

Jesus' "I Am" Words

The Insight Series

David Lumpp

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Contents

About This Series	4
Participant Introduction	6
Session 1	
I AM Who I AM	7
Session 2	
I Am the Light of the World.....	17
Session 3	
The Good Shepherd and His Flock.....	27
Session 4	
The Way, the Truth, and the Resurrection Life	40

Hymnal Key

LSB=Lutheran Service Book

*ELH=Evangelical Lutheran Hym-
nary*

CW=Christian Worship

LW=Lutheran Worship

LBW=Lutheran Book of Worship

About This Series

This course is one of the Insight Series of short (four-session) adult Bible study courses, each looking at an important biblical topic or theme. Using these courses, you will gain insight into a portion of the Scriptures as you hear what God is saying to you there about Himself, about yourself, and about His Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. These insights will help you as you go about your disciple's task of living in the Word, and will equip you for a more fruitful study of the Word on your own in the future.

Using This Course

This course is designed to be used for small-group discussions. Each of the four 60- to 90-minute sessions you will find in this booklet will provide you with a clear picture of where the session is going and what it is supposed to accomplish, give you a way to lead into the session's study, provide input and discussion questions to guide your study of the text, suggest ways to follow up on the study during the week, and offer closing worship aids.

You will not need a teacher for this course. The printed material will guide you through the study. No one will have to be the answerer. But you will get the most from these materials if you:

1. Assign a leader for each session. That person should:
 - a. Make sure he or she works through the material before the session and, if possible, looks at some additional resources to enrich your study.
 - b. Begin and end the session with worship. The devotional time may be quite brief; a prayer or a Bible reading is sufficient. You might assign the opening and closing to a worship leader for each session.

c. Keep the discussion moving. There is a tendency to get bogged down on some questions or points. The leader should be willing to say, "We'd better move on to the next point."

d. Make some choices if time is limited. The leader will want to select those items from the session's content that seem to be most helpful if it is clear there will not be time to work through all of the material.

e. Listen. Make sure everyone is heard. Give each a chance to speak. Encourage participation.

f. Pray for all participants.

2. Prepare for each session. The discussion will work better, the material will be more meaningful, and the Word will speak more clearly if everyone in the class works through the session's material before the class session. Even if preparation is limited to reading through the texts that will be a part of the session's study, the effort will enrich your study.
3. Meet regularly (at least once a week) in a convenient and comfortable place. Too much time between sessions means that learning will be forgotten and much time will be used in constant review. Too little time between sessions does not allow time for you to connect what you have learned to your daily living.
4. Provide resources. Preparation that includes a chance to look at commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible reference books, maps, and so on will add to your class. Encourage those who do such research to contribute what they have learned or discovered as you study.
5. Encourage participation. The course offers many opportunities to discuss biblical texts and to talk about application of the Word to each individual's life. The key is sharing. Everyone should have a chance to listen and to be heard. The goal is encouragement. We want to build one another up as we study the Word. We want to share the hope and the strength we receive by the power of the Spirit through that Word. We want to allow each person to come closer to the Savior as he or she encounters Him in the Word. Emphasize the positive. Share the joy of the Gospel. Celebrate His promised presence as "two or three" gather in His name.

Participant Introduction

The “I am” sayings scattered throughout the Gospel of John give us an important insight into who Jesus revealed Himself to be and what He showed Himself to be doing. As such, they are rich descriptions of Jesus’ claim to divinity and point clearly to His saving mission as the Messiah—the Savior of the world.

In this course we will look at five of the seven “I am” statements—trying to understand how they follow and build on one another.

Here, to help you as you prepare for your study of this course, is a list of Jesus’ “I am” statements:

- “I am the bread of life.” John 6:35
- “I am the light of the world.” John 8:12
- “I am the door.” John 10:9
- “I am the good shepherd.” John 10:11
- “I am the resurrection and the life.” John 11:25
- “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” John 14:6
- “I am the true vine.” John 15:1

As we study we will try to discover the roots of each of the statements in God’s Old Testament revelation about the Messiah who was to come. In addition we will want to look at some of the related texts from other places in the New Testament to help us understand our Lord’s meaning.

These lessons are in no sense exhaustive. These lessons will help you move into a fuller and richer study of Jesus and His life and work as they are portrayed by John in his Gospel. And they will open you to the work of the Spirit as you confront the truths of God’s great love for us and His work of salvation in Jesus Christ.

David Lumppp

☞ Session 1 ☞

I Am Who I Am

Our Goal for This Session

We want to look at the reason Jesus used the words “I am” so often, what those words meant to the people who first heard them, how those special words fit into the purpose John had in writing his Gospel, and what Jesus is saying to us when He says “I am.”

Getting Started

You may wish to read through as much of the Gospel of John as possible before your first session. In addition, you might read one or more commentaries or study Bibles that give you an introduction to John’s Gospel.

Setting the Stage

Since all seven of Jesus’ “I am” words occur in the Gospel of John, we will first want to look at John’s purpose in writing his Gospel. In that way we hope to understand the meaning of those special words of Jesus and how they fit into John’s entire story of the life of Jesus.

1. John spells out his purpose in writing perhaps more

explicitly than any other biblical writer. Read John 20:30–31. State John’s purpose in your own words.

2. John wants to lead the reader to saving faith in Jesus as the Messiah (the Hebrew word for “Christ”), and he chooses his material carefully with that purpose in mind. Page through the Gospel. What incidents seem to fit his purpose of proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah?

3. While all four Gospels focus intently on who Jesus was and what He was doing, John, in a somewhat different way than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, focuses on the words of Jesus Himself. In John we hear Jesus’ own “confessions” of who He was and what He came to do. Why would the “I am” words of Jesus fit John’s purpose of helping us see Jesus in His own words?

Digging In

4. As you read in the introduction to this study, the root of Jesus’ “I am” words is not in John at all. The words occur much earlier in the Bible. Read Exodus 3:13–17. Summarize the reading. What is the setting of this passage in the Old Testament? What is Israel’s urgent, desperate need in Exodus 3?

5a. The phrase in Exodus 3:14, “I AM who I AM,” really translates four Hebrew letters, which are related to the word *Yahweh*, one of the principal names for God in the Old Testament. What does this name of God mean to you?

b. Look up the name in a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. Summarize your findings and check out some of the passages that use this special name. (Most English translations use LORD, printed in small capital letters, for the places where “Yahweh” appears in the Hebrew text.) What does this name have to do with God’s love, grace, saving, and covenant? Share your findings.

6. Look at Exodus 6:2–8. This passage, possibly more than any other, brings together all that God’s covenant will mean for Israel. There are four elements to this promise.

a. Read Exodus 6:6. What is promised here?

b. Read Exodus 6:7. What assurance does God offer? On the basis of God’s action for Israel, what special knowledge will they now possess?