



Date: 21<sup>st</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Theme: **Jesus says "I am"**

Bible Readings: **John 10: 11-18**  
& **John 15: 1-8**

Contributor: *John Pearse*

Edited by Andy Murphy & Mel Wheeler

## PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Please remember to contact your group beforehand to remind them of date and time. Please make yourself familiar with all the material and Bible passages. For this session, it would be useful to have some paper and pens or pencils available (of different colours if possible).

## PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

Please read **John chapter 10, verses 11-18**. This is the set Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Easter. It is one of the seven sayings of Jesus known as the "I am" sayings, from John's Gospel. Jesus says "*I am the Good Shepherd*" (**John 10:11**). We will be discussing in this session who Jesus said he was and who we believe he was (and is). So, it would also be good if you could look briefly at the other six "I am" sayings: *I am the Bread of Life* (**John 6:35**); *the Light of the World* (**John 8:12**); *the Gate* (**John 10:7**); *the Good Shepherd* (**John 10:11**); *the Resurrection and the Life* (**John 11:25**); *the Way, the Truth and the Life* (**John 14:6**); and *the True Vine* (**John 15:1**). Please reflect on:

*To whom were each of the sayings addressed?*

*Where there was a mixed audience of believers and non-believers, what were their reactions?*

*How might these be understood or adopted by followers of Jesus today? What do they mean to you?*

*Are there any of these sayings which people in our modern world have difficulty accepting, and why?*

## STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Risen Lord Jesus, we thank you for our group session today.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us through the Bible passages we shall be discussing, and help to increase our understanding and knowledge of who you are, both human and divine.

In doing so, may we be reminded and assured of who we are, in your love.

In your name, Lord Jesus, we offer this prayer. **Amen.**

## FINDING OUR ROOTS

Read again **John 10:11-18**. In groups of 2-3 people, share your thoughts on this Bible passage. *What does the image of 'Shepherd' mean to you? What could it have meant to God's people then?*

In the other Gospels, Jesus challenges his disciples by asking them "Who do **you** say I am?" (e.g. **Mark 8:29**) *If someone asked you today, "Who was Jesus?" or "Who is Jesus?" what would YOU say?*

Now (being as creative, artistic or colourful as you want) **thinking about your own self**, take a piece of paper and write in the centre in large letters "I AM". Writing or drawing around this, reflect on **who you are** to different people and to God. First, portray all the different things you are to others (e.g. parent, friend, colleague). Next, include the things you *try* to be for others (e.g. helper, encourager...). Finally, think about your relationship with God. *Who (or what) does God say that we are? What affirmations or promises do we find in the Bible?* (You might like to keep returning to this as the session goes on.)

## READING THE SCRIPTURES

**Read together the Bible passage:** John 15:1-8

**Background Information:** This is the last of the “I am” sayings given by Jesus on the evening before his death. That evening started with Jesus washing his disciples’ feet before supper (in John 13), and giving them the command to love one another. Towards the end of the supper, Jesus indicated that it would be Judas who would betray him, but the other disciples did not pick up on that. He also predicted Peter’s denial the following morning. At this point, Judas left the others to arrange with the High Priest for this betrayal. In chapter 14, at the end of the supper, Jesus began some amazing and intensive teaching of his disciples, beginning with some words of comfort, including the sixth “I am”: “*I am the Way and the Truth and the Life,*” – preparing them for a time soon to come when he would not be with them in person. Then, he promised that when he was back with his Father, he would ask his Father to send the Holy Spirit to be with believers for ever. Leaving the supper venue at the end of chapter 14, Jesus continued teaching his disciples, starting with this passage, the last of the “I am” sayings.

Jesus says that he is the True Vine, we are the branches, and God the Father is the ‘Gardener’. The key to being fruitful is to stay connected to Jesus, but even then, expect to be pruned from time to time to encourage future growth.

The ‘Vine’ is mentioned in the Old Testament in connection to God’s people, Israel. In some of the words of the prophets, there is a sense that God’s beloved vine had grown ‘wild’, not bringing forth the fruit that God intended. See **Isaiah 5:1-7**, **Hosea 10:1**, **Jeremiah 2:21**, and **Psalms 80**.

## DIGGING DEEPER – Questions for group discussion

“I am the Vine” – the last of Jesus’ sayings – was given to just his eleven closest disciples on the Thursday evening just hours before his death on the Cross. Jesus seems to have in mind the ongoing mission of the Church: Jesus brings the fruitfulness God desires, and he invites us to be his branches!

*How easy or difficult do we find it to stay connected to Jesus in our lives? How might we be hindered by busyness, troubles, or lifestyle choices? What does stay connected to Jesus mean to you?*

*Jesus said, “apart from me you can do nothing”. How do you understand this?*

*Pruning can mean cutting back on things in our lives (or the church’s life) that may have been good in the past to allow space for other things to happen. Can you think of any examples of this?*

*Despite Jesus’ promise in verse 7 (“ask for whatever you wish...”), I expect all of us have experienced our prayers sometimes not being answered in the way we would like. Why do you think this should be?*

Jesus goes on to tell the disciples to *abide in his love* (John 15:9), and reminds them of his command. When we think of the loving way he leads us, we are brought back to Jesus the Good Shepherd.

*Although most of the “I am” sayings are uniquely applied to Jesus, how can “I am the Good Shepherd” be an example for us today to follow in our Christian mission and ministry?*

*When Jesus speaks of the other sheep outside of the flock in John 10:16, what do you think this means? Is Jesus perhaps encouraging the church to be more inclusive?*

*Are there any other questions arising from today’s material that you would like to ask?*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

- Share things together as a group that you would like to pray for or about and the leader will summarise as a prayer for the group. Remember, God has already heard our prayers and thoughts and so they are a part of the prayer.
- Using the creative work from earlier, offer to God all that you are, and all that you want to be, knowing that you are already redeemed children of God, deeply loved.
- Conclude by saying **The Lord’s Prayer** together.