger, disobedience, envy, greed, and the judgmental character shown by the Pharisees which gave birth to this episode.

8:12. Here we find the second of seven "I Am" passages in John's Gospel. Like water (ch. 4) and bread (ch. 6), light is necessary for life. And the Lord wasted no time in explaining that spiritual light comes to those who willingly follow Him. Since light is one of John's major themes, several assumptions arise from this verse. One is that the world needs light, something John has already told us in chapter 1. There are conditions for seeing and knowing the light—following Jesus. Finally, walking in the light can be permanent. The light of life can change a person so that he or she need never again walk in darkness.

Chapters five, six and seven of John's Gospel have picked up three major Old Testament wilderness reminders of how God dealt with His people: the comparison between manna and the bread of life in chapter 6; the comparison between water in the desert and the water of the Holy Spirit in chapter 7; and here in chapter 8 a comparison with the pillar of fire which led the people through the wilderness and Jesus, the light of the world.

The Feast of Tabernacles was also known as the Feast of Lights because of the many ceremonies that involved various kinds of lighting. From the earliest verses of the first chapter in this Gospel, John has been fascinated with the link between light and life. Here, however, we do not have a statement about everyone participating in the light, but the exclusion of all who do not follow the true light.

Some interpreters have suggested that Jesus may have drawn His illustration from the great candlestick (Menorah) which cast its light over the room in which He was teaching. Everyone there knew the Menorah would be extinguished after the feast. But Jesus indicated that His light would remain forever.

MATTHEW 5:14-16

In Matthew 5:13-16, before embarking on the body of the sermon, Jesus explained in two word pictures the impact that a truly righteous person will have on his or her world. The entire sermon, including the Beatitudes before and the many teachings after, shows us how to live as “salt and light” in the world as representatives of another kingdom. These word pictures also serve Matthew’s purpose—to encourage believers to change their world (Matt. 28:18-20). The function of light is to make reality or truth visible, thereby giving direction and guidance by what is seen. Jesus used the emphatic “you,” and clearly stated that this is already what a believer is, not something he might become. It is the nature of a kingdom servant to be light in the world. Any believer who fails to function as light is going against his nature as God’s new creation. The believer has no light inherent in himself. The believer’s light is a reflected light. Believers are to make certain that nothing comes between them and their source of light (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:13-16).

Both a city on a hill (v. 14) and the lamp on its stand (v. 15) fulfill their function by being elevated, so their light can be seen by many people over a broad area. Jesus Himself explained the application of this principle in

5:16. The light represents our good works, which must be done with such integrity that all who see have no choice but to credit our Father in heaven. The Christian’s life and influence is to be visible and obvious, not secret or hidden. We must not camouflage our devotion to Christ, but humbly do all we can to allow its truest colors to be seen where we live. The term translated give glory to means “to make manifest or visible.” When we shine our light before others by living righteously, we are making visible the character of the Father. It is the Christian’s commission to live in such a way as to make God visible in a world that is blind to Him.

PSALM 119:105

Seeking his direction in life from God’s word, the psalmist declares it is a lamp to his feet, giving light for his path in life. Seeing the divinely illumined way, he has taken an oath to follow God’s righteous laws.

I AM

THE DOOR &

THE GOOD

SHEPHERD

SESSION 2

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

LEADER NOTE

This section is a way to briefly review last week before getting into today's lesson. Please be careful to keep it brief. We don't need to re-teach last week's lesson; we want to help learners see how this lesson is related to the one before it.

I AM BREAD AND LIGHT

In last week's session, we took a close look at two of Jesus' seven "I AM" statements—I AM the Bread of Life and I AM the Light of the world. We were reminded that what Jesus says about Himself reveals important truths about who we are, too. When we understand that Jesus is the Bread of Life, we refuse to look to the world to satisfy us in its temporary and ultimately meaningless ways. When we understand that Jesus is the light of the world, we rely on Him for truth and direction, and we allow Him to shine in and through us as we relate to others.

Name one takeaway from last week that stayed with you throughout the week.

In what situation(s) did you find Jesus as your Bread of Life this week? In what situation(s) were you reminded that He is the Light of the world?

Today, we'll examine two more "I AM" statements—I AM the Door and I AM the Good Shepherd. Through these two titles, we'll learn more about who Jesus is and who we are in Him.

I AM THE DOOR

KEY VERSES

JOHN 10:7-10

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "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 listen to them. ⁹ I am the door.

If anyone enters by 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."

This "I AM" statement was a clear illustration for Jesus' original hearers. A sheep pen was an enclosure of stones, open to the sky, with only one entrance (which was a narrow opening). The shepherd would lie down across that opening and sleep there at night. Literally, no one could enter in except through him. No sheep could exit, either. The shepherd became the door to the sheep and for the sheep.

What does the image of the door tell you about who you are in relation to Christ? What does it reveal about the intimacy that Christ seeks to have with us?

Based on this passage, which of the following labels apply to those who belong to Christ?

- Unsafe
- Loved
- Protected
- Unloved
- Treasured
- Alone
- Saved
- Neglected
- Safe
- Tolerated

How does the picture Jesus painted in John 10 differ from the idea some may have that a life surrendered to Jesus is stifling, joyless, and confining?

A door gives access. It also divides. It keeps danger out and protects what's on the inside. If there is nothing to treasure or protect, there's no need for a door. Further, a door indicates that there is a specific means by which entrance is made. Jesus is the door to salvation because "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Any person or religion that claims to get people into heaven except by Jesus Christ is simply a thief.

Jesus came for the benefit of His people, not to rob them of their possessions. Jesus came to give us life, not to steal it from us. To further illustrate this truth, Jesus went on to describe Himself as the Good Shepherd of His sheep.

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

LEADER NOTE

When we consider ourselves as sheep, these two "I AM" statements go together. We must understand this is a hang-up for many people—part of knowing who we are means we recognize our need. We like to think we are independent, and capable of securing our own destinies. But we are not! Left to our own abilities, we will walk straight into eternal destruction. This "I AM" statement will only be significant to us when we truly grasp our need and who we are apart from Christ.

KEY VERSES

JOHN 10:11-18

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Why do you personally need Jesus to be your Good Shepherd?

What makes Jesus different from every other leader you might follow, even good leaders?

How does this passage compel you to “label” other people?

Every part of this illustration has meaning. When we join God’s flock, we are fed, cared for, and protected by the One who loves us so much that He laid down His life to save us. Jesus doesn’t only take charge over His sheep—He gives of Himself to care for them.

KEY VERSES

JOHN 10:24-30

²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

What is the difference between real sheep and fake sheep?

Find examples of the following in John 10:

- A relationship with the Good Shepherd is loving—
- A relationship with the Good Shepherd is leading—
- A relationship with the Good Shepherd is living—
- A relationship with the Good Shepherd is large—
- A relationship with the Good Shepherd is lasting—

The Good Shepherd points us to the cross, the resurrection, and reward. It is a love relationship—we love Jesus because He loved us first. The Good Shepherd speaks, and His sheep instantly recognize His voice. His voice is intimately familiar. The role of the Good Shepherd is one of leadership—God grows us through His Word, through prayer, through our experiences, and through the community of believers. The Good Shepherd gives us life. It is a living relationship—in Christ we receive eternal life and abundant life even here on earth. The Good Shepherd seeks those who are lost. It is a large relationship—the body of Christ is inclusive and ever-widening as Jesus draws people to Himself and to unity with one another. Our relationship with the Good Shepherd is forever. It is a lasting relationship—nothing can or will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD THE DOOR AND THE GOOD SHEPHERD

LEADER NOTE

This lesson presents critical truths about who Jesus is and what it means to have a relationship with Him. Each person has a next step to take. Use this time to help learners trust in Jesus as the only Door to life and as the Good Shepherd who shows them the way.

I AM THE DOOR

Which side of the “door” to the “sheep pen” are you on? How do you know?

How should it impact the way you live to know there are people right now on the inside and the outside of the “door”?

From today’s lesson, how would you define “abundant life”? Who gives it? How do you obtain it? What does it look like to experience it on a daily basis?

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Are you currently spending enough time in God’s Word to distinguish the voice of Jesus from the voices of this world? What are some ways you could learn to hear Christ more effectively?

If true sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd, Jesus, what is one thing you need to do differently this week to show that you belong to Him?

What are some of the implications for our church as the flock of God?

COMMENTARY

JOHN 10:1-30

10:1-2. Beginning the chapter with his now famous “I tell you the truth” statement, Jesus changed the metaphor from blindness to sheep-stealing. We cannot tell whether the content of chapter 10 followed immediately on the discussion of chapter 9 or occurred on another occasion. Certainly the Lord intended His listeners to identify people of their day reflected in the metaphors of this parable. The sheep pen, for example, represents neither heaven nor the church, but probably first-century Judaism. Verse 1 speaks of the thief invading the sheep pen, not the sheep. The “watchman,” if we identify one specifically, may refer to John the Baptist, or perhaps even the Holy Spirit. Obviously, the shepherd is the Lord Himself, and the thief and robber probably refers to the Pharisees against whom he had battled for several chapters.

Some interpreters place prophetic references on the various “figures of speech” as John calls them. But that is not necessary in light of the reality of the times in which Jesus spoke these words. This was a period of intense conflict in the life of our Lord. The Pharisees and their cohorts had committed themselves to exterminating this one whom they considered a “pesky prophet” from Nazareth. These first six verses emphasize security. In the ancient Middle East, one sheep pen held several flocks, so shepherd recognition was imperative. Only personal identification with a shepherd could make a sheep feel safe.

10:3. Verses 1 and 2 tell us that the shepherd knows his sheep, verse 3 that he calls them, and verses 4-6 that he leads them. Clearly the shepherd and the watchman cannot be the same since the watchman opened the door for the shepherd. But we should recognize the uniqueness of parables and not press every word for a specific meaning. The active verbs seem important in this verse—opens, listen, calls, leads. John is quite specific about the

intimacy between shepherd and sheep. This shepherd does not just sound a call to the whole flock; he calls his sheep by name.

10:4-5. Not only do these sheep listen to the shepherd’s voice, they know his voice. John seems to emphasize the point that they never leave the shepherd and never follow a stranger. But who is this stranger whom the sheep avoid? We do not want to put any dogmatic assignments on the particulars of this parable, but one thing is clear—the stranger is anyone other than the shepherd they know. Strangers abound in our day in a variety of religions and cults as well as the secular domain. Shouting for sheep to follow is common practice, but the Lord’s true sheep pay no attention because they will never follow a stranger.

10:6. As in many of Jesus’ parables, people did not understand the metaphor, at least until He explained its various components which we find later in the chapter. But one thing seems clear in this first paragraph: the sheep were dependent on their shepherd, whom they knew and trusted. Furthermore, the shepherd took full responsibility for the sheep, even though thieves and robbers constantly tried to break into the sheep pen and steal them. In this verse John uses the Greek word *paroimia* (figure of speech), his preferred substitute for *parabole*. The first never appears in the synoptic Gospels and the second never occurs in John, although he used *paroimia* again in 16:25, 29.

10:7-8. Verse 7 begins just like verse 1 in the Greek text—amen amen. Before Jesus actually identified Himself as the Good Shepherd, He described His activity at the sheep gate. We know from Luke 15 that a shepherd counts his sheep and from Psalm 23 how carefully he takes care of them. First-century listeners would have been certain to link this teaching with that familiar psalm. Jesus did not merely explain the first paragraph of the chapter but actually expanded it. New features are added

such as the “hired hand” (v. 12) and the adjective “good” (v. 11). Thieves we have seen earlier, but the “wolf” (v. 12) is a new character and the insertion of the teacher into the narrative in the first person—I am the gate.

10:9-10. In addition to guarding the sheep, the Good Shepherd provides for them—unlike thieves who steal and kill and destroy. Throwing aside the metaphor to reveal spiritual truth, Jesus told the sheep that He had come to give life so they might live it to the full. False shepherds intend to injure the sheep, but that is never the behavior of the true shepherd. We need to watch carefully the flow between metaphor and spiritual reality here. In verse 9 Jesus is clearly talking about people as spiritual sheep, while verse 10 falls back into the metaphor at the beginning and then talks about spiritual life.

10:11. Jesus is the good shepherd. In the OT, God as the true shepherd is contrasted with unfaithful shepherds whom God will judge (Jer. 23:1-4; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11:4-17). David (or the Davidic Messiah) was also depicted as a good shepherd (2Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:70-72; Ezek. 37:24; Mic. 5:4), as was Moses (Isa. 63:11; cp. Ps. 77:20). The reference to the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep calls to mind young David (1Sam. 17:34-37).

10:12. The hired man does not care for the sheep and abandons them in times of danger. The hired hands of Israel (Ezek. 22:27) are contrasted with God and His Messiah, whose role is patterned after God’s “good shepherd” par excellence, King David (1Sam. 17:34-36).

10:16. The other sheep... not of this fold refers to Gentiles (Isa 56:8). Jesus envisioned a future Gentile mission following His death on the cross. One flock, one shepherd alludes to Ezek 34:23; 37:24. Believing Jews and Gentiles will be united into one messianic community.

10:17-18. The Lord emphasized that His death on the cross would not occur because earthly powers are stronger than the power of the

heavenly Father. He would lay down His life willingly and at the time the Father required it. Substitutionary atonement is the heart of the gospel (Isa. 53:6), and that certainly focuses the Lord’s words here. He would join the sheep from a variety of pens and He would die for all of them.

10:19-21. The more the Lord described Himself, the more the Jews became angry and divided, resorting again to their charge of demon possession. Obviously the common people had not forgotten the healing of the blind man as verse 21 links chapter 10 with chapter 9.

10:22-24. Some time later, during the Feast of Dedication which we commemorate as Hanukkah, Jesus came to Jerusalem, still the target of the Pharisees and unbelieving Jews. At the invitation of the Jews to tell us plainly if he was really the Messiah, Jesus returned again to the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep pen and emphasized the security for those sheep who belong to the true shepherd.

In these few verses John almost wrote like Luke with a seasonal notation, specific geographical reference, and identification of the surrounding crowd. The Feast of Dedication was also a Feast of Lights pointing to a time then Messiah would come to the temple and throw out all invaders, thereby reestablishing the kingdom. These grand visions persisted in the Israeli nation until the sack by the Romans in A.D. 70.

10:25-26. Here is our key word again—believe—appearing in both verses and indicating that the first characteristic of true sheep is that they believe in the shepherd. Jesus made faith the cardinal issue separating unbelieving Jews from the true sheep. His miracles had been done publicly and in the Father’s name, but unbelievers seemed unmoved by these divine acts because you are not my sheep. To be sure, one becomes a true sheep by placing faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. But once the Holy Spirit implants that nature in us, we respond to the Shepherd because that is what sheep do.

10:27. This verse identifies two more characteristics of the sheep: they listen to the shepherd and then they follow the shepherd. True sheep listen to the shepherd; false sheep pay no attention.

10:28. Yet another signature of true sheep is that they receive eternal life from the Shepherd. Surely this is one of the strongest verses in the Bible emphasizing the believer's assurance of life in heaven. In one short verse Jesus stated it three ways: I give them eternal life ... they shall never perish ... no one can snatch them out of my hand.

10:29-30. Sheep characteristics include belief in the Shepherd, listening to the Shepherd, following the Shepherd, receiving eternal life from the Shepherd, and now protection by the Shepherd's Father. Throughout the entire Book of John, Jesus repeatedly referred to the Father's power. Even if the unbelieving Jews doubted His ability and authority, they could never doubt the power of the Father. But that is precisely the point of unbelief. Since they did not believe that Jesus had any relationship with God, they did not see Him as their shepherd. But His response was clear: I and the Father are one. Many verses in the Bible establish the deity of Jesus Christ, but few are as pointed as this one.

There can be no greater security, no safer shelter, no surer salvation, and no clearer signature than this relationship to the God of the Bible through His Son the Good Shepherd. No wonder Paul could write, "Your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

I AM THE

RESURRECTION

& THE LIFE

I AM THE WAY,

THE TRUTH, & THE LIFE

I AM THE TRUE VINE

SESSION 3

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

LEADER NOTE

This section is a way to briefly review the last two weeks before getting into today's lesson. Please be careful to keep it brief. We don't need to re-teach previous lessons; we want to help learners see how this lesson is related to the two before it.

I AM BREAD AND LIGHT

In the first session of this series, we learned that only Jesus can satisfy the deepest longings of your heart. No person, possession, or pursuit can fill your soul's desires; only Jesus can do that. He is the Bread of Life. We also learned that there is one God who is the center of it all, and He alone gives life and light in the darkness. Jesus is the Light of the world.

I AM THE DOOR AND THE GOOD SHEPHERD

We examined two more of Jesus' "I AM" statements in our last session—I AM the Door and I AM the Good Shepherd. In making these statements, Jesus was telling us that not all roads lead to heaven. Jesus alone gives us access to God. He paid our entrance fee to heaven with His own life.

How does knowing who Jesus is impact your understanding of who you are?

In your own words, who is Jesus? Who are you in light of Him?

Today is our third and final session in our series, *Labels*. We'll take a look at three more of Jesus' "I AM" statements: I AM the Resurrection and the Life, I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and I AM the True Vine. Who Jesus is defines who we are. No one gets to label us but the One who made us.

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

LEADER NOTE

Each of the "I AM" statements we'll read today have two parts—they first declare who Jesus is and then who we are in light of who He is. As you work your way through these passages, lead learners to identify the labels Jesus gives them (He is the Resurrection and the Life; I am experiencing eternal life now and forevermore. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; I am made right with God. He is the True Vine; I am growing and productive.) Contrast these truths with the labels the world gives, and emphasize the importance of knowing who Jesus is in order to think and act rightly.

KEY VERSES

JOHN 11:21-26

²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the

resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Why do you think Jesus asked Martha to believe in Him before He gave her a miraculous reason to believe?

Is your view and expectation of Jesus better defined by "I AM" (who Jesus is), or "I Will" (how you desire to see Jesus work)? Explain.

Jesus knows better than any of us just how broken the world is. When He is confronted with the suffering of the world, He isn't passive. In fact, Jesus feels the pain of a broken world more deeply than we do. Mary believed in Jesus, but she thought He had dropped the ball. She thought He had missed the opportunity to show His power, but knew His power would one day be revealed. In a sense, Jesus used this opportunity to say, "Yes, I will, but what I want you to know and understand is that, also, I AM." Jesus has power over death, and He has the power to bring you life in the here and now.

KEY VERSES

JOHN 5:28-29

²⁸ "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done

good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

In what way do these verses explain that I AM defines who you are?

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

KEY VERSES

JOHN 14:1-6

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that

where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Contrast the world's view with Jesus' "I AM" statement in John 14:6.

In what way does Jesus' "I AM" statement here speak to every trouble your heart encounters?

The promises in these verses comfort us, because no matter what happens, we have a Savior who walks with us, who will return to get us, and is the Way to where He will take us. What we believe about God drives our lives. If we believe that He is actively involved in the affairs of this world, working to redeem it for His glory and the good of His people, then we will be actively engaged in His redemptive work, even in our fears. It's often through such experiences that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

I AM THE TRUE VINE

KEY VERSES

JOHN 15:1-7

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you

are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

In your own words, what does it mean that Jesus is the Vine and you are a branch on that Vine?

Based on this study of Jesus' "I AM" statements, what reasons do you have to abide in Him? What does it look like, practically, to abide in Jesus?

Describe a time in your life when God "pruned" you. What was the result of the pruning?

In this analogy, Jesus is represented as the True Vine. Jesus encouraged the disciples to abide in Him and to allow Him to abide in them. We can do nothing of eternal value without Christ. Only with Him living and working in us can we produce fruit and make a lasting difference in the world.

Christians are represented by the branch that produces fruit but still requires pruning. This process of removing our dead parts takes place as God challenges us and disciplines us for the purpose of growth in Him. Pruning promotes spiritual health and strong faith.

Which of the following descriptions from this passage stands out to you the most: you are in Christ; you are clean in Christ; you are fruitful in Christ; your prayers are answered in Christ; you are incapable apart from Christ; or you are withering apart from Christ? Explain.

Is it an overstatement to say that you can do nothing without Christ? Why is it important that your thoughts and actions affirm the mentality that you can do nothing without Him? How is Jesus', "Apart from Me you can do nothing" different than the, "You are nothing" label you might receive from the world?

"Apart from Me you can do nothing" is a label driven by the deepest, truest love. Jesus desires to live in us. We act in obedience when we allow Him to not only live in us, but also help us break free from the bondage of sin. With those chains broken, Jesus is then able to work through us. Through our obedience, we display Him and His character to the world. Only by allowing Christ to live in us can we truly have an impact for the kingdom of God.

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD THE GREAT I AM

LEADER NOTE:

These are not merely statements meant to be tucked away as factual knowledge. They are identity forming, life-changing truths. As such, each person has a next step to take. Use this time to help learners personally apply Biblical truths to their lives and commit to live as those who trust in Jesus as the great I AM to define them.

For each of the three "I AM" statements we studied today, name one practical application for your life. (Example: I AM the resurrection and the life—Because I know that I will live forever I can let go of my worries about _____.)

- I AM the Resurrection and the Life:

- I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life:

- I AM the True Vine:

Whatever you need, the resurrected Jesus says, I AM. Personally apply that by filling in the blanks below.

- You say I am afraid. Jesus says I AM peace.
- You say I am alone. Jesus says I AM here.
- You say I am sick. Jesus says I AM Healer.
- You say I am tired. Jesus says I AM strength.
- You say I am dying. Jesus says I AM life.
- You say I am _____. Jesus says I AM _____.

What can you do to more closely and consistently abide in Christ? How can we as a group intentionally help one another with this effort?

COMMENTARY

JOHN 5:28-29

Jesus switched suddenly to physical resurrection and identified a major doctrine of the New Testament—the concept of two resurrections, one for the righteous and one for the wicked. The second resurrection is a resurrection to damnation (Rev. 20:13), but many interpreters believe there are three parts to the first resurrection outlined in Scripture: Christ the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23); the saints (church) at the rapture; and Old Testament believers at the beginning of the millennium. Passages like this should lay to rest the false doctrine that death ends all life and essentially serves as a cessation of existence. There will not only be resurrection; resurrection will be followed by judgment.

JOHN 11:21-26

11:21-24. Here we have one of the great conversations of the Bible. We already know the personalities of these women, so we are not surprised that Martha charged out to meet Jesus while Mary stayed at home. Her words to the Lord almost take the form of a mild rebuke: if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet she hinted at resurrection by adding, God will give you whatever you ask. Knowing her faith, Jesus responded, Your brother will rise again. Martha, Mary, and all these Jewish mourners responded in human fashion to death and sorrow, defeat, and abandonment. According to their words, Jesus should have been there to prevent Lazarus's death. If He were really God, He would have prevented physical death because that is God's job. They treated death as the end of life, the final defeat, a sign that God had deserted them. But He had not.

11:25-26. Jesus said, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Does that mean spiritual life beyond the grave as many interpreters have suggested? The context seems to demand an emphasis on physical death and physical life—in other words, bodily resurrection.

Verse 26 seems to indicate that whoever is still

alive and believing at the time of the Lord's return will never die. Martha did not grasp the entirety of this theology, but nevertheless placed her foothold of faith directly in Jesus' affirmation of His messiahship. She was not completely without faith. She still believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that He might still be able to do something, although she did not really know what. She understood only two categories of life: physical life on earth and some future life at a resurrection. In her mind, Lazarus had neither of those at the moment. She did not think there was anything Jesus could do about His death.

Jesus said future resurrection was impossible without Him. Martha (as well as Lazarus) had no hope without Him in the picture. He also said that real life (life that extends beyond death) is possible only through Him. A person attains it no other way. This life is both spiritual (will live, even though He dies) and eternal (will never die), and it comes only to those who believe in Jesus. It appears to the casual reader that Martha had climbed on board theologically and would no longer have any question about what Jesus could do. Yet a few minutes later she heard Jesus call for the removal of the stone and objected, Lord, he's already decaying. It's been four days (v. 39). Again Martha reminds us of ourselves—willing to verbally proclaim biblical truth without applying it in our lives.

JOHN 14:1-6

14:1. Troubled people need peace and affirmation. The problems of the disciples were as real as our problems. In fact, it is probably fair to say that most Christians are realists. From Scripture they recognize the reality of sin, the reality of evil in the world, the reality of deliverance from sin, and the reality of ultimate eternal life. These disciples, good Jews, had already trusted in God and now Jesus asked them to trust in Him. They had watched him feed five thousand people and bring Lazarus back from

the dead, but now they must trust Him not just for food or miracles, but with their lives.

14:2. Let us acknowledge at the beginning of this chapter that this portion of Scripture is not about huge buildings in heaven but about space. Lots of songs have been written to proclaim “mansions over the hilltop,” but Jesus simply told His disciples, “There’s room in heaven for you.” But he also wanted to indicate that he would go ahead of them to do specific work—the preparation of heaven (14:2b). The New Testament teaches us we are pilgrims and wanderers in this world. We may own homes, and some of them may be huge and beautiful. But we do not belong here because we are not primarily citizens of this world. In heaven we will be where we really belong because Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us.

14:3–5. Forget the mansions; what this passage talks about is the personal touch of the Savior. Count the times He says I or me in these two short verses, and you will come up with five. He wanted the disciples to trust Him personally. It was not just preparation of a place in focus here, but the personal return of Jesus to take His own to heaven. This passage does not speak about levels of reward or big buildings in heaven. It promises the second coming of Jesus Christ. Did they really know the way? They should have known; it has been obvious in this book since chapter 3.

14:6. In response to a question from Thomas, Jesus stated that He was the way and the truth and the life. Jesus did not claim to be one of many ways. Jesus is the way. He not only taught the way, demonstrated the way, and provided the way, He Himself is the way—the only way. The way is not a philosophy or a principle, but a Person. Jesus is the truth. The expression emphasizes Jesus’ utter dependability and also the saving truth of the gospel. Jesus is the single reliable source of redemptive revelation. Apart from Him there is no means of knowing God. Jesus also is the life. No real life exists apart from Him. Jesus claimed that individuals are dead without Him. He is the Source and Giver of

life and the Conqueror of death. Through Jesus, the very life of God is available to us—abundant, everlasting life.

JOHN 15:1-7

15:1. “I am the true vine” is the last of Jesus’ seven “I am” sayings in John’s Gospel. “True” contrasts Jesus with OT Israel. Joseph was called a “fruitful vine” in Gen. 49:22. The reference to the Father as the vineyard keeper harks back to Isaiah’s first vineyard song, where God is depicted as tending His vineyard, only to be rewarded with sour grapes (Isa. 5:1-7; cp. Ps. 80:8-9).

15:2. Three types of believers are named or inferred in this first part of the chapter: those who bear no fruit, those who bear some fruit and, later in verse 5, those who bear much fruit. The fruit-bearing branches, it would appear from the text of this verse, represent true believers. But to whom does the text refer when it says, he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit?

This passage is capable of dangerous interpretation, especially when the idea of fruit-bearing centers in evangelism. Some people teach that those who do not win others to Christ will themselves be snatched out of the vine. Such an idea is alien to the teaching of the New Testament. Perhaps Galatians 5:22-23 helps us here: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

15:3. The disciples, however, needed neither cutting off nor trimming clean because they had already been cleansed by the Lord’s word. One thing is clear at the outset of the chapter: this is not a passage on salvation, a topic John covered in earlier chapters. Here he dealt with requirements for a fruitful life on the part of believers.

15:4-6. Another key here is the word “remain” (abide) which appears no fewer than eleven

times in the passage. It seems to suggest an effortless resting in the Lord, confident in the promised union between the vine and the true branches.

Furthermore, John used the word "remain" forty times in his Gospel and twenty-seven more times in his epistles. In the context of this passage, it seems to emphasize an ongoing faith and loving obedience to the Father and the Son that results in fruit. The fruit in this passage seems to focus on spirit-generated behavior of Christians, though again this is not the only interpretation. Many sermons have been preached on emphasizing fruit as other people who have been influenced by the gospel.

15:7. Jesus added a specific dimension to the mutual abiding of the Christian life (v. 7). He set forth the condition that His words abide in believers. On the basis of this condition, He made the promise of fruitful praying. An abiding life is an obedient life. "My words abide in you" points to a willing acceptance of Jesus' authority as expressed through His teachings and commands. Words that remain ultimately become words that are obeyed. Whatever you wish defines the possible agenda of a believer's praying. The agenda is unlimited. Any concern is a proper subject for prayer. We can pray for anything that Jesus desires and for which He would ask the Father.