

The Gospel of John

Knowing Jesus through
the I AM Statements

LEADER GUIDE

**EDITORIAL TEAM
LIFEWAY GROUP
BIBLE STUDIES**

Kima Jude
Writer

Argile Smith
Writer

Reid Patton
Senior Editor

Cynthia Wooldridge
Senior Editor

Brett McIntosh
Associate Editor

Katie Vogel
Assistant Editor

Jon Rodda
Art Director

Tyler Quillet
Managing Editor

Joel Polk
Publisher, Small Group Publishing

John Paul Basham
Director, Adult Ministry Publishing

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Contents

TEACHING PLANS

Chapter 1 | The Bread of Life

John 6..... 6

Chapter 2 | The Light of the World

John 8..... 9

Chapter 3 | The Good Shepherd

John 10.....12

Chapter 4 | The Resurrection and the Life

John 11.....15

Chapter 5 | The Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14.....18

Chapter 6 | The True Vine

John 15.....21

EXPOSITORY NOTES..... 24

PREACHING GUIDE.....74

LIFE BY DESIGN

We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make life work.

The Bible tells us God originally planned a world that worked perfectly, where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose: to worship Him and walk with Him (Genesis 1:31; Psalm 19:1).

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all eternity (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

We need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead to provide the only

way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Colossians 2:14).

We cannot escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us, turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus, and God turns our lives in a new direction (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8-9).

When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now, we can pursue God's design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13).

Now that you have heard this good news, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: *My life is broken; I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live and die and was raised from the dead to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.*

MEET THE WRITERS

KIMA JUDE wrote the teaching plans for this resource. She is a member of The Oaks Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Texas, where she leads the women's ministry and her husband Barry serves as pastor. Kima has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Marshall University and had an early career as a newspaper reporter followed by a freelance writing career. She has written for several Christian publications, including Lifeway's *January Bible Study* and several *Explore the Bible* group plans.

She is employed full time at a local university in the Dallas-Fort Worth region directing foundation relations and writing proposals. She and her husband are the parents of four young adult children and three young grandchildren. She looks forward to helping them discover the wonders of the Bible.

ARGILE SMITH wrote the expositor's notes for this resource. Argile serves as pastor of Parkway Baptist Church, Biloxi, Mississippi. He's a graduate of William Carey College (BA) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv, PhD).

TEACHING PLANS



THE BREAD OF LIFE

BEFORE THE SESSION

- Read the entire Gospel of John from the Bible. As you read, try to put yourself in the shoes of a new believer and consider its content with the fresh perspective of someone who is exploring Scripture for the first time.
- Read the introduction to the study, paying particular attention to how John compares to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Note the stories they have in common as well as the stories that are distinct to John. Review the outline of session headings that trace the seven “I Am” statements and metaphors. Also, review the theological themes as outlined in the introduction.
- Read Chapter 1 in the Personal Study Guide as well as the related Expository Notes in this Leader Guide. Review John 6:1-15, 22-59 and complete the activities in the Personal Study Guide so you will be prepared to lead any discussion of the exercises.
- Pray for the group who will be engaged in the study. Extend a special invitation to any new Christians in your church or your acquaintance to participate.
- Gather Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and pens for the group. Gather elements that your church serves when it observes the Lord’s Supper.

- Make copies of **Teaching Item 1: Jesus’s “I Am the Bread of Life” Statement** and **Teaching Item 2: The Truth about Sovereignty**.

LEADING THE SESSION

As an ice breaker, invite the group to complete the following sentence: “I am . . . “ with a single descriptive word or phrase. Lead them by sharing a personal example, such as, “I am a father,” “I am a musician,” or “I am a book lover.” Encourage the group to share a single fact that they want others to know about them.

Introduce the study of John as the book that many pastors and theologians recommend to new Christians to be an excellent starting point for studying the Scriptures. Note that the Gospel of John offers a comprehensive yet reader-friendly description of Jesus. Survey the group to learn how many have already studied the Gospel of John. For those who have already read it or have been Christians for a long time, emphasize that a fresh look at John will help them lead new believers to study Scripture.

Provide a brief overview of the study by drawing attention to **Teaching Item 1: Jesus’s “I Am the Bread of Life” Statement**. Connect to the ice breaker by noting that the group identified themselves by their personal “I am” (lowercase am) statement and Jesus identified Himself through a series of “I Am” statements. Note that there are seven “I Am” statements attributed to Jesus in John’s Gospel but they are highlighted in six sessions (point out

that session 3 combines and examines two related statements at once). Inform the group that you will work together during sessions to better understand each “I Am” statement and metaphor. Call on a volunteer to read Exodus 3:14 for more insight into how Jesus’s statements echo God’s declaration.

Preface the Scripture passage for this session (John 6:22-59) by summarizing the feeding of the 5,000 as recorded in John 6:1-14. Note that in addition to Jesus’s resurrection, this miracle is one recorded in all four Gospels. Point out that the feeding of the 5,000 most fittingly led to a series of conversations with Jesus that form the core of His declaration: “I am the Bread of Life.”

1. Call on a volunteer to read John 6:1-15 aloud and direct the group to the PSG, page 12, to help answer these questions: **1) Who was in the audience when Jesus fed the 5,000?** (Identify the audience as Galileans, or Jews). **2) Why was it noteworthy that there were twelve baskets left over?** Guide the group to underline or highlight the phrase “future needs” as encouragement of how we can be sustained and share from the abundance that Christ gives us. **3) Why did Jesus withdraw from the crowds?** Point to the human tendency to try to make Jesus fulfill a man-made role other than His true mission and His need to recalibrate that imbalance.

Call on a volunteer to read John 6:22-25 aloud. Draw attention to the people’s extended efforts to track Jesus to the point of taking their own boats to Capernaum to find Him. Invite the group to discuss the question that the people asked: “Rabbi, when did you get here?” (v. 25). **Ask: What do you think was behind the question?**

Inquire: Who at this point do they most remind you of? Paparazzi trying to get their next celebrity sighting, social media users following for more information, needy people looking for food security, or true believers?

Point out that Jesus discerned their motives, and direct the group to read **John 6:26-27 for His description.** Note that these were hungry people and their interest in following Jesus was to fill their bellies. Emphasize that while Jesus had the compassion to make sure they were well fed the day before, He also cautioned them about seeking after Him for the wrong reasons and directed them to work hard for food that does not spoil.

Call on a couple volunteers to read John 6:28-33 aloud, as if they are engaged in a back-and-forth conversation with Jesus, with the first volunteer asking the questions and the second reading the verses covering Jesus’s responses. Highlight the comparison with Moses and manna and the obvious reference to another miracle with food. Stress that Jesus countered this comparison to try to draw His audience into a much deeper understanding of true sustenance.

2. Direct the volunteers to continue reading John 6:34-35 aloud, as if in a conversation. Encourage the group to dissect the words “hungry” and “thirsty” in the context Jesus used by finding appropriate synonyms or paraphrases. **Ask: Why would food, which is earthly, figure so prominently in spiritual outcomes?** Lead the group to complete the **Symbolism of Bread in the Bible** activity (PSG, p. 16).

3. Point out that after this deeply spiritual talk where Jesus extends His marvelous gift of salvation to His audience, He then pivots. **Direct the group to**

read John 6:36-40 aloud and highlight that Jesus discerned their unbelief.

Draw attention to verse 37 where Jesus says, “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me.” **Ask: Who is ultimately in charge of salvation?** Lead the group to understand that Jesus alluded to the authority of God the Father over salvation with Jesus’s role to act as the sacrificial atonement. Direct the group to review the first paragraph under the “Sovereignty and Salvation” heading in their PSG (p. 20) and the “come to Jesus” reference. Connect the dots between conviction of sin and salvation. **Probe: If you have been convicted of sin, what led to that?** Invite the group to share the powerful conviction that led them to confess their sins and receive Christ. Be prepared to share your own experience. Delve into the doctrine of God’s sovereignty over salvation by encouraging the group to think more deeply about our desire to see others saved.

Ask the group to read John 6:41-51 to identify the Jews’ complaint about Jesus—that Mary and Joseph’s son put on heretical airs by dubbing Himself a gift from heaven. Highlight Jesus’s declaration in verse 44 that no one can come to Christ unless God draws him; focus on His promise that He will then raise him “on the last day.”

Discuss the meaning of “the last day” as a potential reference to Jesus’s second coming, the resurrection, and judgment. **Question: What does that tell you about the longevity of salvation? Is it here today and gone**

tomorrow, or was Jesus indicating that it was eternal? Ask the group by show of hands whether they have heard the concept of “once saved, always saved.” Direct the group to page 21 of the PSG for more information on how the Baptist Faith and Message summarizes the doctrine of eternal security. Suggest that despite Christ’s assurance, some people struggle with this concept. **Ask: Why do you think we may doubt or reject it?** What can you do to trust it? Lead the group to complete the activity **The Case for Eternal Security** in the PSG (p. 22).

Lead the group to read John 6:52-59 to identify the new complaint that the Jews made against Jesus. **Reflect: Try putting yourself in the Jews’ shoes. Were questions about Jesus’s family or the oddity of eating His flesh honest ones or something else?** Lead the group to discuss the deeper meaning of His words and their symbolism. Link Jesus’s statement about drinking His blood and eating His flesh to the Last Supper He shared with His disciples, and display the elements that your church uses when it offers the Lord’s Supper.

Note that Jesus repeated these three key theological concepts in these three segments to try to drive them home.

To wrap up the session, lead the group to share takeaways from the study aligned with the three key theme words and record them on the **Teaching Item 1: Jesus’s “I Am the Bread of Life” Statement** sheet.

EXPOSITORY NOTES



INTRODUCTION TO THE “I AM” STATEMENTS OF JESUS

Biblical Context

The “I Am” statements of Jesus have been recorded for us in the Gospel of John. Jesus called John and his brother, James, to be His disciples, so they left their fishing business and followed Him (Mark 1:19-20). John remained a loyal disciple throughout his long and productive life. In his Gospel account, he referred to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 21:7-26). He never got over the reality that Jesus would love someone like him. Jesus honored John by directing him to take care of Mary, His mother, after He died on the cross. John honored Jesus by taking her into his home that day and caring for her for the rest of her life (John 19:25-27).

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, John played a prominent role as an apostle in the proclamation of the gospel. Imprisoned as an old man on the island of Patmos because of His faith in Jesus, he had a vision of the return of Jesus that became known as the Book of Revelation.

In John’s Gospel account, he shed bright light on the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He included critical details about what Jesus said and did throughout His ministry. At the end of his account, he noted that he could have written much more about Jesus, but the world would not be able to “contain the books” (John 21:25).

The Gospel of John can be divided into two sections. The first section includes John 1–12. These chapters contain rich insights into the reason that Jesus came from heaven to us. This section also includes accounts of the miracles Jesus performed and His instruction as Messiah. The second section includes John 13–21. In this section, John provided accounts of the episodes leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. He also showed how the critics of Jesus allowed their growing hatred for Him to provoke them into hatching a plan to kill Him.

Fortunately for believers, John’s Gospel account provided the “I Am” statements that Jesus made during His ministry. Each statement glistened like a polished facet of a priceless jewel. And each facet had a distinctive glimmer that made it unique. Jesus made the statements as He pressed forward with His messianic mission. The statements prompted some of His listeners to believe in Him as Messiah. At the same time, the statements caused others to turn against Him.

The simmering animosity of the people who rejected Jesus eventually turned into open hostility toward Him. The growing hatred toward Him served as the backdrop for the statements. Against that backdrop, Jesus stayed true to His mission as He continued to declare His “I Am” statements. Furthermore, He brought them into His instruction to His disciples. In doing so, He helped them to have a firm grasp of His relationship with them and their relationship with Him. The statements also gave Him the opportunity to teach His disciples that God sent Him from heaven to provide the way of salvation.

Theological Context

As Jesus made the “I Am” statements, He conveyed the depth of His union with God. As He brought each one of the statements into view, He almost always spoke about their union by putting it in “father” and “son” terms. By using those terms, Jesus clarified the connection between Himself and His Father in heaven. Their seamless unity was altogether perfect in that they nourished the same love, had the same thoughts, lived out the same intention, declared the same message, and completed the same mission. In addition, they incorporated the same power. Therefore, while Jesus was a fully man, He was fully God.

With the statements, Jesus exhibited His union with His Father in another way. Throughout the Old Testament, God made “I Am” statements. The most famous episode in which He made such a statement came in His conversation with Moses. The conversation took place when Moses saw a bush on fire but the flames didn’t consume it. As he approached the burning bush, God spoke to him and called him to return to Egypt for the purpose of liberating His people from slavery and leading them into the land of Israel. In the conversation, Moses wanted to know what he should say when the leaders of Israel questioned him about who sent him. God instructed Moses to say that “I AM” had sent him (Exodus 3:14). Through the prophet Isaiah, He made a similar statement about Himself. As He promised the restoration of Israel, He proclaimed, “I am the LORD. Besides me, there is no Savior” (Isaiah 43:11). Later, He used a similar title for Himself as He spoke to His people. As He reminded them of what He had done in the past, as well as what He would do in the future, He declared, “I am he; I am the first, I am also the last” (Isaiah 48:12).

Jesus echoed the statements of His Father as He made the “I Am” statements that set Him apart as His Son. Of course, many of the people who listened to Him often failed to grasp the truth about His union with His Father. As a result, they rejected Him. He assured them that His Father had sent Him from heaven as Messiah, but they did not believe in Him. However, anyone who placed their faith in Him was “born [. . .] of God” (John 1:13). With individuals who believed in Him, He shared keen insights into His identity as Messiah and what would be involved in following Him. He taught them in a way that assured them that He was the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Literary Context

As Jesus preached and taught, He used a rich combination of literal as well as figurative language. In John’s Gospel account, He spoke about His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return using terms that He expected His listeners to take literally. When He talked about His union with His Father, He used literal language too. Throughout His ministry, He used literal language effectively as He helped His listeners grasp the truth He wanted to convey.

His use of figurative language demonstrated His mastery as a teacher. He knew how to use mental images as teaching tools. He used them so effectively that they continue to be the centerpiece of discussion among believers and unbelievers

alike. Their effectiveness had to do with the way His Spirit used them to give fresh insights and renew appreciation for the insights that had already been given.

Jesus used figurative language in keeping with His preference for description. In the process of sharing truth with His listeners, He seemed to prefer description over definition. For instance, He never gave a conceptual definition of the kingdom of God. Instead, He opened the minds of His listeners to the kingdom of God by giving them a variety of vivid descriptions. For example, He taught that the kingdom of God was like a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31), leaven (Matthew 13:33), and treasure buried in a field (Matthew 13:44).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus provided mental images in the parables that He shared. The simple stories from everyday life served to convey spiritual insights in a way that made some of them unforgettable. Likewise, the “I Am” statements that Jesus shared with His disciples and His opponents demonstrated His perfect utilization of word pictures. Otherwise known as metaphors, they were commonly used words that rendered mental images for people as they listened to Jesus. Used in that way, common images served to convey spiritual reality.¹ Inside the minds of the listeners, the images would set off a chain reaction of thoughts, impressions, ideas, and insights.

The “I Am” statements of Jesus convey spiritual insights by way of simple and clear word pictures. Jesus captures the minds of His listeners by revealing Himself as bread that nourishes for eternity, the light that drives away darkness, and the shepherd who leads and protects His flock. He proclaims that because He is the Resurrection and the Life, a dead person can be raised from the grave and live again. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life that leads to heaven. Furthermore, He is the true vine from which the branches can grow and bear fruit that glorifies the Father.

1. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 58.

PREACHING GUIDE

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6

Jesus Is Bread for Life - John 6:1-15

Jesus Is the Bread of Life - John 6:22-59

- Material Needs (vv. 22-33)
- Bread for All (vv. 34-35)
- If We Believe (vv. 36-59)

Theological truths from John 6:37-40

- Sovereignty and Salvation
- Sovereignty and Security
- Sovereignty and Responsibility

NOTES