

# I AM: WHO YOU ARE BECAUSE OF WHO JESUS IS

## Leader Guide

youth  RESOURCE

Written by Brandon Metcalf

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

When you ask a young person, "who are you?" you'll get a variety of answers. Many of them would probably be based on what they do (similar to adults' answers). But other answers would also be either "I don't know", "I'm still figuring it out", or "I'm not sure anymore". Then these young people go to school, work, college, activities, relationships, etc. in order to find their identity and meaning. And that's a dangerous journey to be on, because the world will give them all kinds of definitions of who they are, and I don't like any of those answers. I would much rather a young person go to those places already knowing who they are, because then they're free to share their source of identity and meaning.

This study is designed to help you do that. In this series you'll look at Jesus' identity through His seven "I am" statements in the Gospel of John, and in doing so, learn more about who you are as a result of who Jesus is. Identity is at the core of what we do in the church, because it's the core of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We are given a new identity as God's dear, forgiven children and that changes everything!

#### Structure of the Leader's Guide

This leader's guide is meant to equip you in order to get the most of the Bible study itself. Here are the categories of content that you'll see in the guide:

##### Words in black

These are the actual questions and content from the participant handouts. Your page numbers will differ from the participant handouts, but you're all working with the same set of questions, verses, and commentary. What differs in the leader's guide is that instead of blank spaces below the questions, there are more words in orange and italics.

##### *Words in Orange and Italics*

This makes up the bulk of the leader's guide. It is orange and in italics so that you can print it out either in color or black and white and still know which parts are the leader's guide additions. Some of this content is simply sample answers to the questions that are being asked. This doesn't mean that these are the only possible answers, but hopefully it gives you an idea as to what your conversation could be about.

Other sections of the orange content are ideas of follow-up questions, tips, examples, or application points that don't appear on the participant handouts. Certain questions can go in several different ways, depending on your group needs, and the orange words are my attempt to identify a few of those deeper discussions that may be worth having in your group. The final type of information in the orange letters is commentary on the question or study itself, trying to explain what I'm trying to get at or accomplish here. This is like the "director's commentary" or "behind the scenes" info that movies have. Though these additions certainly make the guide longer, my hope is that they keep the flow of the study clear and help you know some ways to connect this better to your group. Sometimes there are questions that a certain group may not understand clearly, and hopefully the orange words will help you be able to know what the purpose of that question or section is so that you can get to that same point by asking a different question or using an additional example.

Use what is helpful to you, skip over that which isn't, but please read through it ahead of time so you have an idea of what's there and what could be helpful. Otherwise you'll have 2-3 paragraphs of information that you're trying to read for the first time while your group only has 1-2 sentences.

## Activities

Many of the lessons contain activities that are just mentioned in the participant handouts. This leader's guide contains the instructions, links, or whatever else is needed for each activity. These activities are one way to bring variety to how the group is interacting with each other and with the Scriptural truths. The goal throughout each lesson is to do this in various ways (Scriptural readings, small group and large group discussion, activities, song lyrics, etc.) to connect with a wide variety of learners and experiences.

One note on the song lyric activities (this will also be included by each one of those in the guide): you may want to print out the lyrics for the group to look at. I've also found success with this activity using a lyric video for the song, and having the youth write down lyrics that they connect with as they hear them. Feel free also to substitute a song that hits similar themes if there's one that's more familiar to your group than the suggested one.

## How to Use This Study

**Individuals:** While this study is designed for group discussion, the leader's guide is written to also help someone who was going through it on their own. If you want to go through it on your own as a way to grow on the topic of identity, go for it! I still would recommend going through it with a mentor in order to get the most out of it, even if you're not able to do it with a whole group of people.

**Families:** The more families can be talking together about Scripture, identity, and how it applies to each member of the family, the better! In that way, this study, while designed for youth groups, would also work well for an individual family, a small group of a few youth families together, or any similar setting. Make sure that the discussion is still youth-led, because that will lead to a greater internalization of the concepts and truths.

Youth groups: My guess is that this is the context where the study will be used most often. This can be done either with the group all together or as a small group study if you already have small groups as an active part of your ministry. The study is written for high school youth but could also be used with a Jr. High group or young adult ministry as well.

## Note to Group Leaders

All the leader's guide notes are simply a guide to help you facilitate learning and growth in your group. Speaking from experience here, be careful not to turn the study into a lecture instead of a discussion. What you don't want to happen is for a leader to ask the question, give the group 1-2 seconds to answer, and then jump into reading the leader's guide to them. Anytime the leader dominates the conversation or launches into a large commentary after each group member's contribution, it shuts down the conversation.

Try to observe the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> Rule: No more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the discussion time should be taken up by the leader talking. Give your group ample time to think of answers (10 seconds is recognized by educational researchers as appropriate wait time) and encourage contributions from everyone by having them write down answers to share with a partner or small group. Utilize polls or break-out rooms if you're doing the study virtually to help facilitate discussion that way. Use the information in this guide to help you lead, but make it your own by changing wording, asking your own questions, and using examples from your context.

Keep the focus on helping the group to discover these truths for themselves rather than quickly giving all the answers to them.

## My Prayer for You

Blessings to you on this journey of identity. My prayer is that as a leader you not only remind your youth about these key truths of who God is and who they are, but that you would be reminded of these same things. That you are a child of God, just like they are. That you are forgiven, just like they are. That you are called and sent, just like they are. Oftentimes what God is teaching you is what He is preparing you to teach others, so don't be afraid to allow God's Word to teach and shape you in this process too. May you always remember: you are loved, you are valuable, you are worth dying for. You are who God says that you are!

-Brandon Metcalf, series author



## LESSON 1- I AM...THE DOOR

### Introduction

Activity: Introduce (or reintroduce) yourself to the group using only 3 words. Afterwards, share why you chose those 3 words.

*This is an introductory ice-breaker question that may seem too simple if you have a very tight-knit group, but even in that scenario, it's helpful to do things like this to make the group easily accessible to someone who's new. Whether this is your group's first study together or you've been meeting together for years, I'd encourage you to have everyone do this activity (leaders included!), because you will return to this same activity at the end of the final lesson.*

*The 3 words in this question are most likely to be names, activities, titles, experiences, etc. You may get "correct" answers like "child of God" or something like that, and don't discourage that at all. But really get down to the heart of having everyone answer not what they think the answer should be, but what the answer actually is for them. Being open and honest, like "I know the answer should be this, but if I'm honest, just isn't in my life" can be an excellent preparation for God's Word to really work on your hearts.*

### Finding Identity

Who are you? That's a big question, especially one to try to narrow down into just a few words. But for far too many young people, the three words that they most honestly relate to when it comes to identity is: "I don't know." I don't know who I am, I'm still figuring it out, or I thought I knew, but then something happened and now I'm not so sure.

*Throughout the study there are short sections of content like the above paragraph that serve to transition from one point to another or drive home key points. This is one opportunity for youth to be more involved in the study, if they serve as readers for these sections.*

Below are some of the places where we tend to find our identity. What are some shortcomings or issues with finding who you are in each of these?



## Sports/Activities

*This one is especially tempting when those activities are going really well, but what about if you get injured? Or benched? Or don't do that activity in college? Then you're searching for who you are, not just what to do.*

## Relationships

*The danger here is not just in what happens if they break-up, but also unhealthy co-dependent relationships or clinging to a bad relationship because you can't imagine life without that person. All of these are ultimately unhealthy and not God's design for relationships.*

## Popularity

*Popularity changes so frequently that it can't be counted upon, and there's a big difference oftentimes between morality and popularity. It's not always good to be popular.*

## Grades/Achievements

*Not only does this put tremendous pressure on you to succeed (again, unhealthy), but you also can't guarantee the outcome of much in life. It's possible to study hard and still not get the grade you want, for a team to do everything right and still lose, or to have a great resume and interview and still not get the job. What ends up happening also is we can end up being defined by failure, leading to despair, or by successes which leads to pride. Neither is a good place to be.*

*Overall, this question is driving towards the truth that most of the places that young people find identity and are even encouraged to find their identity are not actually helpful. A good follow-up question would be "What happens when we're searching for identity?" Oftentimes we become desperate and this leaves us open to temptation. In order to find value and identity, you cross physical boundaries in a relationship, go drinking at a party, stop going to church because it's not "cool", or any number of other things.*

*This introduction is also meant to help distinguish between identity (who you are) and vocation (what you do). Normally we operate in a system where what you do (both positive and negative) impacts and defines who you are rather than the other way around. God wants us to know from His Word our identity (who we are) and for that to be lived out in our vocations (what we do).*

So many young people go to college, to the workforce, or to various groups in order to find their identity, to figure out who they are. What ends up happening is that many of them end up getting lost or finding their identity in the wrong things, which has all sorts of disastrous results. The good news is that God isn't silent on this issue. He doesn't want your identity to ever be in doubt. Let's turn to the identity of Jesus and in seeing who He is, find our own identity too.

## A "Filtered" Life

Read John 10:1-9

- What does Jesus say about His identity in this passage?  
*That He is the door of the sheep. This is a simple content-level question that will be unpacked shortly.*
- *Jesus says that He is the door, or gate, for the sheep. In order to get to the sheep, you have to go through the door. If Jesus is the door, who are the sheep? What are the implications of that?*  
*We are the sheep, which means we need to follow the Shepherd. We are in need of protection, we need to listen to God's voice. We go in and out through the door, through Jesus.*
- Jesus is the door. Entering through Him, you find life. How do we enter through this door?  
Luke 19:10  
*Christ seeks out the lost (which is all of us!)*  
Romans 5:8  
*Christ dies for you while you were a sinner. He reaches down to you.*  
Luke 15:1-7  
*Christ goes after the lost sheep and rejoices over it.*

*The only way we enter through the door is because Christ saves us. We cannot save ourselves. The emphasis in this question is on how we don't work our way to God, but He comes to us. This is the heart of the Gospel- make sure everyone takes time to understand this.*

You have a God who comes after you. Who comes after the lost sheep, who comes to save you in your sin. And after He's saved you, He continues to protect you and provide for you. No one can get to the sheep unless they get through the door. No one can get to you unless they go through Jesus.

What does this look like practically? It's like Jesus says in verse 8, the sheep don't listen to the wrong voice. Anything that comes your way has to get "checked" at the door. It gets filtered through the words of Christ.

*This section is about applying the concept of Jesus as our door, that we come and go through Him. The emphasis here is on how whatever comes in to us in the sheep pen has to go through Jesus first. As the door, He's the gatekeeper to your heart, mind, and identity.*

- What does a filter do? What are some examples of filters that you can think of?

*A filter allows some things through, but not others. For example, an air filter allows clean air through but stops dust particles. A content filter allows appropriate content through but blocks inappropriate content. A photo filter changes the way you see a picture by enhancing certain parts or editing the picture (very common on social media).*

- What does God say about you in these passages?

1 Peter 2:9-10

*You are chosen by God, made holy by Him, and you belong to God! You have been called and sent to declare His praises! You can't overestimate how important these truths are- feel free to apply them to the previous scenarios about finding identity in other things (like, if you're not chosen for the team, does that change your identity? No, you're still chosen by God.)*

1 John 3:1

*You are deeply loved by God and He calls you as His child. Explore the family dynamics here- what does it mean to be brought into God's family? When does this happen? (In baptism!)*

- What happens when what others (or yourself) say about you is in conflict with what God says about you?

2 Corinthians 10:5

*Take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Either you believe God's Word or you believe the contrary word. The point here is to drive towards laying everything against God's Word and throwing it aside if it doesn't match what God says about you.*

- How can you filter your identity through Christ?

*This is what this whole section has been driving towards. Take time to apply these principles to real life. How are you actually going to make sure you have God's Word as the standard in your life? Who's going to help remind you of this? What would this look like in practice? Talk about a scenario and have each individual or small group come up with a way that knowing your identity in Christ changes how you handle that scenario.*

*Example scenarios: You have to move schools and "start over" in terms of friendships and activities- how does your identity in Christ help you navigate this change? You get injured and can't play your sport anymore- why do you need to lean into who you are in Jesus? Some classmates at school are really hurting you with their words and you begin to believe them- why do you need to filter what they say through God's Word?*

*Knowing who you are in Christ does not just change your "church life", but it changes your whole life (because there's no separation between the two).*

John 9 says that those who enter through Jesus will go “in and out and find pasture.” Jesus doesn’t just stay with you during Bible study. He also goes with you. Wherever you go, Christ goes with you, to lead you.

- Who does He lead us to?

*He leads us to the lost, the hurting, the hopeless, the needy. He leads us to our families, our friends, our various activities (note that oftentimes the first list and second list have a lot of overlap).*

*This question is the sending element of the study- that we don't just sit on our identity, but we live it out. Because Christ changes who we are, that changes how we live. We go to those who are seeking identity in other places and share about the God who gives us identity. This is the vocation (what we do), which flows from our identity (who we are). And note that we have a tremendous freedom in what vocations we have- because there are a number of ways that we can faithfully live out our identities.*

## Application Activity

### “Who You Say I Am” Lyrics

*This activity involves playing the song “Who You Say I Am” by Hillsong Worship and reflecting on the lyrics. You may want to either play a lyric video for the song (here: <https://youtu.be/RiRKTvqsnlwyou>) or may want to print out the lyrics for the group to look at. Have the youth write down lyrics that they connect with as they hear them (or underline them if they have the lyrics printed in front of them). Feel free also to substitute a song that hits similar themes if there's one that's more familiar to your group than the suggested one.*

### What phrases stood out to me

*Have each person write down 2 phrases that stand out to them as you listen to the song. The purpose of this is to get them to again think about who they are in Christ, that they are who God says that they are. And for many, song lyrics will speak that to them in a way that other forms of communication will not.*





## Conclusion

You are who God says that you are. That's your identity. May what other people say about you, what you say about yourself, your successes, your failures, where you go, how you interact with others, and everything else in your life be filtered through who God says that you are. You are loved, you are forgiven, you are His child. That's who you are!

Finish the I Am Statement:

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY DOOR,**  
**I AM...**  
*(WHO HE SAYS I AM)*

*Have each person write out their answer to this statement. It is personalized- because Jesus is MY door, not just "the" door. This is a personal application, and there's not necessarily one right answer. But it's reinforcing the point of the whole lesson, that because of who Jesus is, we learn who we are too.*

*Take prayer requests and have the group pray for one another.*

## LESSON 2- I AM...THE VINE

### Introduction

List out the top 5 most important things in your life:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*This is not always an easy activity, because narrowing it down to 5 can be tough. But encourage the group to make those hard decisions.*

Look at your list and reflect on the following:

- Why did I select these five?  
*Part of this discussion is, "why did I select these five above others that could have made the list?" You could talk about this for a very long time, so try to keep the group sharing to just a few minutes, but have each person reflect on these on their own first (writing down their thoughts first can be helpful).*
- What's God's role in my list?  
*This is where we begin to think about the connection between God and what's important in our lives. Even if God is on the list, how does He relate with the rest of the list? Resist the urge to rush to answers and "fixing" the list now- let that happen naturally throughout the lesson and in the reflection at the end. It's about letting everyone discover for themselves the truths, not telling them from the beginning what they're "supposed" to say.*
- Is there a difference between what I think the "right answer" should be and what the "accurate/honest" answer is?  
*This is to get everyone to critically think about and analyze their answers. Did I put God on the list just because I'm in Bible study? If I've honest with myself, what should the answer be? This lays the foundation for talking about Christ as central to all things.*

### Central to All Things

When we, especially in the context of a Bible study, are asked what's first in our lives, we know that answer is supposed to be God. God is number 1! And yet there are two problems with even this answer:

First Problem: God oftentimes actually isn't first in our lives if we're honest. What are some examples that you can think of where this has been true in your life?

*I'd encourage any group leader to always be willing to share an example from their own lives. Never ask the group a question that you're not willing to be vulnerable enough to answer yourself. If you aren't going to want to answer it, they won't either.*

*This question targets our pride and selfishness, which so often places us as the lord of our own lives. This is idolatry, or breaking the first commandment, and is far more common than we want to admit.*

Second problem: Even if God is first, what about everything else on the list? Does He have a role in those too, or can I do whatever I want as long as God is first?

*This question targets our tendency to separate our spiritual life from our everyday lives. So, we live or act differently on Sunday than we do on Monday.*

*You could have the group answer these questions or leave them as rhetorical questions for reflection. You'll have time to reevaluate your list and God's role in it at the end of this section.*

Our problem is that we don't want to be dependent on God. We'll give up Sundays for Him sometimes, and maybe a night for small groups or something like that, but then the rest of the week is ours to do whatever we want. When we think that we can operate independently from God, we've lost sight of who we are. Let's again return to the words of Jesus and in His identity, be reminded of who we are as well.

Read John 15:1-8.

- What does Jesus say in this passage about who He is?  
*He is the Vine. He gives life to the branches.*

*Note, this study does not focus on the identity of the Father as the vinedresser or gardener, who prunes the branches. That is certainly a worthwhile topic to discuss, but for the sake of time and staying focused on identity, this lesson will not dive into that section of the text.*

- What does He say in this passage about who we are? What are the implications of this identity statement for us?  
*We are the branches. We can do nothing apart from Christ. Nothing. That's certainly worth spending time on and discussing- can I really do nothing apart from Christ? Why do I need Christ for everything? Note, that verse 5 will be looked at more in the next question.*

*We are meant to bear fruit and the way we do that is by staying connected to the Vine. That will be applied in more detail later, so you don't need to go into it more now.*

For each of these verses, reflect on what does this passage say about God's role in my "list" of what's most important in life (or everything else that doesn't even make that list)?

- John 15:5  
*Apart from Christ, we can do nothing. He has to be the center of all of it- because He's the one that gives us life!*
- Romans 11:36  
*Here we see the phrase "all things" which comes up often in Scripture. This passage makes it clear- from Him, to Him, and through Him are all things. He has to be the center of everything that we do in addition to being Lord over all in our lives, the only God we worship.*
- Colossians 1:17  
*This is a great application of why it's important for Christ to be central- so He can hold it all together! What a powerful truth, especially when our lives seem like they're falling apart.*

### Application Activity

Go back to your list from the introduction. Does anything need to be rearranged? How can God be the center of all of those, so He can hold everything together?

*A primary discussion here would be what it looks like for God to be the center of each thing on the list. How can God be central in soccer, band, a dating relationship, or with my friends? Allow time for this to be processed through and applied specifically rather than generally.*

### Abide in Me

The key to having God at the center of everything is being consistently reminded that we need Him. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. He is the vine and we are the branches. This is good news for us, because branches don't do much apart from remaining connected to the vine and then bearing fruit because of what is provided by the vine. What does it look like for you to remain connected to the true Vine, Jesus?

*How do we abide in Him? It's more about realizing how God reaches out to us than what we do to Him. God reaches out to us in His Word, He adopts us and forgives us in baptism, and He is truly present with us in the Lord's Supper. To remain connected to the Vine is to stay connected to these means of grace- to the ways that He comes to us. Another big application point here is to emphasize the importance of the local congregation (where God's gifts are delivered to us each week) and in having Christian friends who will encourage us in Christ and pray for us.*



The beautiful truth of the Gospel is God holds onto us even when we're not holding onto Him. Isaiah 46:4, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."

## Application Activity

### "He Will Hold Me Fast" Lyrics

*This activity involves playing the song "He Will Hold Me Fast" by Keith and Kristyn Getty and reflecting on the lyrics. You may want to either play a lyric video for the song (here: <https://youtu.be/936BapRFHaQ>) or may want to print out the lyrics for the group to look at. Have the youth write down lyrics that they connect with as they hear them (or underline them if they have the lyrics printed in front of them). Feel free also to substitute a song that hits similar themes if there's one that's more familiar to your group than the suggested one.*

### What phrases stood out to me:

*Have each person write down 2 phrases that stand out to them as you listen to the song. The purpose of this is to get them to again think about the God who holds them fast, no matter what. And for many, song lyrics will speak that to them in a way that other forms of communication will not.*

## Conclusion

Jesus is the Vine; we are the branches. When we remain in Him, the One who holds fast to us, we have everything that we need. It's okay to need God. In fact, it's essential. For Him to not just be first on our list, but the center of everything, so He can hold it all together. What a great God we have!

## Finish the I Am statement

*Have each person write out their answer to this statement. It is personalized- because Jesus is MY vine, not just "the" vine. This is a personal application, and there's not necessarily one right answer. But it's reinforcing the point of the whole lesson, that because of who Jesus is, we learn who we are too.*

*Take prayer requests and have the group pray for one another.*

*\*\*Note before the next lesson...the topic for discussion in the next lesson is darkness and light, confession and absolution. Look at that lesson, especially the activity and I'd encourage you to see if your pastor is available to take part in it. If he isn't already involved in the youth group, extend a special invite to your pastor to join for the whole time, or at least stop by to talk about confession and absolution, and to help the group experience it too. It's a great way to get build a connection between your youth group and your pastor, whether they have many such opportunities or not.*

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY VINE,**  
**I AM...**  
**(DEPENDENT ON HIM)**

## LESSON 3 – I AM...THE LIGHT

### Introduction

- What do you need when you're in physical darkness? Emotional darkness? Spiritual darkness?

*When you're in physical darkness, you need a light. In emotional darkness, you need hope, encouragement, support, and comfort. In spiritual darkness, you need the light of Christ and His forgiveness and salvation.*

We are people who need light. We cannot thrive in the darkness, and yet so much of our lives tend to revolve around darkness- hiding our sin. It's what Adam and Eve do in response to the fall into sin in Genesis 3. Why do we respond to the darkness of sin by hiding it, by keeping it in the darkness?

*Read Genesis 3:8-10 as a reference for the response to sin.*

*Depending on the familiarity of your group with the story of the fall in Genesis 3, you may want to go into more detail into the background of this section.*

*We respond to the darkness of sin by hiding it because we are ashamed of it. We think once it's brought into the light others will think differently of us, we think that no one else will understand, or that the consequences will be so severe that we can't imagine anyone finding out. We maximize the bad that will happen if anyone finds out and we minimize the impact that it has on us in the meantime.*

What effects does hiding our sin have on us?

*Look at what happens in Genesis 3: relationships are fractured. Their relationship with God- sin separates us from God. And the relationship between Adam and Eve is split- that's what sin does. It separates us from God and from others, even when sin is hidden. Hiding sin doesn't actually bring healing. It only multiplies the damage that is caused, not only the guilt and shame, but we are far more likely to continue in a sin that we think is hidden, thereby multiplying the effects of that sin even more.*

The fall into sin fractured relationships- with God and with one another. And sin has been doing that ever since. It's what sin does in your life- even sin that you think is hidden. Perhaps especially when you think it's hidden. Sin that's left in the darkness only gets worse, like poison running through your veins. The secrets we think we are keeping oftentimes end up keeping us. What are some examples of this?

*That last phrase before the question may need some unpacking- instead of keeping secrets, they end up keeping us. We spend so much energy and time trying to protect our secret, hide our sin, or pretend we have our lives together. It's exhausting! David is a prime example of this in Scripture when he tries to cover over his adultery with Bathsheba and in order to keep that a secret ends up murdering Uriah. That secret was certainly keeping him until he was set free through the words of Law and Gospel from the prophet Nathan.*

*What you want to do here is to get everyone in the room thinking about how, if they're hiding a sin in their life, that is actually far worse than letting it out in the open (in an appropriate setting) and hearing God's Word of forgiveness that will set them free.*

## Brought into the Light

Thankfully, you don't have to live in darkness anymore. As Jesus began His public ministry on earth, He fulfilled this prophecy: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:16). Instead of living in darkness, you are called to live in the light.

Read John 8:12.

- What does Jesus say about His identity in this passage?  
*He is the light of the world- you never have to walk in darkness anymore. The questions in this whole section are more content-based question, with the application coming in the activity afterwards (though if application points or deeper questions come before then, certainly embrace that opportunity too).*

Darkness can never overcome light. Even in the darkest of rooms, if you turn on the smallest light, it will illuminate the whole room. Darkness never overpowers light. The Good News of the Gospel is that light has come into the world. And the light of the world as come for you. To shine in your life, to forgive your sins.

Read 1 John 1:5-6.

- What does this passage say about living in the darkness of your sin?  
*We have been called into the light of God, not to walk in darkness anymore.*

Read 1 John 1:7-9.

- What does God invite you to do in this passage? What are the blessings received by living in the light?  
*God invites us to walk in the light, to be purified from all sins through the blood of Jesus. Emphasize here the "all" in this passage. Oftentimes we think that forgiveness only goes so far, that we're somehow the exception to the rule. But we don't have to live in the darkness anymore, because Christ's blood purifies us from all unrighteousness.*

## Light of the World: Confession and Absolution Activity

*The purpose of this activity is for each individual in the group to have an opportunity to bring their sin to light in some fashion, and then to hear God's promise of forgiveness declared to them specifically and personally. So many Christian adults have never had someone tell them by name, "\_\_\_\_\_, you are forgiven, because of Jesus!" They've heard it corporately before, but never specifically and individually- and while the forgiveness is the same in both, it may impact the recipient of the promise differently hearing it individually. The goal here is for your youth and leaders to have this opportunity and blessing today so that they can never say again, "I've never heard that before!"*

*The end of the previous lesson suggested talking with your pastor about getting him involved in this lesson. This is the part of the lesson that's referenced there. Discuss with your pastor, based on your group's dynamics, age, maturity level, size, etc. which option for this experience would be best. Here are a few suggestions for how to go about this, but work with your pastoral staff to make sure that you're not only operating faithfully, but in whatever way will be most beneficial for your group:*

- *Give a time for each youth to write down on a paper whatever sins in their life are in the darkness and need to be brought to the light. You can share a few Scripture readings about forgiveness (like Psalm 32:1-2, Psalm 103:11-12, Romans 4:25-5:2, or 1 Peter 2:24), have each youth insert their own name into those verses so they are personalized. Destroy those papers (safely) as the promises of forgiveness are being shared from Scripture. You could also play a song like "East from West" by Casting Crowns (lyric video here: <https://youtu.be/TnkkZLdjf9Y>) while the papers are being destroyed.*
- *Use a resource like "Proclaiming God's Forgiveness" from Ambassadors of Reconciliation (<https://www.aorhope.org/pgf>) for an order of confession and absolution among fellow believers. Work with your pastor to make sure that the distinction between priesthood of all believers and the Office of the Public Ministry is maintained here and if that would not be possible in your setting, choose a more fitting option for your group.*
- *Have your pastor lead the group in corporate confession and absolution, and then personalize it either with some of the ideas above or adapting a form of private confession and absolution for a group setting if possible. The key is finding a way to proclaim personal, by name forgiveness to each individual.*
- *Have your pastor offer private confession and absolution. He can use whatever format he normally does for private confession and absolution, perhaps abridged. Depending on the group size, you may want to consider having your*



*pastor reach out to other pastors in the circuit who would also be willing to participate in this opportunity.*

*Before choosing this option, you may have your pastor share a bit about what confession and absolution is, the purpose of doing it both corporately and privately, and any other details the group may need before moving forward with it. One big item is that he won't look at anyone differently after confession and absolution, regardless of if any specific sin is brought to the light. That's a big fear of many and why they won't participate in private confession. This option would take much more time than the others, so consider what the rest of the group will be doing during this time (extended worship or prayer time would be one beneficial option).*

## My reaction to God's forgiveness

*This is the group's chance to respond to hearing personal and specific forgiveness to them. Again, you don't want anyone to leave here and not have heard the promise of forgiveness specifically proclaimed to them by name. It is such a powerful experience, that you can invite the group, if they want, to share any reactions that they had.*

*Be careful here, because we don't want the impression to be that you're "more forgiven" when you really feel like it. That's contrary to Scripture, so be sure to emphasize that the benefits of forgiveness are given by the Word of God and His promises declared to us, not by our feelings. But hopefully in allowing individuals to share, as they're comfortable, what a blessing it is to receive God's forgiveness, it'll open the door for them to regularly receive confession and absolution privately from their pastor whenever a sin really bothers them, and to freely and specifically proclaim God's forgiveness when others sin against them (instead of saying "it's no big deal", to say "I forgive you, because of Jesus").*

## Live in the Light

You don't have to walk in the darkness of hidden sin, but rather can walk in the light of forgiveness. To confess is to "say the same thing as". So when we confess our sins to God, we are saying about our sins the same thing that God says about them- that what we are doing is a sin, is not in God's plan, and is harming us and others. When we confess our sins, what does God promise? How can you be sure of this promise?

*Depending on what the activity looked like in your group, you may not have time for these questions unless you split this lesson into multiple sessions. The purpose of this section is to reinforce the confidence that we have in God's forgiveness and that we're meant to have our lives built around regular confession, repentance, and forgiveness.*

*This is not a one time thing- we are called to live in the light. It would be terrible for someone to have a great experience with the confession and absolution activity, and then it turn into a one-time thing because they retreated back into the darkness*

*afterwards of hiding their sin. Here you want to try to cultivate and encourage this as a lifestyle.*

*In response to the questions, God promises very clearly that He forgives our sins. We can be sure of this because God is trustworthy, because of the blessings of your baptism, because the cross of Christ covers over all sins, etc.*

John 3:19 says that "the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." Why do we gravitate towards the darkness? What does this say about how often we need to be forgiven, to have the light of Christ's forgiveness shined on our sins?

*We gravitate towards the darkness because of our sinful nature, which resists forgiveness and the other blessings of God. We're convinced that our sins need to be hidden because no one will understand, we're the only one that struggles with that, or others will reject us or abandon us if they knew who we "really are". Even when we have the light of the world in Jesus Christ, we can still love the darkness instead.*

*This shows that we continually need to be forgiven. Not because the promises weren't still good from the last time, but that we need to hear it again and again, otherwise we'll go crawling back into the darkness. As Martin Luther wrote in Thesis 1 of the 95 Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*

*Again, the purpose here is to begin to cultivate a lifestyle of repentance and confession rather than isolated instances.*

Our lives are meant to be built around confession (saying the same thing to God about our sins that He does), absolution (receiving God's forgiveness proclaimed to us), and repentance (turning away from sin and living in obedience to God's design). Whenever the darkness of sin comes into your life, instead of hiding it, excusing it, or denying it, you are invited to bring it into the light.

James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." How can you live a life of repentance?

*Regular worship attendance and participating in corporate confession, confessing your sins that you commit against others and asking for their forgiveness, actively turning away from sin once you've confessed and heard anew the promises of Christ's forgiveness, and seeking private confession and absolution for those sins that really bother you.*

## Identity in Action

*These are case studies to get very practical about living out forgiveness as an identity. Depending on time, these may be better discussed in small groups.*

Scenario 1- You bring a friend to church and they ask how you know that you're actually forgiven when the pastor speaks the Absolution during the worship service. How do you answer?

*Your pastor has been called to speak the forgiveness of Christ to your congregation on behalf of God Himself. When he speaks the absolution, he does so with the authority of Christ. When he says your sins are forgiven, it actually happens then. If your pastor is still with the group for this part of the lesson, this is a great opportunity for a discussion with him about the Office and what an amazing blessing it is to proclaim God's promises to His people.*

Scenario 2- Your friend has messed up and doesn't feel welcome at church. "Church isn't for people like me" is what they say. What do you tell them that will remind them of God's truth?

*Remind them that the church isn't for "good" people and admittance isn't based on behavior. Everyone here needs Jesus and His forgiveness. Share with them why you need the gifts that God offers (oftentimes telling your own story and your own need is more effective than convincing the other person of their need). Allow Scripture to speak to them directly by having your friend read a passage like Psalm 103:11-12 and asking them how that verse applies to them.*

Scenario 3- You have a sin that is really bothering you- what do you do?

*Go to private confession and absolution with your pastor. Don't leave your sin in the darkness! Bring it in the light and receive God's forgiveness for you! This is another opportunity as a leader to emphasize and cultivate lifestyles of confession and forgiveness.*

## Conclusion

Jesus is the light of the world! "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, emphasis added). All unrighteous- that includes your sins, no matter what they are. You don't have to walk in darkness anymore. Your sin is paid for, covered in the light of Christ. You don't have to suffer anymore from hidden sin. Bring it into the light and find forgiveness and freedom in Christ!

Finish the I Am statement

*Depending on what all of the lesson you used, each individual should have heard this truth multiple times in multiple different ways: you are forgiven! You can't possibly say that enough!*

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY LIGHT,**

**I AM...**

**(FORGIVEN)**

*Take prayer requests and have the group pray for one another.*

## LESSON 4- I AM....THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE

### Introduction

Share a time in your life where you've been lost, either when you didn't know where you were or when you didn't know where to go or what to do next.

*As with any question that involves sharing a story, be prepared to share something of your own. Be aware that this could be being physically lost, like at a mall when you couldn't find your parents or when you're driving to a new location and get turned around and don't know where you are anymore. Or the feeling of being lost could be more emotional or personal rather than physical, like feeling lost after the death of a loved one and walking through a fog for a while. Or it could be about making future decisions- you don't know what to choose, what path to take, which major to select, etc. The goal by the end of this lesson is for Christ to speak into these feelings of being lost and to provide hope.*

Read John 14:1-5. The disciples are lost and in need of guidance. They don't know what's going to happen next Jesus' answer to His disciples and provides us a lot of guidance when we're lost in our lives too. Read John 14:6-7. What does Jesus say about His identity in this passage?

*He is the way, the truth, and the life. You'll have a chance to dive into each of these as the lesson goes on, so it's fine to keep this answer at content-level at this point.*

What difference would it make if we changed the word "the" to "a" way in v6? How do we try to do that in our lives?

*If Jesus is just "a" way, then He is one option among many. You can come to the Father by some other means. You can go through life with something guiding you other than God's Word. Note, you can go through each of the three (way, truth, and life) and talk about the difference between "the" and "a" for each of them here, or you can continue that conversation as you get to the section on each of them individually.*

*Turning Jesus from "the" way to "a" way is a possible definition of idolatry. Whenever we fear, love, and trust in something about God, we've sidelined Him to just being one option among many. The ways that we do this are as numerous as the possible idols for us to worship. I'd encourage you to find at least one good example from your group and if you think it would be helpful to dig into it more, here are a few ideas of follow-up questions: Why is that idolatry? Why is it important that we recognize it as such? How do we respond when this is the case? (Reference back to confession and absolution from the previous lesson- that's how we respond to idols).*



What are the implications that Jesus is “the” way, truth, and life?

*The main implication is exclusivity. Jesus is not just one option among many. All religions are not the same thing, just in different forms. What you believe actually does matter. Here you can choose to emphasize that this is difficult, especially in our culture today: exclusivity is not popular, neither is absolute truth. Ask how your group has seen this in their lives, where they've struggled with it.*

*I would also recommend considering the blessing and the joy it is Jesus is exclusive. This is great news, because you don't need to search anymore! You don't need to wonder if you've found the right path, if you can get to God- you know for sure that God has already come to you in Jesus Christ! We can focus so much on the hardships of exclusivity that we lose sight of the blessings that come from this: certainty and confidence.*

*The rest of the lesson takes each of Jesus' statements individually and looks at each one more in-depth. Depending on how quickly your discussions normally go, how much time you have, and how large your group is, you may want to plan on splitting this lesson into two different lessons, so that you don't have to rush through it all. Or you could split your group into three small groups and having each group go through one of the sections and then have each small group teach their section to the whole group afterwards.*

## Jesus is...THE Way

What is a time in your life where you really felt close to God? Far from God, or that God was far from you?

*This section is designed to emphasize that regardless of how we feel about our relationship with God (whether we feel close or not), that's doesn't determine reality. But let the group get to that conclusion themselves. Be sure not to negate what they feel already in this first question. Simply allow the “I felt far from God when...” stories to simply be- you'll apply God's Word to them shortly.*

Oftentimes it's easy to base our relationship with God on our feelings, whether we feel close to God or not, or whether we feel that He is close to us. What are some potential problems with this?

*Again, these questions are designed to guide the participants into godly confidence in the closeness of God- allow them to go on that journey. The more that they bring up these problems versus the leader giving the answers, the better. Some answers to the question could be: our feelings change, feelings aren't indicative of reality, God is not dictated by our feelings, how can we find confidence if it's based in my feelings and not anything about God?*

Read John 1:14, Luke 19:10, and Matthew 28:20. Even when you don't feel it, where is God whenever you feel lost or far away? How can this bring comfort to you?

*These verses all emphasize that the direction of salvation is downward, from God to us. He comes to the lost, and He is with you always. Regardless of how you feel, God is there. He is never far off and that's comforting especially in those times where I feel like He is far away. I can trust that my feelings don't dictate God's behavior- God is still near to me in Christ Jesus. The next few sentences in the handouts go into what we can point to in order to find that confidence.*

Jesus is the way to the Father- there's no other way to come to God. And Jesus comes to you, even when you feel far off. He draws near to you through His Word and His Sacraments. He seeks and saves the lost, rather than waiting for them to come to Him. You have a seeking, pursuing God who has made not just a way, but *the* way to know Him: His Son Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for you!

What does it mean in your life for Jesus to be not just "the" way, but "my" (or insert your own name here) way?

*Each of the 3 sections in this lesson will end with some form of this question, trying to move from generic (others should do this), but specific (here's how this impacts my life). For this question, knowing that Jesus is my way means I can have confidence in my salvation. I can have confidence in God being near to me. I can have confidence in His promises given to me. And it means that I'm going to let His Word guide me, not my feelings, not others' opinions, or anything else. He is my way, so I'm going to follow Him in faith. What does this look like in my life practically? How am I going to respond the next time I feel far from God? These are the types of practical applications that you want the group to make here.*

## Jesus is...THE Truth

Is there such a thing as absolute truth? Or can everyone believe whatever works for them?

*The short answer here is yes, there is absolute truth. However, this isn't as apparent in our culture, because far more often the idea of "you do you" or "tolerance" (aka- let everyone believe whatever they want) is promoted above everything else. Talk about the concept of there being an absolute truth, a right and a wrong. Again, knowing not just that there is absolute truth, but that this truth has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ is actually something that gives us confidence and certainty rather than being a stumbling block for us.*

Read John 8:31-32 and John 17:17. How does the Bible talk about truth? Why is this important, even in a world where truth is relative?

*God's Word is truth. That's consistently how Scripture talks about truth. This is important because instead of wandering around wondering if what we're doing is right or not, we can go to God's Word. Instead of being tossed about by whatever the latest trend is, we have an anchor of truth in Scripture.*

Since Jesus is the truth and His word is true, we can turn to Him to know what is good versus evil, what is lasting versus temporary, and what is worth pursuing versus what is vanity. And you can turn to Him to know who you are. What does God say about you in John 3:16-17 and Romans 5:8? Why is it important that what God says about you is THE truth in your life?

*This is another important identity application, because when you hear so many different things about you (some that support you, others that don't, and the messages continue to change over time), you need to know what to believe, what is true or not. Knowing that God's Word is where you find truth gives you a place to stand against all the other voices you'll hear. Christ died for you while you were still a sinner- that means that you don't have to fix your life on your own (because you can't!). It means you're not defined by your sins, but by Christ. God loves you so much that He sent Jesus- you are loved! This provides a much-needed anchor against the storms of life (or "identity crisis" as these storms can be called) so that you never wonder who you are, if you're valuable, or if you have a purpose.*

What does it mean in your life for Jesus to be not just "the" truth, but "my" (or insert your own name here) truth?

*Jesus is my truth, and that means I'm going to listen to His voice above all others. I am who He says I am- that means I'm chosen, even if I don't make the sports team. I'm loved, even if my dating relationship doesn't work out like I want. I have a purpose, even if I can't seem to pick a direction for my next stage of life. I am not loved any more because of my successes and neither am I loved any less because of my shortcomings.*

## Jesus is...THE Life

FOMO, or "fear of missing out" is certainly a concern for many. How have you experienced this in your life?

*While not everyone will be impacted by this in the same way, most people probably have a story about it. Some in your group may be severely impacted by this (and end up saying "yes" to far too much for fear of missing out of something), and hopefully this discussion will help them to be able to set healthier boundaries.*

Oftentimes we're so convinced that our lives will be somehow lesser if we miss out on something, so we end up filling our days and schedules with too much. The question we have to ask ourselves is, "What if I don't have that \_\_\_\_\_ (relationship, sport, concert, game, whatever else I want to fill the blank with)?" What will my life be without it?

*This question is a good rhetorical one to ask to get the group thinking. But consider also having each person fill in the blank with something from their own life, and then actually answer the question- what would life be like without that thing? Oftentimes, we realize that whatever we're worried about isn't actually as big of a deal as we thought.*

Read 1 John 5:12. What does this passage say about your life? How does this help you deal with loss, failure, or missing out on things?

*If you have Jesus, you have life. If you don't, you don't have life. This is a simple, but profound truth. Since Jesus is your life, you have what truly matters. No matter what you miss out on, ultimately you have the one thing that lasts, and lasts eternally. This gives you perspective when you're dealing with loss. It doesn't necessarily lessen the need to grieve that loss, but it helps you to navigate that journey of grief with perspective and hope: that you can go on, you can take the next step because you have a God who gives you true life and is with you every step of the way.*

In Jesus you have life- life now and life eternal. He is your life- not sports, not grades, not relationships, not anything else...Jesus is your life. If you get injured and can't play your sport, that is certainly disappointing, but it doesn't end your life- because your life is found in Christ. If your relationship ends, your life doesn't because your life is in Christ. Even if a disease or illness takes your last breath, it doesn't take your life- because your life is in Christ and one day He will raise you and all believers from the dead!

What does it mean in your life for Jesus to be not just "the" life, but "my" (or insert your own name here) life?

*Because Jesus is your life, you have hope. It's not just hope for someone else in their struggles, but it's something that you can hold onto in yours. It's like Martin Luther says in the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed in the Small Catechism: "On the last day He will raise me and all the dead and give everlasting life to me and to all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true." The promise of eternal life being "for me" truly makes a difference in everything.*

## Conclusion

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life! You don't have to be lost anymore, because God comes to find you. You don't have to work your way to God, because He comes to you. You're saved not by your works, but by Christ's. You can be confident in His promises!

## Finish the I Am statement

*As with the others, there's no one correct answer to these, because it's personal and specific*

*Take prayer requests and have the group pray for one another.*

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY WAY, I AM... (NEVER FAR AWAY FROM GOD)**  
**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY TRUTH, I AM... (CONFIDENT IN HIS PROMISES)**  
**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY LIFE, I AM...**  
**(SECURE NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS)**



## LESSON 5 – I AM...THE GOOD SHEPHERD

### Introduction

"The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy." (John 10:10a). That verse brings to mind this story by Kierkegaard: One evening, two thieves break into a jewelry store. But they don't steal anything. Instead, they just rearrange the price tags. So the next day, people are buying masterpieces for next to nothing while others are buying what they think is expensive, fine jewelry, but in reality is overpriced junk.

- How does this story relate to our lives and the value we put on things?  
*A thief has come in and rearranged the price tags in this world. So often we can put so much importance on things that are temporary and think they're what life is all about. Meanwhile, what God has said is important and actually worthwhile, we tend to overlook and ignore.*

- What types of things do Satan and our sinful world want us to think that life is all about?  
*Pretty much anything other than God. Oftentimes we think it's just about things that are inherently sinful or evil, but we're tempted to make almost anything (even God's good gifts) into idols. We're convinced life is all about happiness (which we can't necessarily control, and just because something makes me happy doesn't mean it's good), success (you also can't always control success), money, popularity, grades, etc. The key here is that there's a good chance that some of your group has been sold a lie in terms of what life is all about. And maybe they've even bought into that lie and this study will be a chance to dispel that lie with the truth of God's Word.*

*A verse to look up if you want to dive into this idea more would be Philippians 3:4-8 and how Paul looks at what the world sees as "gain" and he says all of that is loss compared to Christ. He's the true prize.*

- Meanwhile, how does Satan tempt us to forget or question our own value and worth?  
*Worse than getting us to think that life is all about sports or entertainment or something like that, the main attack on us comes in convincing us that our value is up for debate. The image of clearance tags can be helpful- when we sin, we can become convinced that we're less valuable. Who's going to want me now? If everyone knew what I was really like, they would leave. Satan tempts and he accuses, attacking our value, trying to convince us that we're defined by what others say, by what we've done, or really by anything else other than God's Word.*

- One of the greatest ways that Satan attacks us is by tempting us to fall into sin and then accusing us afterwards, attacking our value and worth. When we don't think we're valuable or worthwhile, how do we tend to live and act?

*When we don't think or feel that we're valuable, we tend to respond in two ways. First, we lash out at others, thinking that we'll feel better about ourselves if we compare favorably to someone else. So we'll put down someone else in order to feel better ourselves. Obviously, this is not healthy or helpful, but it's so common.*

*Secondly, we try to find value somewhere, and this is almost always in the wrong places. People will stay in relationships that are unhealthy because they feel like they get value from that person and so they'll ignore all sorts of red flags about that person.*

*Young people will try to find value from drinking at parties or from doing any number of "popular" or attention-seeking things that are rather poor choices. When you really look at it, the vast majority of ways that we all fall into sin and get ourselves into trouble is because we're looking for value, meaning, acceptance, and identity in the wrong places.*

## The Good Shepherd Steps In

God never wants you to doubt your value or who you are: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). The abundant life that Jesus offers is life not found in the things, achievements, and fame of this world, but in hearing, trusting, and following the voice of God.

- Returning to our opening story, how would the jewelry store get their price tags back in order? Where do we turn when determining the true value in our lives?  
*The jewelry store would have to go back to the jeweler, the one who created the jewelry in order to determine its worth. In the same way, we need to turn to God, our creator, to find our value. What He does is He peels off all of the clearance tags, all of the other stickers and reveals our true value: that we have infinite value in Christ!*

- Read John 10:11. What has Jesus done for you? How does His sacrifice impact your sin? (See 1 Peter 3:18) How does this give you a place to stand against Satan's accusations?  
*Jesus laid His life down for you, and His death covers over all of your sins. This takes all of Satan's ammunition away from his accusations. Everything you're being accused of has been forgiven. It's like in a courtroom scene- all of Satan's evidence against you has disappeared, so he can't bring any charges against you. The only evidence that remains is that of the resurrected Christ and His life, death, and resurrection for you. You are forgiven! You are loved! You are valuable, because of Jesus!*

- What does your Good Shepherd laying His life down for you say about your value? What is going to impact or change that? (see Romans 8:38-39)  
*This is a very important point that is often overlooked. The very fact that Jesus went to the cross for you gives you value. You don't earn the cross by being so great or so valuable. It's the other way around- Jesus looks at you in your sin and still chooses to die for you, chooses to say "you're worth it." And nothing is going to change that. Nothing.*

## Activity

### "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" Lyrics

*This activity involves playing the song "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" by Stuart Townend, and reflecting on the lyrics. You may want to either play a lyric video for the song (here: <https://youtu.be/A0CDqG5STPM>) or may want to print out the lyrics for the group to look at. Have the youth write down lyrics that they connect with as they hear them (or underline them if they have the lyrics printed in front of them). Feel free also to substitute a song that hits similar themes if there's one that's more familiar to your group than the suggested one ("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" by Isaac Watts would work well here too).*

### What phrases stood out to me

*Have each person write down 2 phrases that stand out to them as you listen to the song. The purpose of this is to get them to reflect on the depth of God's love for them, as shown at the cross of Christ. And for many, song lyrics will speak that to them in a way that other forms of communication will not.*

## Remember Who You Are

God's love for you is unfathomable. He sees you in all of your sin and brokenness and instead of abandoning you, running away, or rejecting you, He send His only Son to suffer and die for you. That's why you're valuable: because God has given you value through your Good Shepherd.

### Read John 10:14-16.

- What are we called to do as God's sheep?  
*We are called to listen to His voice- not just once, but each and every day. The next question will move into specifics on what this looks like.*
- Oftentimes "listening to God's voice" can sound easy to do, but is hard to practice. What makes it hard to hear and obey God's voice?  
*It's hard because there are so many other voices out there to listen to. Oftentimes we don't look for God's voice among the noise or we convince ourselves that God agrees with us, even if that's not actually true. God speaks to us clearly through His Word, so listening to His voice isn't about waiting quietly to have some kind of a vision for what to do next. We listen to God by being in His Word, as it is preached, sung, and studied.*

*Another aspect of this concept of listening to God's voice is that it's not just about hearing God, but about trusting Him, taking His words to heart and letting them have their way in our lives. See Luke 6:46-49 where the wise builder hears the Word and then does them, he builds on them in trust, whereas the foolish builder hears God's Word but does not do them but builds his life on a faulty foundation. The difference isn't that the wise builder heard the Word and the foolish builder didn't, but that the wise man trusted the Word and built on a firm foundation. It's not enough to just hear the Word; the Word calls us to believe and live faithfully.*

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10.

- What does this passage say about who you are? What does it say about what you are to do?

*This passage was also discussed towards the beginning of lesson 1. Hopefully the group will remember some of the identity applications from it: you are chosen by God, dearly loved, and you belong to Him. What might not have been discussed then is the second question here- that it tells us to "praise the excellencies" of God. Notice that the identity statements are very specific and that the vocation (what you do) is general. There are so many ways that you can proclaim the excellency of God, and you can do that in any number of ways. What matters is that while you do that, you remember who you are!*

This passage is one example of what we see consistently in Scripture. God talks very specifically about who you are, and more generally about what you are to do. So, you're not going to find a verse that tells you specifically which college to go to, or whether to go to college at all. What are you going to find? Verses about who you are and reminding you to live your identity out wherever you go. God leaves the choice of your career path up to you, but He doesn't leave you empty-handed. He tells you, "Pick one and while you're being my witness there, always remember who you are."

*Lion King clip example: The "Remember Who You Are" scene from the Disney classic "The Lion King" fits well here. The clip can be found here:*

*<https://youtu.be/yGQnGQzIAmA>. The scene fits in well here because the command given is not past-tense "remember who you were" as if we need to just get back to the "good ole days" or who we used to be. It's a present tense, even though you've forgotten it, it's still true, type of thing. Your identity is in Christ, even when you've forgotten it. Remember who you are!*

What are some ways that you can "remember who you are" in your daily life?

*You can write out God's truth about your identity on a sticky note and put it somewhere you'll see it each day. You can make the sign of the cross as you say your morning prayers, to remember as you head into each day that you are a baptized child of God. Whenever someone says something about you that doesn't fit in your identity*



*in Christ, you take a deep breath, remember a verse about what God says about you, and then choose to believe God's voice over what that other person said.*

*Oftentimes though, we need others to remind us who we are. When we forget our identity, it's really hard for us to be the solution to the problem that we ourselves caused. We need to be surrounded by others who will remind us who we are. Being in worship regularly, where we are continually told through the readings, songs, liturgy, and sermon who we are in Christ is a crucial way for this to happen. Encourage your friends, family, and other believers around you to speak God's truth with you- to redirect you when you're straying and to encourage you in Christ when you need it. And you can be those kind of friends to one another, in fact that's what being a part of a youth group is all about!*

## Conclusion

Instead of listening to the voice of the world or the rearranged price tags of the enemy, we are to listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd. A Good Shepherd who says, "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). A Good Shepherd who lays His life down for you, forgiving your sins and saying, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). A Good Shepherd who loves you, who saves you, who calls you His own, and who invites you, every day to remember who you are and to remind others who they are in Christ!

Finish the I Am statement

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY SHEPHERD,**

**I AM...**

**(SAVED)**

*As with the others, there's no one correct answer to these, because it's personal and specific.*

*Take prayer requests and have the group pray for one another.*

## LESSON 6 – I AM...THE LIFE

### Introduction

Here are a few questions that we don't have great answers to:

"Why do we drive on parkways and park on driveways?"

"If a kid refuses to sleep during nap time, are they guilty of resisting a rest?"

"Why do hot dogs come in packages of 10 and hot dog buns come in packages of 8?"

Can you think of any others?

*This is just an entertaining introduction question. No pressure if you don't have a plethora of answers here. The purpose is to prime the group to think about questions that aren't easily answered.*

There are a lot of things that we don't or simply can't understand, especially when it comes to God. "Why God?" seems to be a very common question in life, that is very hard to answer oftentimes. What are some examples of "why" questions that we direct at God?

*I would encourage you to have your group take a minute or two and write down their answers first, then have volunteers share if they would like to. The purpose of this is to try and move past "here's questions other people might ask" and move towards "here's a question that I'm actually asking or have asked before." The more personalized the application here, the more they will see the relevance of God's promises later in the study.*

The issue isn't that God can't handle our why questions- He's certainly big enough. The issue is that we can't. What are the ways that we can respond when we don't get answers to our "why" questions?

*The healthy and faithful way that we can respond is to simply trust in God. However, far too often we respond in other ways. We let our disappointment and doubts lead to disbelief: "I can't believe in a God who would allow..." Or we try to come up with answers that make sense to us and explain why God acted in a certain way. The problem with that method is that oftentimes that involves putting words in God's mouth and forcing God to operate in ways that we can understand, and that's simply not the case all the time.*

### Bread of Life

When it comes down to it, our real problem is that God chooses to work in ways that we don't understand. John chapter 6 is a great example of this. Jesus has just taught

the crowds about how He is the bread of life (v48) and that whoever eats of this bread will live forever (v51). His hearers don't understand what He is saying.

Read John 6:60, 66. How do many of those who had been following Jesus respond to this teaching that they don't understand? How are we tempted to do the same?

*They respond to this tough teaching by abandoning Jesus. They choose to no longer follow Him. It truly is one of the most tragic chapters in all of Scripture. We are tempted to do the same in the midst of things we don't understand, because we want God to make sense to us. In our anger, we blame God and that leads us to not want to follow Him or to deny that He even exists. This is a very real temptation, especially for young people during this huge phase of life transitions.*

One of the ways we can respond to God not working in ways that we understand is to do just what these disciples did- to abandon their Lord, to allow their "why" questions to consume them, to demand that God work in ways that we can understand. The underlying problem with our view of what is right and wrong, good and evil, what God should do and shouldn't do, is that we're convinced that when we disagree with God, we're the ones who are right. We're right, and the God of the universe is wrong.

Somehow, we reasoned it all out and if we explained it to God, He would go, "Oh Myself! I never thought about it that way...I'm really glad I have you around to keep me in line!" Thinking that we know better than God is really the root of all sin, so this can quickly get us into trouble, as seen in John 6. Why is our assumption that we're right and God's wrong at the heart of our issues here?

*This is a key point to understand. We abandon God because He doesn't seem to listen to us, doesn't make sense to us, or doesn't act like us. Ultimately, we are saved by God because He's not like us. It's the reason He's God and we're not. We go into our "why" questions with a false assumption and that sinful pride gets us into trouble. But until we recognize that we're operating with the wrong view, we'll be easily consumed by "why".*

But as we continue in our text, we find another way to deal with our why questions- to cling to what God has given to us, rather than what He hasn't.

God, in His wisdom, has chosen oftentimes to keep the "why" answers to Himself. What if we let Him have it? God is the provider of all things that we need and He has chosen not to give us all the answers that we want. That must mean that we don't actually need those "why" answers. What if instead of demanding more, we looked at what He *has* given us and trust that it is enough?

Read John 6:67-69. What do the twelve cling to in the midst of their questions? How do they respond differently than the other disciples?

*Peter responds that they can't go anywhere else because Jesus has the words of eternal life. He doesn't say "here's the answer to the question that those other disciples were asking" or "we have this whole thing figured out." No, in the midst of wrestling with a hard teaching, what the twelve did was cling to what they do know instead of being consumed by what they don't know. And in doing so, they set a great example to us on how to deal with times where God doesn't act the way we think makes sense.*

God does provide us an answer to our questions, but it's not a why answer, it's a Who: Jesus, who gives us life. We hold onto Jesus, the Who, in the midst of the "why's" of life.

*This is the teaching that the previous section has been driving towards. The next section will use the example of death to further apply this teaching.*

## Resurrection and the Life

Knowing our Who, Jesus, gives us an anchor in the midst of even the toughest of "why's", even death.

Read John 11:21. How is Martha's statement similar to our questions when faced with death and loss?

*She says that if Jesus were there, her brother would not have died. We say similar things too. God, if you had done something, my friend wouldn't have died. Lord, if you had intervened, my dad wouldn't have cancer. God, if you really cared my mother would still be here. These are natural things to say, but they're not where we want to dwell for too long because ultimately there's no hope found in these statements. Our hope is in what God definitively promises.*

Read John 11:23-27. What does Jesus say about His identity in this passage? Why can we cling to this in the midst of our why questions?

*Jesus says that He is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Him will live even though He dies. We can cling to this because this is a clear and certain promise from God. We're not guessing if it is true or trying to figure out if it applies to us- we know that Jesus is still the resurrection and the life. This gives us hope that even though we don't understand why someone died, we know we will see them again because of the faith that God gave them in Jesus Christ. This the only way we can have hope in the midst of loss.*

Jesus didn't just *talk* about being the resurrection and the life, God actually raised Him from the dead after He died on the cross for our sins! Read Romans 6:4 and 1 Peter 1:3-4. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for your life?

*Because Jesus was raised from the dead, you will be raised from the dead on the last day! And not only that, you have been raised to new life already in your baptism! It means death doesn't have the last word in your life- Christ does. It means that saying goodbye to a brother or sister in Christ is only temporary. You can have hope- a living hope!*



More than answers, God gives us Himself and the more we know Him, the more we realize that He actually is the answer that we've been looking for all along.

*The next part is a litany of ways that God answers our prayers with Himself. When we realize that God doesn't give us the answers we want, but He gives us Himself instead, we can see that we've received so much more than what we are asking for. You can have one person read the whole list or alternate readers after each statement.*

For every cry in our lives, God answers with Himself- "I AM."

Who's going to help me...and He answers, "I AM."

Is anyone going to figure this out? I AM.

Is anything going to last? I AM.

What's real anymore? I AM.

Is anybody listening to me? I AM.

I can't hold on anymore. I AM.

I'm running on empty, who's pouring into me? I AM.

I'm doing all I can and it's not enough. I AM.

What's my hope for the future? I AM.

Who's going to save me? I AM.

God says to you: I am your hope, I am your peace, I am your Savior, I am your life! More than answers, this I AM God wants to give you Himself. And He wants to send you out into a world that is full of why's, not for you to try to make up answers as to why God would allow one thing or another, but to share what you confidently do know: that God has sent Jesus, and He is for you. We don't always have a why, but we always have a Who, and You can trust in Him and His promises, no matter what.

What's one take-away I have from today's lesson?

*This is a chance to check-in and see if there are any lingering questions or undiscussed items so far. The next section is a wrap-up of the entire series.*

## I Am Statements

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY DOOR, I AM...WHO HE SAYS I AM!**

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY VINE, I AM...DEPENDENT ON HIM!**

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY LIGHT, I AM...FORGIVEN!**

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY WAY, I AM...NEVER FAR AWAY FROM GOD!**

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY TRUTH, I AM... CONFIDENT IN HIS PROMISES!**

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY LIFE, I AM...SECURE NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS!**

**BECAUSE JESUS IS MY GOOD SHEPHERD, I AM...SAVED!**

God's blessings to you as you live out your identity in Christ, as you are sent as His witness to share Christ's promises with those around you!

*Consider brainstorming with your group ways to keep these identity statements in front of you going forward. Maybe you post them on your youth group social media page, paint them on a wall in your youth room, make t-shirts with them printed on the back and your logo on the front, have some artistically gifted youth make posters for each statement, say these at the opening or closing of each youth group gathering, etc. Find ways for this to live beyond just one series, but to really become something you keep reminding each other of in your group.*

## Conclusion

Think back to the opening question of this study series- describing yourself in 3 words. Now in light of everything we've talked about, knowing who you are because of who Jesus is, come up with three new words to summarize who you are. It could be a 3-word phrase (like "Child of God") or 3 individual words (like "Loved, Forgiven, Sent").

My 3 words:

*This goes back to the opening question for the series and asks everyone to update that summary based on what you've talked about. The hope is for a Christ-centered, Scripture-rooted phrase or set of words. Think of ways you could incorporate these into your group- bracelets with their 3 words printed on them, write all the set of 3 words on a chalkboard or whiteboard in your room, create a collage online and use as your background for your group social media page.*

*The goal of the series is for each individual to find their identity in knowing who Jesus is. Because of who Jesus is, here's who I am. I'm convinced that when young people can do this- confidently knowing who they are and whose they are because of Christ, it will change their lives and God will use them to share His life-changing Word with those around them. God's blessings to you as you continue to remind your group (and they continue to remind you) of who they are in Christ!*