

Jesus Introduces Himself – the Seven *I am* Statements

Most of us have seen people wearing name tags—store employees or servers at a restaurant, for example. Maybe you’ve even been given one of those “Hi, my name is _____” stickers to wear at a VBS program or on the first day of school. Wearing a name tag is one way we can introduce ourselves to people who have never met us. Jesus didn’t wear a name tag, but He did introduce Himself to people who didn’t know who He was. In John’s gospel, the apostle records seven times that Jesus used the words “I am” to help His hearers understand who He was and why He came. We’re going to look at those seven “I am” statements to see what we can learn about who Jesus is.

I am the bread of life. (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51) The sixth chapter of John begins with Jesus feeding over 5,000 people using just five loaves and two fishes—what a miracle! But feeding people wasn’t the main point of what Jesus did. The miracle was a sign that pointed to who Jesus was. And Jesus makes that clear when He says, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus wanted people to understand that just as they need bread (food) to stay alive physically, they need Him to live spiritually. Jesus also taught that just as God provided daily manna (bread from heaven) to the Old Testament Israelites, Jesus Himself is sent from heaven for God’s people. Talk with your family about what bread can teach us about Jesus.

I am the light of the world. (John 8:12; 9:5) To say you’re “in the dark” about something means that you don’t understand it; you need someone to “shed some light” on it. And when you finally do understand, you often say, “Oh, now I see.” Even in Jesus’s day, “light” and “seeing” meant knowledge and understanding, and “darkness” meant confusion and misunderstanding. Jesus’s teaching that He is the light of the world goes along with His miracle of healing a man born blind in John 9. After meeting Jesus, the man could see, but more than that he could understand who Jesus truly was (9:30-33). Talk with your family about what light can teach us about Jesus.

I am the door of the sheep. (John 10:7,9) In this and the next statement, Jesus refers to the flocks of sheep that would have been familiar sights to His hearers. Jesus describes a sheepfold, an enclosure where sheep could spend the night in safety, and He says that He is the door—the way in to the place of safety and the barrier that keeps bad things out, protecting the sheep. Read John 10:1-10 and talk with your family about what doors or gates can teach us about Jesus.

I am the good shepherd. (John 10:11, 14) Jesus switches from comparing Himself to the door by which shepherds and sheep enter the sheepfold to comparing Himself to the shepherd. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus will stop at nothing to care for His sheep—even if it means giving up His own life. The Old Testament often referred to God’s people as His sheep. We are God’s sheep, and Jesus is the best Shepherd we could ever have. Read Psalm 23 and talk with your family about what shepherds can teach us about Jesus.

I am the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25) When Jesus’s friend Lazarus got sick, Lazarus’s sisters Mary and Martha hoped that Jesus would come and heal their brother. Lazarus died, not because Jesus couldn’t get there in time, but because Jesus had a better plan. He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead and prove to people that He has the power to restore life—physical life and spiritual life—because He is the source of life. Read John 11:1-5 and talk about the ways in which life comes from Jesus.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6) As Jesus’s time on Earth was coming to a close, He spent less time with the crowds of people and more time with His disciples. “Disciple” means “follower,” and these men had literally followed Jesus for three years, walking with Him for hundreds of miles throughout Judea and Galilee. They were sad and confused when Jesus started to talk about leaving them: “Where I am going you

cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward” (13:36) and “You know the way to where I am going” (14:4). Thomas spoke up and said, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus answered Him with one of the most famous “I am” statements. Talk with your family about how John 14:6 means that Jesus is the *only* way to know God.

I am the true vine. (John 15:1, 5) The New Testament teaches that when we are saved by grace through faith, we are joined with Jesus. Paul says we are “in Christ.” Jesus explains this mysterious connection by using the picture of a grape vine that has branches sprouting off of it. As long as a branch is connected to the vine, it will receive water and nutrients, and it will produce fruit. Jesus said that when we obey His commandments, our lives show that we are connected to Him. We will receive our spiritual life from Him, and our lives will produce spiritual fruit. Read John 15:1-16 and talk with your family about how a vine can teach us about our connection to Jesus.

Jesus used these seven word pictures to help His hearers understand better who He is and why He came. As we study them, we can grow closer to Jesus, more grateful for all He’s done, and more ready to share the Good News with others. Pray that God will use you to introduce Jesus to someone this week!

Hymn of Praise – “One There Is, Above All Others”

We’ve thought of the ways Jesus described himself in the “I am” statements of John’s gospel. But, in John 15, Jesus describes himself with a “you are” statement, too. When Jesus said to his disciples, “*You are* my friends” (v14), he was at the same time saying, “*I am* your friend.” In today’s hymn, John Newton thinks about Jesus as the best friend we could ever have. Jesus is a friend who loves us forever (verse 1), who laid down his life to save us (verse 2), who calls us friends even though He is so much higher than we are (verse 3), and who keeps loving us even when we don’t treat Him as we should (verse 4). Read John 15:12-17 and then sing this hymn.

1 One there is, above all others,
well deserves the name of Friend;
his is love beyond a brother's,
costly, free, and knows no end.
They who once his kindness prove
find it everlasting love.

2 Which of all our friends, to save us,
could or would have shed his blood?
But our Jesus died to have us
reconciled in him to God.
This was boundless love indeed;
Jesus is a Friend in need.

3 When he lived on earth abased,
"Friend of sinners" was his name.
Now above all glory raised,

he rejoices in the same;
still he calls them brethren, friends,
and to all their wants attends.

4 Could we bear from one another
what he daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother
loves us, though we treat him thus:
though for good we render ill,
he accounts us brethren still.

5 O for grace our hearts to soften!
Teach us, Lord, at length to love;
we, alas! forget too often
what a Friend we have above:
but when home our souls are brought,
we will love you as we ought.

When we sing this hymn, we marvel at how Jesus loves us, undeserving though we are. But we also ask the Lord to help us love Him better looking forward to the day when, in heaven, we will love him “as we ought.”