



I AM

(Jesus and the heart of God)

INTRODUCTION

God wants to be known. Yes, God is holy, set apart, glorious, *and* God chooses to reveal God's self to us. We can know something of what God is like through God's creation. We can know what God is like through stories in the Bible. In many ways, the Bible is a story of humanity's attempt to know God and God's desire to be known. We come to know God best through the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God-incarnate; the "Word made flesh" who "lived among us." The Gospel of John contains a collection of self-revealing statements made by Jesus. These are known as the "I Am sayings." This series explores these image-rich sayings and how they help us see God's heart and nature.

Bread of Life

Light of the World

Good Shepherd

True Vine

Way, Truth, Life

Resurrection and Life



I AM

Bread of Life

Opening Prayer

God beyond us, you are without equal in your power and might. God beside us, you are without equal in your faithful love. God within us, you are without equal in your renewing presence. You are the great I AM. Thank you for being a God we can know and for being a God who wants to be known all through your son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to know and love you more. Amen.

Opening Question: When was a time you were hungry and a meal was particularly satisfying?

Scripture: John 6:26-35

Jesus replied, "I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Human One will give you. God the Father has confirmed him as his agent to give life." They asked, "What must we do in order to accomplish what God requires?" Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent." They asked, "What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." Jesus told them, "I assure you, it wasn't Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!" Jesus replied, "**I am the bread of life.** Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Discussion

1. Crowds have just been fed miraculously by Jesus. How does this set the stage for what Jesus says next?
2. Is there a difference between being full and being satisfied? How do you see that in the passage?
3. What are some of the ways we chase after fullness in today's world?
4. Jesus speaks in metaphor here. What do you think he means by "the food that endures for eternal life?"
5. What do you think Jesus means when he says, "I Am the Bread of Life?"
6. What does this statement reveal about God's heart and character?
7. What would have to be true for us to live like we truly trust and believe that statement?

Big Idea

As human beings, we often chase after fullness and whatever will fill us up quickly. God desires to give us abundant life and the good things that truly satisfy. Bread is a basic source of life and sustenance. When we trust that Jesus is the Bread of Life, we trust that God is a gracious provider and giver of life. Our relationship with Jesus will be the daily bread we need that ultimately satisfies our deepest hunger and keeps us from being consumed by our appetites. God is enough!



I AM

Light of the World

Opening Prayer

God beyond us, you are without equal in your power and might. God beside us, you are without equal in your faithful love. God within us, you are without equal in your renewing presence. You are the great I AM. Thank you for being a God we can know and for being a God who wants to be known all through your son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to know and love you more. Amen.

Opening Question: When was a time you were grateful to have a flashlight or candle?

Scripture: John 1:1-5; John 8:12

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

Jesus spoke to the people again, saying, **"I am the light of the world.** Whoever follows me won't walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Discussion

1. What does light do and how does light have power *beyond* what it physically does?
2. What is the connection between light, life and Jesus in these passages?
3. What do you think it means or looks like to "walk in darkness?"
4. How does trusting in Jesus as the Light of the World who overcomes the darkness give us a posture of hope?
5. How have you experienced Jesus as a source of light in a time of darkness?
6. What does this statement reveal about God's heart and character?
7. What happens when we trust Jesus as a source of light?

Big Idea

God brings light to the darkness. That's a thread that runs throughout scripture from the creation of the world to the restoration of all things. It can often feel like we live in a dark, scary world full of uncertainty and chaos. Just as light helps things to live, guides us, helps reveal what's hidden, Jesus as the Light of the World is present in even the most dire situations providing hope, guidance and life-giving power. Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise!



I AM

The Good Shepherd

Opening Prayer

God beyond us, you are without equal in your power and might. God beside us, you are without equal in your faithful love. God within us, you are without equal in your renewing presence. You are the great I AM. Thank you for being a God we can know and for being a God who wants to be known all through your son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to know and love you more. Amen.

Opening Question: What is an example from your life of gravitating toward what feels familiar or safe?

Scripture: John 10:7-16

So Jesus spoke again, “I assure you that I am the gate of the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and outlaws, but the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That’s because he isn’t the shepherd; the sheep aren’t really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. He’s only a hired hand and the sheep don’t matter to him. “I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that don’t belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd...”

Discussion

1. There are actually two “I Am” sayings here. How do they work together?
2. What is Jesus trying to contrast in this scripture passage?
3. What are some of the tasks of a shepherd? What traits does a “good” shepherd need to possess?
4. What does it mean to be “known” by Jesus in the same way a shepherd knows her sheep?
5. What kinds of things do we see Jesus as the good shepherd doing for his flock?
6. What do you think Jesus means when he says “I have other sheep?”
7. What does this I Am statement reveal about God’s heart and character?
8. What would have to be true for us to better listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd?

Big Idea

Deep inside every single human heart is the desire to be fully known and loved. Everyone wants to know that they matter and that someone cares about them. Once again, Jesus is borrowing an image from the Old Testament used to describe the relationship between God and God’s people. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows us and loves us completely. He cares for us, leads us, journeys with us, and does not abandon us—even when it costs him his life. We would do well to listen to his voice of compassion in our lives!



I AM

True Vine

Opening Prayer

God beyond us, you are without equal in your power and might. God beside us, you are without equal in your faithful love. God within us, you are without equal in your renewing presence. You are the great I AM. Thank you for being a God we can know and for being a God who wants to be known all through your son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to know and love you more. Amen.

Opening Question: What is your greatest gardening success or failure?

Scripture: John 15:1-10

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples. "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

Discussion

1. In the Old Testament, Israel was portrayed as a grape vine. How might Jesus be developing that image in applying it to himself?
2. What does this I Am saying reveal about God's heart and character?
3. When have you tried to go it alone as a branch apart from the vine? What happened?
4. What does submitting to God's pruning mean for you?
5. How does Jesus explain what it means for us as branches to remain in him as the vine?
6. When have you experienced power and life from your relationship with Jesus?
7. If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, what does fruitfulness from remaining in Jesus look like?

Big Idea

Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. That's the way the relationship goes. Branches grow from the vine and not the other way around. We receive life and power and purpose when we are connected to, and remain in Jesus and his love. Branches that decide to go it alone, to try life without the life of the vine wither. Our vocation is to let God's power and love and life flow through us. We don't draw our worth and power from the fruit, but from the vine! Our job is to be a branch declaring our dependence on the vine and then the fruit happens. If we remain and abide with Jesus, we will find life and strength and power from him!



I AM

Way, Truth, Life

Opening Prayer

God beyond us, you are without equal in your power and might. God beside us, you are without equal in your faithful love. God within us, you are without equal in your renewing presence. You are the great I AM. Thank you for being a God we can know and for being a God who wants to be known all through your son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to know and love you more. Amen.

Opening Question: When was a time that someone helped show you the right way to go?

Scripture: John 14:1-10

Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going." Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us." Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?."

Discussion

1. This scripture passage takes place right after Jesus tells his disciples about his upcoming suffering and death. How might that factor with his "I Am" statement?
2. The back and forth dialogue between Jesus, Thomas, and Philip is so sincere and interesting. What do you see behind the disciples' comments and Jesus' responses?
3. Do you think "way, truth, life" are synonymous? Or do they work together in a different way?
4. If Jesus is "the way," how would you describe the "way" of Jesus?
5. How do you read "no one comes to the Father except through me?" Is it a statement about which religion is right? Is it a statement about God's grace drawing us to God and not anything we do ourselves?
6. What is the connection between Jesus' "preparing a place for us" and his self-description as the way, truth and life?"
7. What does this I Am statement reveal about the heart and character of God?

Big Idea

Jesus speaks these words to comfort his disciples after sharing with them about what was about to happen to him. Jesus is reassuring his followers that in and through him, they can know what God is like and can have eternal access to God and connection to eternal life. Jesus is both the way to life with God forever and the best way to live life right now. Jesus always shows us the way because he is the way, truth and life!



I AM

Resurrection and Life

Opening Prayer

God beyond us, you are without equal in your power and might. God beside us, you are without equal in your faithful love. God within us, you are without equal in your renewing presence. You are the great I AM. Thank you for being a God we can know and for being a God who wants to be known all through your son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to know and love you more. Amen.

Opening Question: What is one of your hopes for the future?

Scripture: John 11:17-27 (but to really get the full story, you need to read John 11:17-46!)

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you." Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, the one who is coming into the world."

Discussion

1. Jesus is stepping into a situation where grief in the face of death is real. Where do we see that in Martha? What are some of the ways grief shows up in our lives?
2. There's an interesting relationship between past, present and future in this passage. How does Jesus' statement fit into that dynamic?
3. We often cling to the idea that things will eventually turn out ok. How does Jesus' statement "I am the resurrection and the life" go beyond that?
4. What does it mean to trust that Jesus himself *is* the resurrection and the life?
5. How have you experienced Jesus being a source of hope and life in the face of death?
6. What does this I Am saying reveal about the character and heart of God?
7. What implications for our lives today does this statement have? Where have you seen resurrection and new life now?

Big Idea

I AM, (present tense) the resurrection and the life. Jesus is saying that he is that future, hoped-for reality of resurrection and life...that hope of a new heaven, new earth transformed... only he's bringing it from the future into the present right now wherever Martha is, wherever we are, wherever death confronts us, wherever and whenever "If only" seems to be what falls from our lips most easily. Hope like this isn't just a strange and vague idea, it's a person, his name is Jesus, and he wants a relationship with us. If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that means pain and sorrow and sickness and death don't have the last word. We don't have to wait until we die to come alive. Real transformation can happen. God will meet our problems with possibilities we never saw coming with some new part of God's future bursting into our present time of grief, confusion, death, mess with hope and new life!



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Wrap-Up

What is the biggest thing God is saying to you after this study and these conversations?

What are you going to do about it?

What are your next steps?