

I AM

THE RADICAL CLAIM THAT CHANGES
EVERYTHING

I AM: THE RADICAL CLAIM THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Small Group Study Guide

2015 • St. John's Lutheran Church of Orange • All Rights Reserved. Any reproduction of this material by any means, in whole or in part, is prohibited without written permission from St. John's Lutheran Church of Orange.

154 S Shaffer St
Orange, CA 92866
714-288-4400

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are taken from the NIV:
THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984,
2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.



CONTENTS

SMALL GROUP ESSENTIALS	2
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK	3
SESSION 1 - BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION	5
SESSION 2 - I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE	8
SESSION 3 - I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD	11
SESSION 4 - I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD	14
SESSION 5 - I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE	18
SESSION 6 - I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE	21
SESSION 7 - I AM THE VINE	24

LEADER'S GUIDE

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	27
SESSION 2: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE	28
SESSION 3: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD	29
SESSION 4: I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD	31
SESSION 5: I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE	33
SESSION 6: I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE	35
SESSION 7: I AM THE VINE	36
ICE BREAKERS	38
NOTES	40

SMALL GROUP ESSENTIALS

THE FOUR KEYS

Four key ingredients should be a part of every small group:

The Word of God: Whether we study straight from the Bible or study the Bible through devotional books/guides, we are committed to GROWING from the Word of God in Christ.

Growth: We are here because we want to GROW and see our lives transformed to be more like Christ. As part of this GROWTH we commit to pray for each other. We seek to encourage each other and hold each other accountable in the steps of our discipleship process: CONNECT-GROW-SHARE.

Acceptance: As members of this Life Group we seek to accept each other unconditionally as Christ does each of us, seeking to build strong friendships rooted in Christ.

Confidentiality: Everything shared in this group stays with this group. Gossip and slander are unacceptable. Like Christ, we seek the best for each other.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each session in this booklet corresponds to the video teaching you will be watching with your group. This format is set up for groups that meet for 1 ½ hours. You can make adjustments based on the time limits for your group. Each week the format will be as follows:

Opening Prayer (1-2 min.)

We encourage you to spend a few minutes praying for each other and the study.

Read the Small Group Essentials (2 min.)

We encourage the Small Group Essentials at the beginning of each meeting. This helps the group members to remember these guide lines and promotes a feeling of safety and confidentiality.

Read Scripture (3 min.)

Read the Scripture verse for the lesson each week. Members are encouraged to bring their bibles and read from their Bibles. This can be read out loud as a group, taking turns, or read by one member.

Video (10-15 min.)

Watch the video teaching for the week and write down anything that you find particularly relevant.

Discussion Questions (40-50 min.)

Answering all the study questions is not expected or required. Your group may have robust discussion on just a few, or they may move quickly through many. But spend some time discussing the content of the video and the connected Bible verses. The NIV Bible translation is used, unless otherwise noted.

Closing Prayer (10 min.)

Please take time to note any praise reports and prayer requests. Please keep these in prayer during the week.

BEFORE YOUR START



Before Diving into the study, we encourage you to watch the video entitled "Before you Begin."



OPENING PRAYER



Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2



Read the following verses together.

Exodus 3:1-15, John 8:58, John 20:30-31



Watch The Video



Discussion Questions

GETTING STARTED

1. Pastor Michael explained that three of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are called the synoptics because they are similar. But the gospel of John is a little different from these three. What are some of the reasons for this difference according to Pastor Michael? How are these differences helpful?

2. Read John 20:30-31. This is the purpose statement for the Gospel of John. Also, Read 1 Corinthians 15:2. Why does believing in Jesus lead to having life?

DIGGING DEEP

3. Read Exodus 3:14-15. Pastor Michael explained that in John 8:58 Jesus said, “before Abraham was born, I AM.” What important claim is Jesus making about himself? Why do you think this would be unsettling to the religious authorities?

4. Read Exodus 3:7-10. Why did God appear to Moses? Now read John 3:16-17. Why did God send his Son into the world? What is the common thread?

APPLICATION

5. Jesus’ assertion “I AM” was a radical claim that changed everything. Have you ever had difficulty changing your mind about someone or something even when the truth was staring right at you?


6. Moses didn’t believe he had the credentials to lead people out of Egypt; to be God’s representative. Do you ever feel like you don’t have the credentials to share your faith; to lead people closer to God? Pastor Michael gave us many details about Moses’ life. When you consider what you learned does that change your mind?

 **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

JOHN 6:35

 OPENING PRAYER

 Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

 Read JOHN 6:25-40 together as a group

 Watch The Video

 Discussion Questions

GETTING STARTED

1. Pastor Tim sets the stage for us in the opening of this video. There is a large crowd and they need to be fed. Verse 10 tells us there were about 5000 men. Most scholars believe that 5000 represents only the head of the household, thus, the actual number of people fed would have numbered 20,000 or more. It seems that both the disciples and the crowd had missed an important point when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes. What was the most important point?

2. Read John 6:10-11. Read Matthew 26:26. In his lesson, Pastor Tim mentioned an important step that Jesus performed before distributing the bread. What was it?

3. Read John 6:26-27. Jesus is trying to point the crowd to something important. What was it?

DIGGING DEEP

4. Read John 6:11 and Exodus 16:11-18. When you consider Jesus feeding the 5000 (John 6) and God providing bread in the form of manna (Exodus 16), what do you think was God's (and Jesus') ultimate goal in supplying this bread?

5. Read John 6:4, 11, Matthew 26:17, 26 and Exodus 12:17. What important religious event was about to be celebrated? What is the common element at the center?

6. Read John 6:32-35 and Matthew 26:26. When Jesus explains that he is the bread of life (John 6) and explains that the Passover bread is His body (Matthew 26), what does this tell us about life, bread, and Jesus?

APPLICATION

7. When you hear the words of institution during church, "this is my body broken for you, take, eat," and participate in the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion), do you ever consider what it means that Jesus is the bread of life, that he is present in the bread and wine?

8. Read John 6:32-40 and 47-51. Jesus claims his role as the Bread of life. How can we get the Bread of Life (Jesus) regularly?

9. What keeps us from daily feeding on the “Bread of Life?”

 **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

I AM


THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

3

JOHN 8:12

 OPENING PRAYER

 Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

 Read JOHN 7:1-14 and 40-52, JOHN 8:12 together as a group

 Watch The Video

 Discussion Questions

GETTING STARTED

1. Read John 1:1-13 and Psalm 27:1. In the opening verses of this gospel, John introduces the concept of the Word bringing light to everyone in the world. Discuss some of the ways in which Jesus brings light to the world.

2. Read Exodus 13:21-22. Pastor Nathan describes the purpose of the Festival of Booths. What is the purpose of this celebration?

3. Pastor Nathan also explained that the candelabrum in the temple, like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, represented God's presence among his people. What is the significance of Jesus' statement, "I am the light of the world," as he stood in the temple, directly in front of this candelabrum?

DIGGING DEEP

4. Read Exodus 13:20-22, Psalm 119:105 and Isaiah 42:5-6. In question 3 we discussed the significance of Jesus' statement "I am the light of the world." How did His statement relate to the Jews' history as a people and to God's deliverance and guidance of them?

5. How does Jesus' claim to be "the light of the world" recall Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 9:1-2) concerning the Messiah? (See also Matthew 4:12-16). How does this address the Pharisees' contention that no prophet had ever come out of Galilee (John 7:52)?

6. Read Isaiah 60:19-22 and Zechariah 14:6-9, 16. As part of the prophecy, how will Jesus, "the light of the world," someday fulfill the meaning of the Festival of Booths as the people of the world come to know what it means to experience the continuous light of God's presence?

APPLICATION

7. Light and dark are concepts used both in the culture and in Christianity. How are our Christian and cultural concepts of light similar, and how are they different?

8. Read John 3:19-21 and 1 John 1:5-7. As imperfect people, sinful people, who have a tendency to follow our own desires instead of God's directives, we walk in darkness. How can we break this tendency and move toward the light?

9. Jesus made the statement, "I am the light of the world," but He also told His followers, "You are the light of the world." Read Matthew 5:14-16. How can we be the light of the world?

 **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

I AM

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

4

JOHN 10:14

 OPENING PRAYER

 Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

 Read JOHN 10:1-21 together as a group

 Watch The Video

 Discussion Questions

GETTING STARTED

1. Pastor Michael gave us insight into life as a shepherd. What are some of the important descriptions he gives us of a shepherd's life in Israel? Also, what is the important distinction Pastor made about how Sheep are encouraged to move?

2. Read John 10:1-21 and list what each of the following people or groups do (*fill in the table below*).

Shepherd	Sheep	Thieves (Pharisees & Others)

3. Who does each character represent? What conclusions can you make about each person or group from the table above?

DIGGING DEEP

4. In John 10:1-9 Jesus describes himself as “the gate.” What is Jesus the gate to? (See also Matthew 1:21, Ephesians 1:7, Acts 16:31).

5. Read John 10:11, 15, 17, 18. John tells us four times that the Good Shepherd “lays down his life” for the sheep. Why would Jesus need to repeat this statement four times?

6. Read Ezekiel 34:1-6 and identify some of the characteristics of selfish shepherds. What are some cultural identifiers that are “selfish shepherds?” Read Ezekiel 34:11-16 and Psalm 23. Identify all the different ways the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. How can we be good shepherds?

7. In the first part of this discourse (John 10:1-9), Jesus says, “I AM the gate.” In the second part of this discourse (John 11-18), Jesus says, “I AM the Good Shepherd.” Why is it important to understand that Jesus is both the gate and the Good Shepherd?

APPLICATION

8. The sheep were gathered into the sheepfold or pen at night where they were kept for their safety. Yet every morning the shepherd would lead them out to pastures where food and water as well as dangers were found. Why would a shepherd take them out to where they would be in danger and where he may have to put his life on the line to protect them? In what ways does Jesus lead us out of the safety of our sheepfold? Why does He do so?

9. Sheep are mentioned more than 200 times in the Bible. They are characterized as stubborn, fearful, helpless, weak, easily misled, harmless, and unaware of their surroundings. Although sheep are often considered to be dumb animals, on the other hand, they were also considered valuable in Biblical times just as they are of value today. In what ways are we like sheep? What value can we offer to God’s kingdom?

10. Psalm 23 and John 10:10b paints a beautiful picture of the life of a sheep. Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (NIV). Other versions translate the phrase as “abundant life” or “more abundant life.” Describe what this full or abundant life means to you.

 **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

JOHN 11:25

 **OPENING PRAYER** **Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2** **Read JOHN 11:17-27 and 38-44 together as a group** **Watch The Video** **Discussion Questions**

GETTING STARTED

1. Pastor Bob helps us understand in John 11:23-26, the word "life" is used in two senses when applied to human life/our life. Explain the difference between these two senses of life. Why would Jesus explain both types?

2. Read John 11:7-8. Why does the proximity to Jerusalem heighten awareness of Jesus' risk when going to Bethany? Why would it have been beneficial for the Jews to witness Lazarus' resurrection (11:42)?

3. Jesus waited a few days to go and visit Lazarus after he found out about him being sick. What do you think was a likely reason for this delay? How would this delay eventually tie into His own death and resurrection? (Read John 11:45-53)

DIGGING DEEP

4. Some believe there will simply be a spiritual resurrection of the dead, and not a bodily resurrection. What do the following passages have to say about this: 1 Corinthians 15:42-49 (note 'natural' and 'spiritual' are qualifiers while 'body' is the noun) and Philippians 3:21?

5. Review 11:23-27. Martha sees Lazarus' resurrection as an event that will eventually happen in the future, but look carefully at what Jesus says in 11:25 - 26 and discuss the evidence for resurrection life happening the moment a person believes.

6. Pastor Bob explains the Greek word for "give yourselves fully" literally means to "exceed a fixed number." As Christians we know that Christ has "fully given Himself" up for us, sinners who have deserved nothing. But Christ did not only die for us, he lives for us as well. How important is the bodily resurrection of Christ as opposed to simply the 'idea' or 'memory' of Christ living on? Read 1 Corinthians 15:13-14.

APPLICATION

7. When considering question 6 above, why is it so difficult for us to give ourselves fully for Him, the One who loves us more than anyone?

8. Read John 11:21-23 and John 11:32-33. Compare Martha and Mary's reaction to Jesus' delay; arriving after Lazarus had already been in the tomb 4 days. Do you think the Bible illustrated both of their reactions for a specific reason? Would you have reacted more like Martha or Mary? Why?

9. Have you ever been hopeless, sad, or even angry with God for allowing something bad to happen that you felt He could have prevented. How do you feel about it today?


10. When Jesus restored physical life to Lazarus, everyone noticed. When Jesus gives spiritual life to one who believes in Him, how do other people notice?

 Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

JOHN 14:6

 **OPENING PRAYER**

 **Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2**

 **Read JOHN 13:1-3 and 21-37, JOHN 14:1-7 together as a group**

 **Watch The Video**

 **Discussion Questions**

GETTING STARTED

1. Trevor tells us Jesus' opening words in John 14 are words of comfort. Why did Jesus need to comfort his disciples (refer back to John 13)?

2. Read John 13:1-3 and 14:1-3. Where was Jesus going, and what was he going to be doing?

DIGGING DEEP

3. In John 14:6 Jesus calls himself, “The Way.” This was an important designation for early Christians. For example read Acts 9:1-2. Trevor talks about the Greek word for “way.” When Jesus says he is “The Way,” what does he mean?

4. In John 14:6 Jesus also calls himself, “The Truth.” Read John 1:14 and John 1:17. What does It mean to know the truth (see John 8:31-32)?

5. We also read in John 14:6 that Jesus is, “The Life.” Read Romans 12:9-21. Trevor mentioned that life in Jesus affects us now and in eternity. How do we have life in Jesus now?

6. Read John 14:6 again. In the Greek language, the pronoun “I Am” used in verse 6 is emphatic, comparable to saying, “I, and none besides me.” Also, Jesus uses the definite article to distinguish Himself as, “the only way.” Trevor gave us an explanation about this radical claim. What do you think about Jesus’ claim to exclusivity? Is there really no other way or means to eternal life?

APPLICATION

7. Reflect back on Jesus’ unsettling disclosures in Chapter 13 and his comforting words in John 14:1-4 from question 1 above. When you think about the difficulties you face in your own life of faith, how do Jesus’ words of comfort speak to you

today? How do His words of comfort to his disciples help with our own troubled and anxious hearts?

8. In John 14:5, Thomas asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" How are we sure that we are headed the right way? What are some ways we follow Jesus?

9. Is truth relative; different for one person as compared to another? Discuss what happens when everyone can have their own truth.

 **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

JOHN 15:5

 **OPENING PRAYER**

 **Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2**

 **Read JOHN 15:1-17 together as a group**

 **Watch The Video**

 **Discussion Questions**

GETTING STARTED

1. Pastor Tim gave us one reason why Jesus would use the vine example. What was it? Can you think of other reasons why this would be a meaningful metaphor?

2. In John 15:1 we find out who is the “True Vine.” Who is it? In 15:5, who are the branches?

3. Viticulture is the cultivation of grapevines; grape growing is an appropriate image to understand the connections between Jesus and believers. The clusters of fruit displayed the quality of the vine and the ability of the vinedresser. How do you understand Jesus being the true vine and His Father the vinedresser?

4. Think about verses 15:2 and 15:6. What do the branch that bears no fruit and the fruitful branch have in common? What is the difference?

DIGGING DEEP

5. Read Romans 8:38-39. If nothing can separate us from the love of God through Christ, e.g. nothing can separate us from the vine, how does someone become a branch that must be cut off? Consider Judas Iscariot (John 12:4).

6. Look at verses 15:2-4. Now Read Hebrews 12:10-11. How does pruning help the vine? The word “prune” also means “cleanse.” What makes us clean? What makes us fruitful?

7. Read 1 John 4:19. Jesus repeats the words, “remain in me,” “love,” and “bearing fruit.” How are these words related? What is the “fruit that will last?” (John 15:5-9, 16)

APPLICATION

8. The Greek word for pruning also means “cleanse.” This is God’s way of dealing with sin. Jesus tells us that the branches that bear fruit will be pruned by God so they will bear more fruit (15:2). Even the best branches have need of purging or pruning so that they will be more fruitful. Have you experienced this pruning in your own life? If so, what form has this pruning taken?

9. As you re-read John 15:11-17, what do you see believers being called to do? The answer closely relates to Pastor Tim’s story about grits.

10. Love is a command from Jesus (John 15:17). This command is not always easy to obey. What has God given us to help us keep this command?

 **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

GETTING STARTED

1. John's readers, the recipients of his original gospel writings were different from the people that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were writing to. John is writing to a group of people who were not only Jewish Christians, but also Samaritan and Greek Gentiles. The Jewish Christians were well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Gentiles did not have this same religious background. John's gospel speaks to both audiences. This is helpful because John's gospel also speaks to the newer believers and the seasoned veterans today. This is why Pastor Michael said the gospel of John is both a shallow pool in which a child can wade and at the same time an ocean full of wonders. This gospel has something for everyone.
2. This gospel is a record of much of Jesus' ministry, written down so that we may read the good news of Jesus' life. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that awakens faith and saves. It is through hearing and reading the word of God that we come to believe. John's text is missional in purpose; its mission is to speak to people and bring them into Christ, into belief, and into life.

DIGGING DEEP

3. God referred to himself as "I AM." These words in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament scriptures, were also the root for YAHWEH or LORD (as we see it often translated in our Bibles). When Jesus uses the same term to describe himself, he is publicly claiming to be God. The religious leaders would find this unsettling because nobody could claim to be God – this was blasphemy, punishable by death. Furthermore, many wondered about Jesus' audacity. He had no authority, organizationally / religiously speaking; rather it was the Jewish Priests who felt it was their function to make these kinds of determinations. The priests had all the authority – at least in their minds.
4. God appeared because he saw the misery of his people in Egypt and He was concerned about their suffering. God sent his Son into the world to save the world. What is the common thread? God is doing all the saving work. People are not saving themselves, but rather it is by God's grace and God's mercy that anyone is saved.

APPLICATION

5. Answers may vary.
6. Answers may vary.

SESSION 2: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

GETTING STARTED

1. The sign (miracle) was the most important point. Feeding 20,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, with 12 baskets of leftovers was miraculous. That Jesus could perform such a miracle should have been the first thing everyone noticed, thought about, marveled at. Instead the most important point for the crowd and even Jesus' followers seemed to be their full stomachs – the free bread – their concern for their stomachs had blinded them to the evidence of who Jesus was.
2. He gave thanks. This was not a “thanks” to the crowd; this was a thank you to God who gives us all that we have. Like we sing in the doxology, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” it also pointed to our daily dependence on God for both our material and spiritual blessings.
3. Believe in him and have eternal life. Merely material notions of blessings are not worth pursuing. Focusing on worldly things (the bread of the world) as the priority, rather than on Godly things (the bread of life), will not help you in the end. Worldly things spoil, but heavenly things are eternal.

DIGGING DEEP

4. God's desire is to fill our needs materially and spiritually. God wants only the best for His creation. But also, God helps us understand from where all blessings flow, who we can depend on. God is the ultimate provider of everything we have. We ask for God's provision every time we pray the Lord's Prayer and say, “give us this day our daily bread.”
5. Passover is also called the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This festival, appointed by God, was an important remembrance of God's saving work – rescuing His people from slavery in Egypt. Bread is at the center of the incident at the Sea of Galilee (feeding the 5000); it is at the center (along with the wine) of the Last Supper – the institution of Holy Communion (the Lord's Supper).
6. Jesus redirects the crowd. Instead of connecting himself to the great Jewish patriarch and prophet, Moses, Jesus connects himself to the bread from God; the nourishment that feeds a hungry people. In the Lord's Supper Jesus gives us the words of institution, “take and eat; this is my body.” Martin Luther says that Word and Sacraments point us to Jesus, strengthen faith, and comfort troubled souls. Jesus is pointing to himself as the bread of life, the strengthening and comforting ingredient in the Lord's Supper, in the Gospel, and in life.

APPLICATION

7. Jesus has promised us to be present, to be with us, strengthening us, comforting us, and guiding us here on earth. That is why, along with Baptism, we call the Lord's Supper a Sacrament. In Holy Communion we encounter Jesus, not merely as a remembrance but also as a reality.
8. We can feed on the Word of God, the Bible. We can spend time in prayer and quiet time thinking about Jesus and talking to Him through prayer. We can participate in worship; partake of the Lord's Supper.
9. Answers may vary.

SESSION 3: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

GETTING STARTED

1. There is much darkness in the world—evil, cruelty, hatred, trouble, pain, suffering, deception, blindness to truth, hopelessness, despair, condemnation, death. As the light of the world, Jesus is the light that dispels all of this darkness, bringing to all mankind hope and life. His light contrasts with and illuminates the darkness, at once revealing to people their sin and pointing them on the path to salvation, rescuing them from death, giving them hope, and bringing them new life.
2. This week long festival commemorated the forty years Israel wandered in the desert during the time of Moses. During this time, God accompanied them by day as a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire, “to give them light.” God was with them, at the center of their community, leading them continuously. Ultimately, it was a celebration of God dwelling in midst of his people.
3. Jesus statement is significant for several reasons. It is a response to all of those detractors who were questioning his identity. Jesus was indeed the Messiah foretold in Scriptures. The light and life of for the Israelites wandering in the wilderness was God. Jesus is the light and life for God's people everywhere. In Jesus, the hopes of the Festival of Booths were realized.

DIGGING DEEP

4. God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and God rescued us from slavery to sin by sending his Son to die on a cross, to bear the burden of our mistakes, so that we may be set free. God went before the Israelites as a pillar of

smoke by day and fire by night, God was in their midst, and God was their guide. Jesus became and is the light for the whole world, he is the one who leads us day and night, and Jesus is our guide.

5. According to the prophecy, believers could anticipate a day when they would live in the continuous presence of God. Like the Israelites who followed the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, enjoying continuous presence of God in their midst, this day would come again. Jesus' claim marked this return to life continuously in the presence of God, through Jesus. To make this claim during the festival of booths would make this connection between the Son (Jesus) and the Father (God) very clear. The Pharisees of all people should have known the prophecy. They were the most learned members of Jewish society; they were the keepers of scriptural knowledge. That this promised light of the world would come from Galilee should have been expected.

6. Zechariah wrote of a day when God will come to reign as king over the whole earth and there will be continuous day "with no distinction between day and night." People from the whole earth will go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Booths and worship the Lord as King. As the light of the world, Jesus is the One through whom God's presence is made known to humankind and through whom people come to know God through deliverance from sin and death. Having sojourned temporarily in the world under God's protection and guidance, they then will bask in the light of His continual presence and worship Him as King and celebrate His deliverance and direction of them for eternity in heaven.

APPLICATION

7. Light is life-giving. Plants need light to grow, we need sunlight to stay healthy, and light warms the earth. Every living creature needs light to live. Without light, there is no growth, no health. Spiritually, Jesus shines into our sinful, dark lives and gives us life. Jesus' light chases away the darkness and saves us. As Christians we seek this life saving, dark chasing, light. In the culture, people who make poor decisions do not want the light to shine and disclose their sins. In the culture, many people choose false "lights", like money and fame and worldly religions to follow thinking these will save them. But eventually, all of the false lights will prove only to hurt not harm.

8. Regular worship, regular study of God's word, regular service to others, as well as prayer and fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters are good ways to chase away darkness. In this way we stay connected to the source of life and light – Jesus.

9. Answers can include a review of the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), as well as Jesus' call to love one another, to serve others, to care for the least of these, etc.

SESSION 4: I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

GETTING STARTED

1. Shepherds needed to be tough. Life was hard in the desert. A shepherd had to protect his herds from harm, from the elements, from wild animals, and thieves. When danger or night time approached, good shepherds would usher their sheep into pens and guard the gate. Shepherds in the Middle East have the distinction of calling their sheep, of leading them forward, rather than driving them from behind.

2.

Shepherd	Sheep	Thieves (Pharisees & Others)
opens and enters by the gate	listen	thief
call	follow	robber
leads	know shepherds voice	do not understand
goes ahead	never follow a stranger	steal
tells	run away from strangers	kill
has come	do not recognize strangers	destroy
lays down life (4x)	are saved	abandons
knows	come in	runs away
has other sheep	go out	(wolf) attacks
brings tem	find pasture	scatters flock
has authority	have life to the full	cares nothing for sheep

3. The Shepherd represents pastors and church leaders. Both professional and lay church leaders can be included. But also, in one sense, we should consider ourselves shepherds as we go about our days seeking to be good neighbors who shine the light of Jesus. The sheep are believers. The thieves are anyone or anything that would separate us from Jesus; bad leaders, material possessions, addictions, sin and the devil, etc... The Shepherd is constantly doing things that benefit the sheep. His focus is always on the sheep and their well-being. He continually seeks out other sheep to join his flock. The sheep have a strong connection to their Shepherd. As long as they keep their focus on him, they enjoy benefits and blessings. (Recognizing, as Christ's sheep today, we don't always do such a good job of focusing. We are easily distracted.) The thieves and others do not seek to benefit anyone but themselves. They are clueless as to the identity of the Shepherd and see him as a threat to their well-being. The Thieves try to separate the sheep from the shepherd.

DIGGING DEEP

4. Jesus is the gate to life. It is only through belief in Jesus that we are saved. Believing in Jesus gives us a better, more fulfilling life here on earth, but also guarantees our life in eternity. Jesus does not promise a trouble-free life earth, but he does promise to be with us through it all.

5. The death of a shepherd would not be intentional; in fact it would be rare because it would leave the flock entirely exposed. Shepherds would always defend their flocks against attack, but losing their lives would not help the flock. In contrast, the death of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, is intentional. It results not in his flock being exposed, but rather being defended against attack. The death of the Good Shepherd does help the flock. The death of the Good Shepherd was not the end of life, but the beginning of life through - the resurrection of Jesus - for his flock (you and me).

Jesus chose to lay his life down to secure the future of his sheep. It wasn't merely that he was prepared to do battle with enemies; he readily did so of his own accord. His death brings abundant life today and eternally for all believers. Jesus clearly states this phrase four times within seven verses. He doesn't want anyone to claim that he was unwilling to go to the cross for our salvation.

6. Selfish shepherds care only for their own needs. They make sure they are well fed, protected, and clothed. Selfish shepherds do no care for the sick or seek the lost. Selfish shepherds leave us stranded and alone. Celebrities, politicians, bad bosses are all selfish shepherds that are relatively easy to identify. Materialism and consumerism may also be. Think about ways we also may personally behave as selfish shepherds.

The Good Shepherd searches for his sheep, seeks and gathers them. He rescues them from a life of darkness. He returns them to safe pastures ("their own land") he designated for their inheritance (their "portion"). He provides all their food and basic necessities (grazing and rest). He won't entrust their care to just anyone, he himself will be their shepherd. He seeks and brings back those who stray and strengthens them. He binds their wounds. He destroys those who prey on his sheep. As disciples, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be like Jesus - to be Good Shepherds.

7. God solved our sin problem. He provided both the method and means for reconciliation. Jesus is the way to God. He is the one way we have connection with God. Because of Jesus' work, laying down his life for us, we have forgiveness and access to God. Jesus is both the gate to the abundant life here on earth and to eternal life in heaven. Jesus is also the one who guides us, protects us, feeds us, and cares for us. It is through the gospel message, the good news of Jesus Christ, that we awaken faith, strengthen believers, and comfort troubled souls.

APPLICATION

8. Outside the sheep pen is where the fresh grass and water streams are located and where the sheep find exercise, which nourishes and helps the sheep grow. If we are not led out of the confines of our self-determined sheep pens, then we will not find growth in our lives. Discipleship is not easy, it requires us to encounter others, but it is only outside the sheep pen that we can truly live in Christ. Jesus also promises, as our Good Shepherd, to walk with us every step of the way.

9. Answers may vary.

10. Answers may vary.

SESSION 5: I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

GETTING STARTED

1. People who believe in Jesus, live – have life. Our lives lived in and for Jesus take on greater meaning, they are lives of purpose. When we die, as believers in Jesus, we also have everlasting life. This means that Jesus makes a difference in our lives now and for eternity.

2. The religious leaders were trying to kill Jesus. By going to Bethany, Jesus would be very close to Jerusalem – in arm's reach of those who wanted him dead. However, by witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus, seeing a dead man raised to life, would make Jesus' divine claims very difficult to refute. In fact, many more believed because of this miracle that they witnessed.

3. By waiting, there was no question that Lazarus was truly dead. This incident, the raising of Lazarus, was the final event that would lead the religious leaders to act; to arrest and crucify Jesus, in fulfilment of the prophecy and completion of God's plan for salvation of His people. When Jesus was crucified, died and was buried, he was in the tomb until Sunday. As with Lazarus, there was no question about Jesus being truly, bodily, dead.

DIGGING DEEP

4. The apostle Paul calls it a spiritual body in the 1 Cor. passage. The word “spiritual” may cause some confusion. These days, when we think of something spiritual, we may think of something with no substance. That might lead some to conclude that the resurrection entails an unsubstantial existence. But, notice Paul's grammar. He calls it a spiritual body. “Body” is the noun and “spiritual” is the modifier. Therefore the body is not lost, but modified by the spirit. The

reason Paul refers to the resurrected body as a spiritual body is to show that the resurrected body is not one that is both good and bad, but one that is altogether good. Right now our bodies are good and bad, sanctified and carnal. A body with fleshly lusts and sins cannot enter heaven. But, a spiritual body can. It will still be a body, but one that is altogether good – one that is minus the limitations of such things as mortality, fatigue, hunger, thirst, etc.

5. Martha confesses resurrection on the last day. But Jesus explains this more fully. He affirms resurrection on the last day. But for believers, eternal life begins now here on earth because we are already saved, we already have abundant life in Jesus – our comforter and guide. Now we have salvation, not yet do we have eternity. Now we are saved and may live life to the full, not yet do we have everlasting life in heaven. We have life now in Jesus and we have eternity with Jesus.

6. If Christ death does not end in life, then our life in Christ has little meaning. By having faith and being baptized into Christ, we receive all of the benefits – we look good to God because he sees us in Christ. If on the other hand, there is no resurrection, if Christ is not divine, then everything falls apart. Jesus cannot possibly be part of the Trinity, he cannot possibly pay for our sins, he is not interceding for us with God, and God does not see us through Christ's perfection. We are on our own. We must, through our own efforts and merit, work our way to heaven.

APPLICATION

7. Answers may vary.

8. Martha professes her faith in Jesus. She gives one of the great confessions of faith we read in the bible. Mary is sorrowful and unable to see past the loss of her brother. But notice, Jesus has compassion for both of these dear friends; he knows they both have faith. But sometimes our faith is strong and robust, giving us the clarity and fortitude to face any situation. Sometimes we are weakened by in our sorrow or pain, unable to see with clarity and fortitude. The great comfort is that whether in good times or in bad, whether our faith is robust or weak, we have Jesus right by our side.

9. Answers may vary.

10. Be sure to consider people who are Christian but may not behave as you would like as well as those who seem to be reflections of the Christian life.

SESSION 6: I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

GETTING STARTED

1. In Chapter 13 Jesus foretells of many difficult events that are about to take place. He predicts Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, the most unsettling of these events is Jesus' impending departure. These 12 disciples, men who had been with Jesus every step of the way, would surely be unsettled by these disclosures.

2. Jesus' departure was actually to the disciple's advantage. He was going to prepare a place in heaven for the disciples, for all Jesus followers and he was going to come back and bring them there. Heaven here is pictured as the Father's house. The point is not the lavish accommodations, but rather there is more than enough space for everyone.

DIGGING DEEP

3. In order to have eternal life with God in heaven, you must believe in Jesus. Jesus is the only way to God the father, Jesus is the only way to salvation, and Jesus is God's only begotten son the only one who died to take away the sins of the world. Because Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God who paid the price for all mistakes and sins, we are guaranteed we have the way to eternity.

4. To know the truth is to know Jesus. The truth is that God loved the World, his own creation, so much that he was willing to sacrifice his only son on a cross, to allow his only son to bear the burden of the world's sinfulness, so that we may have everlasting life. Truth sets us free from a life of burden, working our way to salvation, wondering if there is eternity. Truth sets us free to live a life of meaning and purpose in Christ.

5. We are not promised an easy, worry free life just because we believe in Jesus. What we are promised is that Jesus will be with us every step of the way, helping us, guiding us, and comforting us. Life lived in Jesus means a life of love for others both those who are easy to love and those who are not so easy to love. Remember, Jesus washed the feet of his supporters and his betrayer.

6. Trevor reminded us that "When it comes to other religions, the path or way to enlightenment or a form of heaven, is tread by YOU." This is a heavy burden, because all of us stumble every day, none of us can ever get it quite right. Can we ever be patient enough or kind enough? Can we share enough or give enough? How can any human know if they have satisfied the requirements, made enough restitution for their shortcomings? That is why Jesus is the only way – because Jesus is good enough. Jesus was the perfect and complete restitution.

APPLICATION

- Answers may vary.
- Following Jesus is not always easy or burden free, but even in times of trouble Christians many times find guidance and peace by seeking Jesus. We can follow Jesus and seek him by spending time in the word, in worship, and in prayer, as well as by serving others just to name a few.
- Jesus is culturally connected and he is relevant to every generation and every time. But Jesus is the truth and he is relevant not relative, he is not just one way of many ways. If everyone has their own truth then there are no rules, there is no right or wrong, it would be difficult to have good order in society. Relationships and marriage become disassembled along with the rest of the culture.

SESSION 7: I AM THE VINE

GETTING STARTED

- Vineyards dotted the landscape across the ancient Mediterranean world. Vinedressers would nurture productive branches; dead wood was removed in winter and useless growth cut away in spring. The Old Testament commonly refers to the nation of Israel as a vine. This figure of speech was well known and Jesus' disciples would relate to it. It is also significant that they had just partaken of wine at the Lord's Supper and it was fresh in their minds.
- Jesus is the true vine. He is God's chosen one. We are the branches. Anyone who believes, anyone who is IN Christ, is a branch and has life. It doesn't matter what your religious or life background used to be, now by believing in Jesus you are connected to the life-source.
- The grape cannot make itself good; neither can we make ourselves good. Everything is up to God. God helps us by pruning away the unwanted, by training us in the way we should go, but nurturing us and placing us in the vine, placing us in Jesus.
- They will both be pruned. Some who pass for branches are only tied to Jesus by a thread, like Judas Iscariot. They will soon dry up. We need to abide in Christ because as Pastor Tim said: "There is no life outside of being in Him." Believers are also pruned as a way of helping and directing us. As a loving father disciplines his beloved children, wanting only the best and never harm for them, so also God the vinedresser disciplines us.

DIGGING DEEP

5. Nothing can take us away from the love of God, nothing can snatch us out of our Father's hand, but we can decide to jump out of his love, we can decide to jump out of his hand. Like Judas Iscariot, we can decide to become unfruitful branches.
6. Useless growth takes energy from the vine that should go to producing fruit. Cutting away useless growth allows the vine to be more productive. The Word of Christ cleanses us. The Word of God helps us recognize useless growth in our lives. It can help us confront sin and address whatever separates us from God. It can help us focus in on God's love and strengthens our relationship with the vine. It is our connection to Jesus that makes us fruitful. Believing in Jesus gives us life. The fruit is nothing less than the outcome of dependence on the vine.
7. Remaining attached to Jesus means remaining attached to our energy source that allows us to bear good fruit. God loves his son Jesus, Jesus loves us, and so we can bear fruit of love toward other – we love because he first loved us. The fruitfulness of Christians is the work done for Jesus and the Kingdom. Jesus calls us to a life of service. The fruit that will last will glorify our Father in heaven.

APPLICATION

8. Answers may vary.
9. V. 12, love one another, v. 14, do what God commands, v. 16, go and bear fruit, v. 17, love one another. Stick together, serve together, and support one another.
10. Answers can include the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Christian friends, a new softened heart, and the ability to love others as well as fellowship with other Christians in weekly worship.

ICE BREAKERS

to do with your group if time allows

Take something from your wallet/purse and tell how it relates to you.

Tell about the most positive conversation that you had today.

Tell about the most interesting thing that happened to you today.

Tell about the most humorous incident that you experienced in the last year.

My favorite fun activity when I was a child was...

The thing that drives me crazy is...

We celebrated Easter when I was a child by...

My favorite movie of all times is...

My idea of a great vacation is...

My favorite food is...

If I could visit any era of history, I would visit...

My favorite childhood memory is...

My favorite leisure activity is...

Tell about the best birthday present you ever received.

Share one of the happiest days of your life.

Describe what your day was like today.

If you had to move and could only take three things with you, what would you take?

While growing up I saw God as...

What would you do if someone willed you a million dollars?

If you could do anything you want this time next year, what would it be?

THANK YOU to all who have contributed to the I AM curriculum guide and videos and St. John's 2015 Life Group campaign:

Daryl Cole

Sara Doyle

Kelly Early

Joseph Fryer

Doug Gardner

Tyler Harms

Pastor Nathan Hausch

Pastor Michael Hayes

Chris Higgins

Cathy Joeckel

Pastor Tim Klinkenberg

David Kruse

Leann Luchinger

Christina Meadows

Tim Odle

Susan Odle

Matt Parsons

Becky Peters

John Primm

Ken Pummill

Michael Robinson

Pastor Bob Rossow

Lori Siekmann

Mary Strack

Leona Tschopp

Trevor Van Blarcom

Concordia University Irvine, for the use of the CUI Studio Theater

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

I AM