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## *Jesus the True and Better “I AM”*

### **Pray**

That God will open our eyes to who He is. That his words will give us a bigger picture of how he is more powerful and personal than we can imagine.

### **Background**

Jesus is just starting his ministry and he is making these claims about himself which is explored throughout the book of John. He’s speaking to the Israelites who have been under a parade of foreign rulers, the latest being the Roman empire. Using the backdrop of the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus makes these claims with deep symbolism that link the history of God and the nation of Israelites.

### **Summary**

Jesus’ claim of being great “I am” - eternally sovereign and unconstrained is as ground-breaking today as it was 2000 years ago. He is beyond our mental model of who we think God is.

### **Read Exodus 2:23, 3:2-8, 3: 13-15**

1. The Exodus is the founding story of the nation of Israel that the Israelites have heard repeatedly. What’s your impression of God as described throughout the passage?
2. How would you react if someone said that God was a person you could talk to and grab a drink with?

### **Read John 8:48-59**



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3. Jesus is speaking to the Israelites who have been under occupation by foreign nations for hundreds of years. What sort of parallels would the Israelites be drawing between their current situation & the Exodus story? What might they be hoping God will do in their situation?
4. In the book of John, Jesus sets out many shocking claims for the Israelites. What are some of the claims that Jesus makes in chapter 8 (v54, v56, v58)?
5. The Messianic King has been promised to the long-suffering Israelites who have been under occupation for hundreds of years. What is their attitude towards Jesus? Why? (v48, v53)
6. Have you ever been disappointed by God showing himself in ways that you didn't expect?

### **Small group**

7. Often we can focus on God as the distant sovereign all-powerful God or God as the close personal friend. In reality, Jesus as I AM brings a sovereign God close to us.
  - a) Write down words expressing your 'real' image of God (what you think he is like) and share with the group. Which image of God do you tend to focus on? How does that affect the way you respond to the circumstances happening in your life and around the world today?
  - b) Pray together to know Jesus more and to break open our boxes of who we think God is and give us a bigger vision of Him.



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## The Vine and the branches

### Pray

### Background

Jesus continues his ministry and he is making these claims about himself which is explored throughout the book of John. In chapter 15, he's speaking & teaching to his disciples as he knows that his arrest and eventual crucifixion is just around the corner.

**Grapevine:** Growing grapes for wine is a process that requires careful tending by the gardener. This involves regular pruning or removing of branches which are unhealthy. The whole process can take up to three to five years before grapes are finally produced from seeds .

**Fruitfulness** : Imagery of bearing fruit appears throughout the Bible in multifaceted ways. Isaiah 5:1-7 describes fruits growing vineyards bringing justice & righteousness. Galatians 5 describes the fruit of the different fruits of the spirit. Colossians 1:6 speaks about fruit in the context of evangelism. A thread on fruitfulness throughout the Bible is that we're becoming more Christ-like.

### Summary

For our lives to make a positive, lasting difference, we must abide in Jesus - being in a daily relationship & depending on him.

### Read John 15: 1-17

1. Jesus describes himself as the true vine and we are the branches (v1).
  - a. Building on the analogy, what does it mean to **abide** in Jesus? (v5, v10 )
  - b. What does abiding in Jesus lead to? (v8, v12)

**Note** : The imagery of fruit appears throughout the Bible in multifaceted ways. Isaiah 5:1-7 describes fruits growing vineyards bringing justice & righteousness to Israel. Galatians 5 describes the fruit of the different fruits of the spirit. Colossians 1:6 speaks about fruit in the context of evangelism.

- c. What does "bearing fruit" as described in v4 mean? (v12)



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2. Vines are important for the branches because they provide sustenance and nutrients. Jesus calls himself the “True Vine” (v1) but often we can connect ourselves to “False vines”.

What sort of False vines are you depending on to sustain yourself at this moment?

Think about how you are spending your downtime, where your thoughts often focus on. For example: If I just have/If I just get/ ... I’m going to be alright/good.

3. Pruning can sometimes be a painful process. It involves cutting away last year's branches so that more fruit can grow, even if it was fruitful last year . When God prunes us, it can mean we leave our comfort zones, put down unhealthy habits, or even take away what’s been fruitful or good in the past.
  - a. In what ways might God be pruning you right now?
  - b. What does Jesus say can strengthen us and enable us to grow during this pruning process? (v7, v16)
4. Jesus defines success as “bearing lasting fruit” (v16). That can be a slow process as a grape vine doesn’t sprout a million grapes overnight. Traditionally, different spiritual disciplines (i.e. habits) like meditating on God’s word, prayer, journaling have been used to intentionally know God.
  - a. What does it look like in your situation today to redefine success as bearing lasting fruit?
  - b. God's love enables us to abide and love others. Spiritual disciplines are a way of finding intimacy and knowing God. Just like in a good marriage relationship, it's an invitation to know each other more deeply and not a checklist. What spiritual disciplines is Jesus calling you to develop during this time?

## Pray

Take 5 mins by yourself to be real with God in prayer about where you are with him.

Then in 2s share specifically about how others can pray for you in your walk with Jesus this week. And pray for each other.



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## *The Way, the Truth & the Life*

### **Background**

Jesus continues to reveal more of himself knowing he has already been betrayed by Judas & a plot to murder him is in place. Jesus also foretold his death to his group of disciples, disciples who have given up their livelihoods & their professions in order to follow Jesus.

### **Summary**

Jesus says he is the way, the truth & the life. He invites us to follow him and promises a home in eternity where we will be fully satisfied.

### **Notes:**

Heaven - Scripture uses the word 'heaven' in 3 main ways. 1) The skies. 2) Space 3) The place of God's presence in unopposed glory. The Bible never uses the language of "going to heaven when we die" (with lots of clouds and harps) but it does tell us that at death, believers will be "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). There we await the final resurrection (e.g. 1 Cor 15:50–57) when heaven will reunite with earth in a new creation, with God's presence at the centre.

### **Read John 13:31-38, John 14:1-7**

1. What sort of uncertainty are the disciples facing in their life at this moment? (13v33, 13v38) How might they feel?
  - a. What sort of uncertainties are in your life right now? How do you respond when there is uncertainty?
2. Jesus responds to his disciples turmoil by talking about the hope of heaven.
  - a. What imagery does Jesus promise for us (14v2, 14v3) about eternity in heaven?
  - b. What is that imagery telling us about what it feels like to be in heaven with Jesus?



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3. Home is supposed to be a place of rest, where you're known, loved, safe & secure. God's people are exiles in this world whose home & hope are fixed on eternity with Him. However, we often want to make our home in our temporary circumstances in the here and now.
  - a. How do you look to make yourself at home now (known, loved, safe & secure) ? Where might you be putting your hopes & desires? E.g. Putting your hopes on stability & security by trying to get a well-paid stable job.

Note for leaders:

Think of your own example: relationships, work, health, etc.

- b. The sad reality of our present world is that it is broken & unstable. How do you feel when those things you want to make you feel at home disappoint or don't last?

E.g. Feeling constantly anxious because you're trying to find stability in your resources but the stock market tanks or the pandemic makes your job at risk.

4. Jesus' claim that he is "the Way, and the Truth and the Life" (14v7) is a promise that following him will lead you to a secure future, one he has prepared and one where we are forever satisfied, secure, loved & deeply known. Reflect on this claim. How much do you believe it? How should this transform the way you view your current circumstances and challenges?

## Small groups

- A. In the past, when many people had much less than we do, yet they spent a lot of time thinking about their life after death. Many of us spend a lot of time thinking about our future plans and ambitions but very little time thinking about our eternal future with Christ. Why is that? How does that reveal where our view of home is?
- B. Home is ultimately where we invest our hearts in. What does it look like for you this week, to invest in Christ as your home? What would it cost you to do that? Are you willing to pay that cost?
- C. One of the ways we make Christ our home is that we long for others to make him their home too. In the current uncertainties in our city, how can you as a CG seek to invest your lives to point non-believers around you to Christ?



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## Pray

Come to Jesus with your desires & struggles amidst our broken reality. Confess where Christ isn't the home you long for and pray for him to rekindle a desire to be home with Him.

Pray for those around you who are struggling and do not know Christ as their true home. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with them.



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## *Jesus the good shepherd*

### Background

Jesus is speaking to his disciples after being in conflict with the Pharisees who were investigating him because he healed a blind man during the Sabbath. His claim that he was the Good Shepherd contrasts to the other Shepherds like the Pharisees who were not leading the Israelites well.

Shepherding: In the days of Jesus, shepherding was an important job. Shepherds were both strong and gentle because they had to fight off wild predators like in the story of David, and also take care of their sheep. The imagery of a shepherd has been used throughout the bible to describe monarchs & God Himself (2 Samuel 5:2, Psalm 23, etc).

### Summary

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows us more than we know ourselves and wants to care for us.

### Read John 10: 1-18

1. What claims does Jesus make about himself? (v7, v14, v12) E.g. I am the... What do they mean?
2. What does Jesus say he'll do for us & give us ? (v10, v15)
3. Jesus says that he is a Shepherd who knows our individual names. How does that make you feel?

**Note:** Your name was your identity, your destiny, the truth hidden in the marrow of your bones. It was a one-word moniker for the truest thing about you—your inner essence. Your inner Tom-ness or Ruth-ness. Your name is your autobiography. ~ John Mark Comer

A Shepherd is known as the provider for the sheep & someone who knows everything about us including what we need. How does that encourage you whatever difficult circumstances you're facing?





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4. We can often follow other false Shepherds & hirelings (i.e. people who are hired to take care of the sheep).
  - a. What is the difference between Jesus the True Shepherd and others we might be tempted to follow? (v12, v13) What voices are you tempted to follow?
  - b. Jesus is the Shepherd that is willing to lay down his life for you. Where have you seen his mercies & protection in your life?
5. Following Jesus involves knowing his voice and following him (v4 &5). How are you hearing the voice of Jesus today? What has he been saying to you?

### **Optional: Small groups**

Part of hearing His voice involves reading & meditating the words He has spoken to us. In the famous passage of Psalm 23, David paints God as his Shepherd. Read Psalm 23 aloud and then meditate over it for a few minutes. Meditating involves just repeating a verse aloud and emphasizing on different parts of the verse each time.

- a) What verse(s) speak to you in particular?
- b) How is God asking you to trust that lead you this week?



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## *Jesus - the Resurrection and the Life*

### **Introduction**

“[For most modern people]death is an abstraction to us, something technically true but unimaginable as a personal reality.” Tim Keller

Do you agree or disagree with this quote? When was the last time you thought about death?

### **The Background**

Jesus is coming to a family that is facing death. Initially, it was the prospect of the death of their brother, Lazarus, if Jesus does not appear. Finally, it is the reality of his death, because Jesus' appearance was too late. John confounds us with a behind the scenes view of Jesus' love which is radically different from our own.

“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” V5-6

#### **Read: John 11:17-44**

1. Contrast Mary and Martha's responses to Jesus (v20-24,27; 29,32)). What does this show about their understanding of Jesus?
2. How does Jesus respond to each of them? What does it show about Jesus' understanding of and care for Mary and Martha? (V23,25-26; 29,33-35)
3. In what way is Jesus, by waiting 2 days longer and then resurrecting Lazarus, showing his love for them? (V40)
4. Death is the loss of what is most precious to us. Ultimately, our own life or the life of loved ones. This is guaranteed. But we can also have multiple 'little deaths' in our broken world. Lost hopes and dreams, lost relationships and opportunities, lost confidence and direction.



We normally respond to death by:

- Denying it (living as if it won't affect you)
- Escaping from it (being too busy/distracted to think about it)
- Fearing it (living our lives with FOMO or 'what ifs' )

But the resurrection of Jesus changes the way we should view death. Death is a doorway to life not a pathway to destruction for believers.

Think about the way death affects you and how you respond to death. What does Jesus' statement "I am the resurrection and the life" mean for you personally? How convinced are you that Jesus has truly risen from the dead and you will resurrect with him?

## Respond

Tim Keller in the light of a diagnosis of terminal cancer said:

"But as death, the last enemy, became real to my heart, I realised that my beliefs would have to become just as real to my heart, or I wouldn't be able to get through the day. Theoretical ideas about God's love and the future resurrection had to become life-gripping truths, or be discarded as useless."<sup>1</sup>

Pray that resurrection would not be a theoretical idea but a life-gripping truth for you today.

NOTE: if you would like to read Tim Keller's helpful article, the link is posted in the footnote below.

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/tim-keller-growing-my-faith-face-death/618219/>