

# I AM

J E S U S

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# PREFACE

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The Gospel of John is uniquely written. The thesis or purpose statement is at the end of the book. John 20:30-31 says, ***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”***

The goal of John (and the entire Bible) is that we would realize and believe that Jesus is the Messiah who gives life - eternal and abundant. In the process, to help us better understand what this means, Jesus describes Himself using seven titles:

Bread of Life  
Light of the World  
The Door  
Good Shepherd  
The Resurrection and Life  
The Way, the Truth, and the Life  
The Vine

*I Am* consists of seven study guides for personal or group discussion and forty-two devotions to help you realize God's love and offer for you. *I Am* will show you who Jesus is, what He did, why He did it, and how you can know you are going to Heaven. It is a book about life and death, even eternal life and eternal death.

LESSON ONE

**I AM:**  
**THE BREAD OF LIFE**

PASTOR RYAN STORY



## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE

In John chapter 6, we are able to read about the account of Jesus feeding about 5,000 men. The total number fed was most likely higher due to the fact that the Bible only records how many men sat and ate. Jesus was able to feed a large crowd of hungry followers with a small boy's lunch of ***"five barley loaves and two fish"*** (John 6:9). After this miracle, Jesus and His disciples headed for Capernaum.

John 6:22-24 says, ***"On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus."***

1. Why did the crowd return to where they had eaten the bread?

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John 6:25-27 adds, ***"When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.'"***

2. How did the crowd over spiritualize their devotion to following Jesus?

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## LESSON ONE

3. Do you ever over spiritualize your walk? How so?

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4. What does Jesus tell us to work for?

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John 6:28-31 says, ***“Then they said to him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ So they said to him, ‘Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”***

5. What was the crowd most focused on?

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John 6:32-34 adds, ***“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’”***

6. How is Jesus like the manna God sent down from Heaven?

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## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:35-38 continues, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.’”***

7. Why does Jesus call Himself the Bread of Life?

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8. Why did Jesus come down from Heaven? What does that have to do with not being hungry again?

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The Jews who were following Jesus were misguided on why they were following Jesus. They chased Him down from Tiberias to Capernaum just to get their bellies filled again. Their focus was on fulfilling their physical need, hunger, and they were missing the greatness of Jesus' miracle that fed over 5000 people. They missed the point so much that they even thought Jesus was proposing cannibalism (John 6:52).

9. Why do you think the crowd did not understand Jesus' teachings about Him being the fulfillment of Scripture?

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## LESSON ONE

The crowd was following Jesus because He fulfilled a need they had, not because they viewed Jesus as fulfillment. The reality is that this mentality can happen easily. Jesus lovingly and willingly meets our needs and in many cases our wants. It becomes so easy to go to Him with our requests seeking after Him to satisfy our current hurts, pains, frustrations, and struggles. While physically providing and “feeding our bellies” is so important, Christ offers a much greater and longer-lasting fulfillment if we could only recognize the difference.

10. Do you only look to Jesus to give you fulfillment?

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11. Do you allow Jesus to be your fulfillment?

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**I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE**



## LESSON ONE

# TASTE

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## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I recently read that five well-known pizza franchises started out in Michigan: Domino's, Little Caesars, Cottage Inn, Jet's Pizza, and Hungry Howie's. I did not realize Michigan was such a "pizza state," even though I contribute to the industry. My favorite is probably Jet's deep dish barbeque chicken pizza (minus the onions, please). My guess is that your favorite is pepperoni as this is the number one selling topping.

Sports Illustrated (June 30, 2017) reported that Domino's (\$5.3 billion) and Little Caesars Pizza (\$3.7 billion) are two of the top three pizza establishments in America. Only Pizza Hut beats them in total sales (\$5.8 billion or \$5,800,000,000). For the young at heart, Chuck E. Cheese's (\$885.2 million) is fifth.

In John chapter 6, we read that Jesus fed 5,000 hungry men (verse 10). Can you imagine if it were pizza? You would need at least 2,500 pizzas. Since there were women and children present, you probably should order 5,000 pizzas. Each box is two inches thick; therefore, the pile would be 10,000 inches or over 800 feet high. That would be too much for a boy to carry in his lunchbox. Another miracle could be the fact that there were leftovers (verse 13).

It is an amazing miracle what Jesus did with five loaves and two fish (verse 9)!

However, a few hours later and they would be hungry again.

The biggest miracle is found in verse 35, ***"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and***

***whoever believes in me shall never thirst.***” Jesus has an offer. That offer is eternal life.

Jesus’ mission in coming to Earth was to bridge the gap (created by man’s sin) between man and God. Normally, it would be said that it was a mission impossible, but Jesus was, is, and forever will be God. He came and lived a perfect life so that His death would pay for the penalty of man’s sin. It was a ransom payment buying us out of “death.”

Please do not stop there, He is alive! Three days later, Jesus rose again. He came back to life and even stayed on Earth for another forty days to prove the fact. Our debt is paid. We can have eternal life by placing our trust in Him. We are saved by God’s grace. Faith, not works, is the ticket. John continues in chapter 6 saying, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life”*** (verses 47-48). If you do not eat, you do not live.

Jesus is the Bread of Life that fills the void in our lives. He is not just a temporary fix. It is forever.

Psalm 34:8 adds, ***“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”***



# MANNA AND THE SON OF GOD

## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE • DEVOTION 2

Pastor Gareth Volz

In John 6:35, Jesus makes the first of His seven “I Am” statements, saying, “***I Am the Bread of Life.***” Earlier in the chapter (verses 1-15), we read that Jesus was being followed by a large crowd because of the miracles He was performing in healing the sick. Seeing the crowd coming, and with Passover approaching, Jesus asked His disciple Philip where they could buy bread to feed the crowd. Verse 6 says that He asked this to test Philip because Jesus already knew what He was going to do. We need to remember God always has a plan for every situation, and His plan is always perfect.

Philip told Jesus there was no way they could afford to feed so many people. Another disciple, Andrew, sarcastically said there was a boy in the crowd who had five barley loaves and two fishes, but what would that do?

Jesus told His disciples to have the crowd sit down. Then He took the five loaves and two fishes, gave thanks for them, and began to distribute them to those who were seated. When the people had eaten as much as they could, Jesus told His disciples to gather up the leftover fragments so nothing would be wasted. The leftovers filled up twelve baskets, and thus we see the miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 men with the five loaves and two fishes. This shows us we should never underestimate the power of God and His ability to meet our needs.

The crowd realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah and wanted to take Him by force and make Him their king. Since this was not according to God’s timing or plan, Jesus withdrew to the mountain

by Himself to spend time with His Father. Meanwhile, the disciples got in a boat and began to sail across the sea to Capernaum. They ran into a rough wind and saw Jesus coming to them walking on the water. The disciples were glad to have Him join them in the boat and immediately they were at the shore (verses 16-21).

That is the background leading up to Jesus declaring, ***“I Am the Bread of Life.”*** The crowd followed to Capernaum seeking Jesus. Jesus told them that He knew why they were following Him because He had fed them with five loaves and two fishes, and they were filled. Jesus began to teach them to work for the eternal things of God, not for the food which perishes. The crowd asked what they needed to do to be doing the work of God. Jesus responded that the work of God was to believe in Him whom God had sent, meaning Himself.

The crowd asked Jesus for a sign, saying that the proof Moses had been sent from God as he gave their fathers manna from Heaven in the wilderness. Jesus pointed out that it was God who gave the manna, not Moses, and God was now giving them the true bread from Heaven which gives life to the world. Excitedly the crowd said, ***“Sir, give us this bread always.”*** That is when Jesus said, ***“I Am the Bread of Life”*** (John 6:35).

The manna from Heaven is an Old Testament picture of Jesus as the Bread of Life:

1. The manna was small (Exodus 16:14); Jesus came as a small baby.
2. The manna was round (Exodus 16:14) – a symbol of eternity; Jesus is the eternal Son of God.
3. That manna was white (Exodus 16:31) – a symbol of purity; Jesus lived a sinless life on Earth and is the holy Son of God.

## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE

4. The manna satisfied the people for 40 years in the wilderness; Jesus satisfies for all eternity.
5. When the people saw the manna in the morning, they saw the glory of the Lord (Exodus 16:7); Jesus said, "When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). We see the glory of the Lord that resurrection morning when Jesus left the tomb alive.

The manna is an Old Testament picture of how Jesus came to Earth:

1. The manna came down from Heaven (Exodus 16:4); so also did Jesus.
2. The manna came at night (Exodus 16:12); Jesus was born at night.
3. The manna came down in the wilderness (Exodus 16:14); Jesus came to a world that was a wilderness of sin.
4. The manna came to a rebellious people (Exodus 16:1-3); so also did Jesus.

The manna is an Old Testament picture of what we must do with Jesus:

1. The people's physical hunger could only be satisfied by the manna; spiritual hunger can only be satisfied by Jesus.
2. The people had to stoop down to pick up the manna; we must humble ourselves and come to Jesus.
3. The people had to take the manna for themselves and eat it; Jesus must be received inwardly.
4. The manna had to be taken early in the day; we must accept Christ now.
5. The people had to continue to feed on the manna each day for physical health; we need to feed on the Word of God (Jesus) to grow spiritually.

LESSON ONE • DEVOTION 2

Isaiah 55:2 tells us ***“to eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.”*** There is nothing that tastes better or is richer than ***“The Bread of Life,”*** Jesus Christ.



# SATISFIED

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## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE • DEVOTION 3

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”*** John 6:35

***“I am the Bread of Life.”*** These words from Jesus are first and foremost undeniable proof that bread is not evil! I am looking at you Keto diet! Cinnamon rolls and donuts, especially glazed cake sticks with lemon or Strawberry jelly filling are a gift from God Himself. Of course, the Teacher, the Master Illustrator is not talking to us about physical (delicious) bread(s). He is talking about spiritual food. It is the inward nourishment of the soul. He is talking about man's deep spiritual appetite and telling us what it takes to satisfy it.

The Bible says that every single person has been born with an insatiable inward spiritual hunger. It is a deep longing of the soul that nothing else ever fills. Every single person has this. When we are physically hungry, we eat a meal to satisfy that hunger. However, how does one satisfy the inward spiritual hunger? Most walk around with a gaping hole in their souls. We do not have to look far to see that man tries to satisfy this inward void, emptiness, and thirst with everything they can. They try everything except God that is. Everywhere are examples of people trying to eat and drink deeply, all in an effort to finally and fully quench the inward hunger and thirst that exists within them. They do this, of course, to no avail. Apart from God, this is not possible. God has designed man this way. If we are an engine, we are designed to run on the fuel of God Himself. If we are a home, the very foundation must be God Himself or the house does not stand.

That is why what Jesus says here is nothing short of astonishing! Not only does He say that man can truly eat, but He says that man can actually be continually satisfied. Notice the words, ***“I am the Bread of Life.”*** In this statement, He is telling us that He Himself is the answer. He is the way. He, a continual personal relationship with Him, is how a person can not only be spiritually nourished but how they can have lasting inward satisfaction. Hear the promise in Jesus’ words, ***“Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”*** Right there we are told that if we come to Him that inward void will be filled. We will be full. He says if we believe in Him, what He did on that cross for us, we will never need to look any further. We shall be satisfied in Him, by Him, and through Him.

My encouragement to you, dear reader, is to drink deep of Jesus. I want you to be satisfied only by Him. When you feel the leanness of your soul, do not try as the non-believer does to eat of something else. It will not satisfy. All else will leave us hungry. The answer is Jesus Himself.

# THE NEED

## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE • DEVOTION 4

Pastor Pat Rowland

An interesting exchange takes place in John chapter 6 between Jesus and “the crowd” of people that followed Him from Capernaum. The previous day a large crowd, we are told there were 5,000 men, had followed Jesus, and was listening to Him teach. When it came time to eat, there was no food except five small loaves of bread and two fish. Miraculously Jesus feeds the large crowd with twelve basketfuls left over. The next day the crowd appears again looking for more miracles and maybe another meal.

In John 6:26, we read, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”***

While they were concerned with a daily provision of bread, Jesus offered them a lifetime supply. Curious, they asked, “What must we do to have this amazing bread?” Jesus said, there is no work, you only have to believe, which the crowd responded with asking for another miracle. God provided what was called “manna” when the Israelites were in the wilderness (Exodus chapter 16) as if that was greater than feeding over 10,000. Jesus responded saying manna was a gift from God that gave daily provision, but His bread was a gift from Heaven that gave life.

John 6:32-33 continues, ***“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’”***

Still thinking that Jesus was talking about bread, the crowd asked for this bread Jesus was talking about.

Finally, in verses 35-36, we read, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.’”***

Jesus’ message is simple, He does not ask us to do anything more than believe that He is who He said He was, and that it is only through Him that we can have eternal life. As the Bread of Life, Jesus provides what we all want, what we all need, and what we all can have. However, too often we complicate things because we put what we think we need ahead of what Jesus knows we need.



# FOOD ANALOGY

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## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE • DEVOTION 5

Philip Piasecki

If there is one thing in this world that everyone can agree on, it is that we love food. I feel Christians will use any excuse we can think of to have an event where food is present. I once saw a parody article online that said something like, “Scientists confirm: food consumed at church potluck does not count towards the daily caloric intake.” I am sure there are many of us that wish that was the case. If you have been around the River Church for a while, you will know we have a couple of Pastors on staff who cannot make it through a single sermon without making a food analogy! One of the reasons for that though is that they learned from the best preacher of all time, Jesus. Throughout Scripture, Jesus used parables and examples involving food. He knew how to get people’s attention.

John 6:32-35 records, ***“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”***

In John 6:48-51, Jesus continues, ***“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”***

I absolutely love these scriptures, particularly because of the context surrounding them. Essentially the context is the crowd Jesus is speaking to had been searching for Him because He has fed them food before, and they wanted another free meal. Since these people are looking for food, Jesus takes the opportunity to give them the Gospel and explain that He is the Bread of Life. When I think of food I think of something that sustains me and gives me the energy to live my life. This is what Jesus is saying He can do for us spiritually! Obviously, we all know that if you believe in Jesus you will still become physically hungry. What Jesus is saying in this chapter is spiritual, you will never hunger or thirst again if you believe in Him. Jesus is the Bread of Life, He will sustain us spiritually. He gives us what we need daily to live our lives for Him. Instead of putting our time and energy into things that only satisfy us for a short time, we can invest our efforts into our relationship with Christ and reap spiritual contentment.

Next time you find yourself chasing anything and everything except for Jesus, remember that He is the Bread of Life; He is the only one that can satisfy you.

# BREAD IS GOOD

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## I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE • DEVOTION 6

Pastor Roy Townsend

I cannot hide the fact that I love bread. I could eat bread with every meal and then have bread for dessert. We grew up eating toast, muffins, biscuits, submarines, rolls, cornbread, but our favorite bread would be dessert loaves of bread. My mother would make banana-nut bread, and my wife makes zucchini bread, and I love both. So, it is needless to say that I love all types of bread. I understand the concept of eating bread at most meals.

In John 6:35, we read, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”*** This Scripture is an important verse that Jesus is informing us that He is God. He is revealing to us His saving relationship with the world. He is telling us that He is the ***“Bread of Life.”*** This is a concept that I can relate to because bread is such an important part of my eating habits. We have all heard that a person can survive on bread and water to sustain life. However, I was always a little confused by the statement because I always seem to need more bread in my life.

John chapter 6 starts with Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 men. It is where Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish and then He miraculously was able to feed not only the 5,000 men but their entire families too. When it was over, there were twelve baskets filled with leftover bread from the miracle. We can see that bread was an important part of the eating habits for the culture and time of this miracle. The people had their fill of the bread, but they would need more bread for the next meal.

The next day Jesus was stating to the crowd that they followed Him for the next meal of bread. John 6:26-27 reads, ***“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.’”*** Christ is setting the stage for one of the ***“I Am”*** statements that the people will fully understand because apparently, they loved bread too.

John 6:33-34 continues, ***“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’”*** Next, Jesus says something that would probably startle the crowd because many of them have missed the fact that He is the Savior of mankind. He is the Messiah! ***“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”*** Christ is saying that He is essential for eternal life just like bread is essential to sustain physical life. He is the only way to have the abundant, eternal life that Jesus wants for us. He will make us righteous in the sight of God.

Personally, when I had realized what Christ had done for me, I can truly say that I love the ***“Bread of Life,”*** and because I have this bread, I do not hunger. He is the only way to satisfy our spiritual hunger. I hope that you love the ***“Bread of Life”*** too.





**I AM: THE BREAD OF LIFE**



LESSON TWO

**I AM:**  
**THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

PASTOR RYAN STORY

There is so much importance of when and where something is said. The timing of making a statement can become just as powerful as the statement itself. Martin Luther King Jr's "*I Have a Dream Speech*" is one of the most iconic speeches of all time. Add to the power of the words of Dr. King is the fact that this speech was delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial which brings so much to the power of that speech. The state of the world at that time is significant too.

1. What are the most memorable statements you have ever heard in your life? Why were these so impactful?

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In John Chapter 8, Jesus says, "***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life***" (John 8:12). This is one of the more well-known statements that Jesus makes. It is even more amazing if we look at the context of what is going on around Jesus when He makes this statement.

2. What do you think is the significance of Jesus saying He was "***the Light of the World?***"

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Before we even get to Jesus' statement, we need to understand what is going on in Jesus' world at this time. If we go back a chapter, we read in John chapter 7 that "***the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand***" (John 7:2). Be honest, when you read your Bible how often do you stop and study about something that you do not know about? Do not feel too bad, there are details in the Bible that were so connected with the culture of the time that most miss. One of those would be

## LESSON TWO

this feast. Taking time to look into or learn more about these cultural specifics can bring a greater understanding of the context of the situation.

In Exodus chapter 23, God says, ***“Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me”*** (Exodus 23:14). So at the time of John chapter 8, people are celebrating, or at the very least finishing, the Feast of the Booths. During this feast, there were several acts of ceremonial worship that took place, but we are going to focus in on one. In the courtyard around the temple, there were four huge candelabras that had four giant bowls made of gold. The Talmud (book of Jewish rabbi's discussing their thoughts on the Old Testament) states that priests and other religious elite would make candle wicks out of their old clothes. It was said that there was not a courtyard in all of Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light from these candelabras.

3. How do you think pride could have snuck into the hearts of the priests who provided the garments for the wicks?

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Add all of that new information to the time when Jesus said, ***“I am the Light of the World.”*** He said it in a very exact location, to an exact group of people, and at an exact time. In John chapter 8, Jesus is arguing with Pharisees and religious elite and John 8:20 tells us, ***“These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple.”***

Remember what Jesus already had said, ***“Again Jesus spoke to them, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’”*** (John 8:12).



4. What is the deeper significance of Jesus saying He was ***“the Light of the World?”***

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5. Why do you think Jesus saying that He was ***“the Light of the World”*** would be so aggravating to a Pharisee?

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6. What is the major difference between the priests providing the light of Jerusalem and Jesus saying He was ***“the Light of the World?”***

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One aspect of Jesus announcing He was ***“the Light of the World”*** is where He proclaimed it. Jesus told a group of people who were spiritually blind that He was ***“the Light of the World”*** and ***“whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.”*** Jesus wanted everyone to know He was the light to illuminate their path back to Him. For the Pharisees and the Jewish nation, they were focused on making sure their light shone inward. Their festival was for them, the Jews in Jerusalem. How often is the church today only focused on making sure ***“the Light of the World”*** is only for those they want to give it to?

Matthew 5:14-16 adds, ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others,***

## LESSON TWO

***so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”***

7. How do you shine your light before others?

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Since the wicks of the candelabras were made of priest's clothing, there was a bit of pride and arrogance that went along with the shining light.

8. How do you make sure the light you are shining to others is the light of Jesus and not your own piety?

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9. What is going to be different for you this Easter season than in years past? How can you shine the light of Jesus to the world around you?

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**I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**



## LESSON TWO



# FLASHLIGHT APP

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## I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I tend to appreciate the simple things in life. I still enjoy having a flashlight with me whenever I have my phone. It often takes me a moment to even remember that my phone is a flashlight. When I worked midnight security during my seminary days, I always had a “mini-mag lite” with me. Often I had to wander through dark halls and offices when it was quicker to use a flashlight than go back and forth between light switches.

Light helps us find our way. Jesus uses light as a perfect image of who He is:

***“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”*** John 8:12

***“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*** John 9:5

Jesus helps us find our way!

Light is a picture of righteousness. It conveys an open, honest, and transparent view. It implies the concept of not hiding anything. It portrays an element of real and genuine. However, darkness reeks of evil, ignorance, and confusion.

In John 1:4-5, Jesus is described as light, ***“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*** Verse 9 continues the picture,

***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”*** John picks up the conversation in chapter 12, ***“So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going’”*** (verse 35). He continues in verse 46, ***“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”***

Jesus is the light of the world. We need to walk in the light. We need to walk in righteousness because of what He has done and is doing for us. The problem is that sin is fun for a season. John 3:19 says, ***“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”*** Sin is tempting, but it is not worth it. The consequences kill. In 1 John 1:6-7, we read, ***“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”***

We need to walk in the light of our salvation. We need to walk in the footsteps of our Savior.

Jesus is the light of the world. The way we know Jesus is through the Word. In Psalm 119:105, God’s Word is said to be able to help our steps for today and the future, ***“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”***

Instead of cursing the darkness, light a candle (or use the flashlight on your phone). Walk where God directs. Be courageous. Be real. Be Christian.

# NIGHT LIGHT

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## I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD • DEVOTION 2

James Mann

Growing up, I was terrified of the dark. I remember having so many night lights on that it would have made more sense just to leave on the lights. I have an unusual living situation; I am living alone in the house I grew up in as a child. Still, to this day, I am convinced that a witch is living in the dark corner of my crawl space, and when I turn the lights off in the basement, I do not take my time going up the stairs. These thoughts and fears are so typical for young children, and apparently someone in their mid-20's. I want you to think for a second, "Why is this?" In the darkness, we cannot see what is around us. As a child, we often think of monsters roaming around in the dark. We do not feel safe. If we cannot see what is around us, how are we supposed to protect ourselves? So, what do we do when we are feeling unsafe in the darkness? We simply turn on a light.

In John 8:12, we see Jesus making the statement, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** What Jesus is saying here is, "Listen, if you follow me, you no longer will have to walk in fear of the unknown. As long as you stay with me and on my path, I will protect you and care for you."

I do not know about you, but the idea of the Son of God being the One who protects me sounds way safer than a night light. Like many things, this protection does come at a price. The only thing Jesus is asking for here is for you to simply follow Him. If we follow Him, we no longer have to worry about this darkness that is in the world because He will make the darkness run and hide. I never understood how someone could feel safe in the world in which we are living. It

## LESSON TWO • DEVOTION 2

is a scary place when you sit back and look at it. It has become a place where most parents will not even let their children walk down the street to play with their friends anymore, and I cannot blame them one bit. We need protection from this darkness because there is only so much we can do on our own. We need the One who will drown out the darkness and cover it with His light. We need to start following this Light.





# THE RELAY

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## I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD • DEVOTION 3

John Rigg

I have always been fascinated by the Olympic Games and the willingness of participating countries to put away their differences and compete against each other for Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals. However, there is a part of the Olympic Games that typically does not receive much publicity, but I find it just as captivating to follow. That event is the Olympic Torch Relay. Several months before the Olympic Games, the Olympic flame is lit at Olympia, Greece then travels around Greece, and is then transferred to the current year's host city. The host city then by way of a relay, transports the torch to various parts of their country keeping the torch lit throughout the entire journey. The final runner in the relay then lights the Olympic Flame in the host city and it continues to burn in the cauldron for the duration of the Games until it is extinguished during the Olympic closing ceremony. Thus, the fires contained in the torches and Olympic cauldrons all trace a common lineage back to the same Olympia lighting ceremony.

Jesus' words remind me of the Olympic lighting ceremony and the Olympic Torch Relay. ***"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life'"*** (John 8:12 NKJV).

Jesus is trying to make everyone understand that compared to the darkness and sin of the World, He is the Light of the World. Apart from Him, there can be no rescue from one's sin or light to guide a person through this life or the next. Jesus vowed that anyone following Him would not walk in darkness but have ***"the light of life!"***

However, Jesus' stay on the Earth as a man would soon come to an end with His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. What would happen to the Light then? Would it be snuffed out? How would mankind know of eternal life if the light is gone?

The answer is in "The Relay."

Matthew 5:14 (NKJV) says, ***"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."***

Jesus, as the Light of the World, made disciples of men and charged them with the task of being light-bearers themselves. As the Olympic Flame, Jesus would always be the source, but anyone willing to give their lives to Him would be guided out of the darkness and become torches themselves eventually passing the light on to someone else. Thus, just as each Olympic Torch can be traced back to the original flame, so can the flame of each disciple be traced back to the original source, the only true Eternal Flame, Jesus.

Knowing that Jesus is the Light of the World, would you please take a moment and honestly answer the following questions.

Has your torch ever been lit?

If not, will you take the step today to find someone to help you know how?

If Yes, have you ever relayed the flame to anyone else?

# AFRAID OF THE DARK

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## I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD • DEVOTION 4

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

***“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” John 8:12***

I am afraid of the dark.

Please, allow me to explain. I am not afraid of physical darkness. I have no problem sitting in a room at night without any lights. I am not afraid of monsters under the bed or the boogie man in the closet. The darkness I am afraid of is the “kind” of darkness Jesus is referring to here in John 8:12. Maybe I should rephrase it? I am afraid of spiritual darkness. I want to explain what I mean when I say that. I do not mean that I am afraid of the devil, the spiritual realm, or demons. I mean that I am afraid of evil itself, of sin, of what sin does to peoples’ lives. The way darkness ravages families and destroys lives is devastating. I fear what sin could do to my kids. I fear the voices that my children could listen to and the choices they could make that would take every good thing from them. I fear what darkness could do to my life. Over the years, I have watched as many good and godly people, people I know and love, have been swallowed up in darkness. Their lives serve as a daily example to me saying, “Do not go that way. It is the pathway to destruction.” It has been said, “Sin will take you further than you wanted to go, cost you more than you wanted to spend, and hold you longer than you wanted to stay.” I am afraid of darkness. It terrifies me.

This is why the words of Jesus here in John 8:12 are such a blessing and encouragement to my soul. Jesus not only tells us that He is Light

but also tells us how to avoid darkness. In saying that He is Light, He is saying that He is the opposite of that darkness that terrifies us, while also telling us how to avoid that which will destroy us. So, He says, ***“I am the light of the world.”*** Notice that He always pulls us back to Himself. He says, ***“I Am”*** (Exodus 3:14) the way that you will see. I am the way that you will know where to go and what to do. I am the way you will see and avoid pitfalls. I am the light to your path and the lamp to your feet (Psalm 119:105). I am all that is symbolized by light, that is, the opposite of darkness. I am all that is good and right, just and pure, safe, and secure.

Jesus then helps us and says, ***“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.”*** In this, He tells us how to escape this enemy of darkness and how to avoid this savage monster that lives and moves in shadows. So simply, Jesus says, “Follow Me.” At the heart of this, He is telling us to simply stay close to Him. In my family, we often say that the only place that a sheep is safe is right next to the shepherd. It is true as a spiritual picture just as it is in real life. The safety of any sheep is its proximity to the Shepherd. It is also true for us as His sheep.

Are you afraid of darkness? Do you fear what it can do to you and through you? The solution is to stay close to the ***“Great Shepherd of the sheep”*** (Hebrews 13:20 NKJV). Be careful of any distance between you and Him. We are not safe away from Him! We must be watchful (1 Thessalonians 5:6) over anything that causes us to wander. Stay close. You cannot effectively follow someone from afar. As you follow Him, the promise from the Shepherd is that you “shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”





# THANKFUL FOR THE LIGHT

I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD • DEVOTION 5

Pastor Ben Kirkman

I was raised on a farm, way out in the country, far away from city lights. When the sun went down it was dark, very dark. I vividly remember being ten years old having to go outside and do my evening chores in the barn after dark. I can picture myself standing on the back porch in the safety of the house lights staring at the 300 feet of darkness I would have to cover to make it to the safety of the barn lights. I can still hear my dad saying, "Don't let the boogie man get you!" I ran as fast as I could to the barn door, leaving the boogie man in my dust! I then had to unlatch the barn door, swing the door open, slam the barn door behind me, and then fumble around in the dark until I could find the light switch. Once the light was on, I was safe!

I now live on the same farm that I grew up on and I have the joy of sending my kids outside after dark to lock up the chickens for the night. I make sure to remind them to watch out for the boogie man as they run out the door and then watch them out the window as they frantically try to outrun the fears that come with the darkness. In my defense, my children do have headlamps, so they have an advantage over the boogie man that I never had.

It is incredible to me the fears and perceived dangers that darkness brings. There is just something scary about being in complete darkness. Just as incredible is how light has a way of dissolving the uncertainties and fears that darkness may bring.

I love how Jesus refers to Himself as the *"Light of the World."* In John 8:12, we read, *"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,*

***but will have the light of life.”*** The Bible speaks of those who have not turned to the Lord for salvation as walking in darkness; and of those who have trusted in Jesus, ***“the Light of the World,”*** as being delivered ***“from the domain of darkness.”*** In Colossians 1:13-14, Paul writes, ***“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”***

Jesus, ***“the Light of the World,”*** is the only source of freedom from the cursed darkness of this world. Jesus gave His life, shed His blood, and took the punishment for our sins upon Himself. He paid our sin debt and gives us hope of being declared righteous before a holy God. He came to this world as the light, shining in the darkness, preaching that He is the only solution for us in the spiritual darkness of the world. If you have not trusted in Him alone for forgiveness and deliverance from the consequences of your sins, repent and run to Him today. He is the Light you can turn to with confidence!

# CAN YOU GET ME THE LIGHT

I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD • DEVOTION 6

Pastor Roy Townsend

A couple of years ago, I needed the serial numbers off the back of my television. I got up and stuck my head behind the television, but I could not see the tag. I asked my wife for a light to stick behind the television so that I could see the numbers. Okay, so now I could see the tag, but I could not make out the numbers again. Just then I remembered a friend of mine saying the older you get, the more light you will need to see. I always thought that his saying was just an old tale, but now I realize that I need more light to see. I need light to see lots of things.

John 8:12 reads, ***“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”*** This is one of Jesus’ statements where He is letting the audience know that He is God. The metaphor used here is that He is the ***“Light of the World.”*** It begs the question, so the world is currently in darkness, and He is that light. We need the light so that we can understand where we stand. Jesus came to seek and to save sinners. He is shedding light on our current condition as humans. We need to understand that all humans are born sinners and need Christ to save them from their sins.

John Piper stated, “Jesus being ‘the light of the world’ means the world has no other light than him. If there is going to be a light for the world, it will be Jesus. It is Jesus or darkness. There is no third alternative. No other light. It means, therefore, that all the world and everyone in it needs Jesus as their light.” When you see the light you will realize that we are all sinners in need of Jesus.

The verse goes on to say, ***“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*** John further writes in chapter 12 verse 46 (NIV), ***“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.”*** If we decide to have this relationship with Christ we will not have to walk through this physical life in darkness.

Just like I needed the light to be able to see behind my television, we need the light of the world to realize that we are in darkness. If you choose to be in a relationship with Him, we will never stumble because we have the light.





I AM: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD



LESSON THREE

**I AM:  
THE DOOR**

PASTOR RYAN STORY

***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.’” John 10:7-8***

1. Have you ever had to explain something that was complex to someone only to be met with a blank stare? Or have you ever been the one who was giving the blank stare? What was it that was being explained and were you the explainer or the one with confusion written all over your face?

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Do not feel bad if you have experienced either of these scenarios. Constantly through the Gospels, those listening to Jesus could not understand the depths of His teachings. Also, Jesus was the greatest teacher to ever live and He had still had a degree of difficulty ensuring that people listening to Him understood what He was trying to teach. In the first five verses of John chapter 10, Jesus is trying to explain an amazing truth about who He was. ***“This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them”*** (John 10:6.) Luckily for us, there was a lack of understanding so Jesus breaks down one of His lessons into two amazing parts.

In John 10:7-8, we read, ***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.’”***

Most people are not familiar with shepherding, let alone shepherding in the times of Jesus in the hills of Israel. Often Jesus used everyday examples to help people understand His teachings. In this case,

### LESSON THREE

Jesus uses sheep farming. Now in 2021, this concept may be lost on some of us, but in Jesus' time, this idea of Jesus being the ***“Door of the sheep”*** would have been a concept easily grasped.

Shepherds would often make pens that only had one entrance. The door for the sheep pens was the shepherd himself. At night when the sheep and shepherds would rest, the shepherd would lay his body across the entrance. It was to keep the sheep in and to keep any threat out. The shepherd acted as the door for the sheep.

2. Who is Jesus referring to by ***“all who came before me?”***

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3. What distinct personality traits would you use for a thief and a robber?

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4. How does Jesus being the door protect His sheep?

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John 10:9 says, ***“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”***

5. What is the purpose of a door?

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6. How does one enter this “Jesus door” and what is the reward? Why is that such an important idea to understand in light of doors offering us protection?

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John 10:10 adds, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”***

7. What does a thief do? Why is it so crucial that Jesus says He is ***“the Door?”***

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John 10:10 brings some controversy to the Christian world. Jesus saying that He has come ***“that they may have life and have it abundantly”*** can create some very interesting theological viewpoints. To ignore the fact that Jesus said these words is equally as dangerous.

8. What do you think it means to ***“have life and have it abundantly?”***

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If we take everything in context, in order to know what having this ***“life and have it abundantly”*** means we have to look at what it means through the filter of Jesus’ proclamation that He is ***“the Door.”*** Jesus’ claim is more than just a fireproof piece of wood. By Jesus saying that He was a door was His claim to saying His willingness to lay down His life to protect His sheep in order for them to have life.

### LESSON THREE

John 10:17-18 adds, ***“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”***

9. Why did Jesus lay His life down? What did Jesus ultimately protect us from?

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Jesus did not lay His life down on the cross for our sins for us to receive our abundance of life from materialistic temporary things. The abundance of life that Jesus is talking about here is a life that is completely overflowing with a relationship with God.

10. What are some things that Jesus protects us from that cause us to lose sight of this abundance of life?

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Sheep who wander off are popular enough to get songs written about them, but we seldom put the same emphasis on making sure a sheep understands and does not wander off in the first place. Christians at times live life like this. We are warned and taught to stay away from sin, to avoid being deceived by thieves, robbers and yet “we will go in and out” not to “find pasture” that Jesus has for us, but to find gratification for our flesh. In the beginning parts of this parable, the parts that were hard to understand, Jesus says, ***“A stranger they***



I AM: THE DOOR

***will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers***” (John 10:5).

11. What influences do we tend to follow, and where do they lead us?

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12. What is the best way to make sure you are in the pasture where Jesus is ***“the Door?”***

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### LESSON THREE



# MURPHY DOOR

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## I AM: THE DOOR • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

There are all types of doors. There are hinged doors, pocket doors, roller doors, bifold doors, sliding doors, pivot doors, and French doors. Dutch doors remind me of the barn where you want to keep the bottom half of the door closed while opening the top half. I recently had a friend refer to a Murphy door. I was not sure what it was. It is a door that looks like a bookcase. It is a hidden door. I like that idea.

In John 10:7-9, Jesus describes His actions by using an object lesson. It reads, ***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.’”*** Twice Jesus said, ***“I am the door.”***

Jesus was describing Himself as a shepherd. The crowd knew what a shepherd did at night. He would get all his sheep in the pen (often made of rocks) and then he would lay across the opening (doorway). His job was to keep the sheep from wandering and to keep predators outside of the pen and away from his sheep.

No matter what kind of door you have, it serves two purposes.

First, the door keeps something inside. I remember my dad reminding me to close the door to keep the heat or cool inside the house. I was reminded that we were not the Rockefellers. The shepherd wanted to keep his sheep safe and inside the pen.

### LESSON THREE • DEVOTION 1

Second, the door is meant to keep something or someone out of the house or room. It allows for safety for those on the inside. The shepherd was a “wall” of protection for his sheep.

Jesus is the door. He is always with us. He provides and protects. He is willing (and did) lay down His life for His sheep.

John 10:27-30 says, ***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”***

Thank Jesus for guarding you from the evil one. Follow Him as He leads you to green pastures and still waters.

The Murphy door may be beneficial in hiding a special room, but Jesus has made the way to the Father known to all who are willing to listen. How to get to that place is no secret. It is found in the Good News of Jesus.

# ANOTHER WAY

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## I AM: THE DOOR • DEVOTION 2

John Rigg

One of the characteristics of Jesus that I admire most is His willingness to lovingly teach us even when we are blind to His truth. His use of parables is one way in which He does this, but often He uses items in everyday life as object lessons to help us better understand.

In His efforts to help the Pharisees understand a simple truth, Jesus uses a simple object, a door. John 10:7–9 (NKJV) says, ***“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.’”***

Jesus' claim to be ***“the door”*** is a rebuke aimed at the Pharisees who were self-deceived. It is their distorted view of themselves that Jesus is addressing. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees were the religious leaders and members of a Jewish party that exercised strict piety according to Mosaic Law. The way to God, according to them, was by strictly obeying the Mosaic Law. Ironically, this is something they themselves were incapable of doing. Nevertheless, the Pharisees were right about one thing, it would take perfect righteousness to repair a broken relationship with God brought about by mankind's unrighteousness.

By calling Himself ***“the door,”*** Jesus is saying that the only way to God is to be justified by trusting in Him and His righteousness. The apostle Paul repeats this truth in his letter to those in Galatia.

Galatians 2:16 (NKJV) adds, ***“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”***

For a great deal of my life, I lived the life of a Pharisee. If you were to get a character evaluation from someone who knew me, in most cases, it would be a favorable one. “He’s a nice guy,” they would say. I was not a religious man per se, but self-righteous none the less. Like the Pharisees, my self-evaluation was incorrect. “I am not perfect, but not as bad as most,” I would conclude.

Jesus also mentions that those who came before Him were thieves and robbers. Have you ever noticed that thieves and robbers rarely use the front door? By avoiding the door, the self-righteous are attempting to steal and rob something that only Jesus can provide - His righteousness.

Jesus’ claim is this, ***“If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved”*** (verse 9).

They will be saved from what? It is the penalty due to the unrighteous. It is eternal separation from God.

I was a thief and a robber, but by His grace, I walked through ***“The Door.”***

Have you entered through ***“The Door”*** or are you trying to get in another way?



# DOOR OF PROTECTION

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## I AM: THE DOOR • DEVOTION 3

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.’”*** John 10:7

“Did you remember to close the door?” That is the question we ask our kids nearly every night when they (hopefully) secure our ten egg-laying chickens into their coop. I have explained the danger to them more times than they have wanted and am always ready to explain it again. They could, no doubt, recite the words, “The door is what keeps them safe from everything that wants to eat them, and everything wants to eat them!” It is true, everything wants to eat our chickens! Because of this, I built them a home. It is not just any home; the thing is a veritable Taj Mahal. It is complete with vinyl siding, Pella windows, an elevator, finished basement, recessed lighting, and central air. Ok, I may be exaggerating slightly but the thing is a fortress. The one questionable area in its armor is the door. They exit that door in the morning and they go through it at night. If we do not close it, anything can and will get into the coop and devour our flock. So I ask every night, “Did you remember to close the door?”

In John chapter 10, Jesus is giving us a similar picture, but not in regard to chickens. He is speaking in reference to sheep. He says in verse 7, ***“I am the door of the sheep.”*** What He says is a familiar picture that everyone listening easily understood. Shepherding was a common occupation in Jesus’ day and the picture here refers to something Shepherds did often. Each morning, just before the sun was up, the shepherd would lead his sheep out to pastures where they could eat. Several times a day, the shepherd would lead his flock further and further out to find grass to eat.

At night, unless the shepherd was close to home, he would need to sleep out in the fields with his flock. As the sun began to set, the goal turned from feeding His sheep to keeping them safe. In the Judean wilderness, everything wanted to eat sheep! To keep them safe, he would gather bramble, thorn branches, rocks, and tree limbs to create an enclosure; it was a make-shift sheep “pen.” It was nearly a circle except for the opening the sheep needed to enter the pen. The opening was its door. This entrance is where the shepherd would sit at night and watch for predators. It is where he would sleep, lying across the opening so that anything that wanted to come into the fold must first pass over him. In this way, he himself became the door. He became the way into the fold and the protection from all the dangers outside.

Here, our Lord Jesus says that He is this **“door of the sheep.”** In this, He is saying that He is how we enter the fold. We enter His fold by accepting and receiving Him. It is not by turning to religion or morality. We enter through Jesus. We enter by Him and by what He has done. We come to Him for life and He admits us into His fold. He is the door. He then laid down His body for us. He did this, first of all, at Calvary. That is where He laid Himself down to be attacked by every predator that would have devoured us. He was attacked so that we would be safe.

In verse 11, Jesus says, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** That is what He did. Even now He lays down at the door to the sheepfold for you and I. Anything that would harm us, must pass over Him. He is our door of protection. Jude 1:24 (NKJV) says, **“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”**



## I AM: THE DOOR

Our Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, is our protection. He keeps us safe from all harm. He is the door into the fold and the way that we are eternally safe. Jesus said, ***“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved [safe], and will go in and out and find pasture”*** (verse 9 NKJV).

Have you entered by the Door? Are you a part of His fold? He is the door through which we must enter to be saved!







# COMPASSION, PROTECTION, SALVATION

## I AM: THE DOOR • DEVOTION 4

Pastor Jayson Combs

***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.’” John 10:7-10***

Have you ever had a door slammed in your face? When I was 18 years old, I went to a very conservative Baptist college. One of the requirements of the school was to go from door to door and tell people about Jesus. To be honest, it was a scary thing for me. I will never forget the time when a small group of us rang the door at a particular home. A man opened the door and immediately slammed it back in our faces. That was a scary door. In John chapter 10, Jesus tells us that He is the door. Jesus says whoever enters through Him will be saved and will find pasture. Today, I want you to think about the amazing door that Jesus offers.

First, it is a *door of compassion*. Matthew 9:36 says, ***“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** Maybe today you need to remember the amazing compassion given to us by our Savior. Growing up conservatively, it is easy for me to fall back into thinking God is a rule-enforcing, angry God. I sometimes need to stop and remember the door of compassion my God has opened for me.

### LESSON THREE • DEVOTION 4

Next, know that God offers the *door of protection*. I have read that shepherds would lay across the entrance and would physically become the door. Any wolf that wanted to get to the sheep would have to physically go through the shepherd. In I Samuel chapter 17, David explains how he is a shepherd and how he protected his sheep by killing a lion and a bear. This is an amazing picture of the door that the Lord offers to us. He is our defender and protector.

Lastly, Jesus is the *door of salvation*. It is only through Him that we may enter into life. Jesus says that people will seek different ways to get to God, but only through Him may we have salvation. Today, remember the wonderful door that Christ offers to us through compassion, protection, and salvation.



# ESCAPE ROOM

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## I AM: THE DOOR • DEVOTION 5

Pastor Noble Baird

A while back, I had the chance to go experience an Escape Room. For those of you who are unfamiliar, this is basically a real-life puzzle where you and a group of friends try to escape a room within the allotted amount of time. You truly feel like Sherlock Holmes as you try to decipher clues and puzzles, ultimately making your way through to unlock the final door and escape! However, it will also test your friendships as you try to communicate and work together. Needless to say, when I went with my group of friends, we did not escape in the allotted amount of time, but we did come close and had a ton of fun. The reason I bring this up is that whenever I think of a door, there are many ways in which to enter. Some doors, we use a key, others we may use a key code, and some fancy ones use a fob or a card.

During this Easter season, we are going through our study on the “I Ams” of Jesus. Today, I want to take a look at how Jesus is the door of our lives. In John 10:7-9 we read, ***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.’”*** Now, when we read this passage, many of us can understand that when Jesus is referring to the ***“sheep,”*** He is referring to us, His followers. He first speaks of all the false teachers who have come before Him (thieves and robbers) and established how they were liars and not the true door through which to enjoy the pastures, or truth, joy, and eternal life. Yet, there is the second part of this teaching which I love, an open invitation. In verse nine, Jesus says ***“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.”*** Jesus is reminding us of the open, free invitation to enjoy life in Him.

### LESSON THREE • DEVOTION 5

With the Escape Room, there are tons of keys and puzzles we must complete and work through, in order to earn and gain entrance to the final door and escape. Yet, as Jesus tells us here in John 10:9 and Paul reminds us in Romans 10:9, there is no secret clue or hidden key through which we can gain access to eternal life. All we must do is simply confess Jesus as our Savior and trust that He is who He says He is, and we will instantly gain access to walking through the greatest door in the world, that door is Jesus. There is no secret code, no fancy key, all we must do is trust and confess and we will be saved. I may have failed at the Escape Room, but boy am I thankful for a loving Savior who readily opened the door for me when all I had to do was trust and walk through it!





# THE WAY TO PASTURE

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## I AM: THE DOOR • DEVOTION 6

Pastor Caleb Combs

Jesus is the greatest teacher of all time. The way He taught and illustrated so that the listener would understand is incredible. I can think of several teachers I have had that have taught things that soon afterward led me to think, “What did they say?” Yes, I realize I should have paid better attention, but I think a real key to being an effective teacher and communicator is seeing the listener or student and helping them grasp and comprehend what is being taught. Jesus was the master of this.

In John chapter 10, Jesus is teaching and speaking to a crowd. It was compiled of religious leaders, political leaders, common Jews, and others, all standing in amazement of what Jesus was saying.

Jesus said in John 10:7-10, ***“So Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.’”*** Jesus challenged the basis of all that they believed and the false teachers that came before Him. He begins to teach with the illustration of a shepherd. Later in chapter 10, He refers to Himself as the ***“Good Shepherd.”*** This illustration of shepherding is one that most, if not all, of the listeners, would understand. Shepherding was very common in this time and is still a trade in Israel to this day.

Jesus calls Himself **“the door,”** and says that anyone who comes through Him will find pasture. This picture is one that every listener would understand clearly. As a shepherd, the number one priority is the sheep. The shepherd would do anything for the sheep. During the day he would lead them, and at night when the predators would come to steal or kill the sheep, the shepherd would find a cave or a safe place with one way in and one way out. He would lay himself down in the doorway for the night in protection mode knowing that nothing could come in or out without his permission and knowledge. When he awoke the next day, he would lead the sheep to find a pasture to eat in.

A simple illustration articulated magnificently so they understand exactly what Jesus was saying; I am the only way to the pasture. Jesus being the **“Good Shepherd”** wanted the world to understand that He would protect, lead, love, and guide His sheep all with the goal of getting them to the pasture. The previous false teachers and religious leaders came to destroy the sheep, but Jesus came to give the sheep life abundantly.

Jesus has the same goal for you in your life today, to give you life abundantly. This verse has been taken out of context so many times with people saying, “Jesus wants me to have my best life now with millions of dollars, a nice car, big house, and lots of shoes.” This is not what He meant. Jesus clearly communicated that life abundantly cannot be found in the things of this world, but only through Him. He came with a message of life found through the Gospel, and that life is eternal life given through Jesus Christ. Eternal, abundant life is only found through one door, and that Door is Jesus Christ. The best part is that Jesus desires that all would come to repentance and the knowledge of Him, so He can let you into paradise. The question I ask you today, “Have you entered the door into a relationship with Jesus today?” If you have not, simply realizing your need as a sinner



## **I AM: THE DOOR**

for a Savior and calling on the name of Jesus to save you is the only way into finding the pastures of eternal life. I pray you realize that today!



LESSON FOUR

**I AM:**  
**THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

PASTOR RYAN STORY



## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

There are a lot of words in the English language to explain the utmost quality of something. There is a struggle at times to figure out which adjective should be used to describe something at the highest quality. Just saying “good” for some reason does not really cut it.

1. What word do you use to describe something of high quality?

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John 10:11 says, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”***

It seems like Jesus is shortchanging His abilities to be a shepherd. To say Jesus was only “good” seems like we are lacking in vocabulary. We can explore stories in the Bible and read about Abraham, Jacob, Moses, King David, and even the prophet Amos were all shepherds; surely they were at least good at being shepherds.

2. What is it that makes Jesus ***“the Good Shepherd?”***

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There is little logic in a shepherd dying for a sheep. While an above-average shepherd might be willing to face the fear of potentially getting hurt for the saving of a sheep when the sheep's life is in peril, however, it seems unlikely that shepherds would truly lay down their lives for their flock. It makes little sense to lay down your life and it also puts the sheep in more danger if the shepherd is dead. This is what makes Jesus ***“the Good Shepherd.”***

## LESSON FOUR

3. If Jesus is the shepherd in this parable, who are we?

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4. What is it that a shepherd does for their sheep?

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Being called a sheep is one of the most insulting, but yet honest, things Jesus could have called us. Sheep are known for many interesting characteristics.

- Sheep are not known for their intelligence. Sheep are not known to be smart or cunning animals when it comes to even their own safety.
- Sheep have a minimal sense of direction. Sheep get lost easily.
- Sheep are known to easily wander away from the flock while they graze.
- Sheep are weak and have no natural defense of any kind.
- When a sheep senses danger, the natural instinct of a sheep is to panic.
- Sheep can become restless when hungry or annoyed.
- Sheep can not get up on their own.



## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

5. Would you describe yourself as a sheep? Why is it so important that we have a good shepherd in our life?

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One of the tragic aspects of life is watching a person follow a bad leader. In John chapter 10, the conversation Jesus is having is within earshot of a group of Pharisees. For the Pharisees, they were unable to remove the plank from their eyes to see Jesus for who He truly was. Jesus was the one who the people at this time should have been following, yet the Pharisees would not rest until life returned to normal, and the Jewish people once again were being led by them.

John 10:12-13 continues, ***“He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”***

6. What does a hired hand do when they spot trouble? Why does he do that?

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7. What happens to the sheep? Why is it so damaging when that happens?

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#### LESSON FOUR

8. Why is that such bad leadership compared to what the good shepherd does?

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Finally, John 10:14-16 adds, ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”***

9. How well does Jesus say He knows “His own?”

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10. Why is that the most necessary attribute of leadership?

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Jesus is meant to be the leader of our lives. He demonstrates His qualities by how He loves, protects, guides, forgives, gives wisdom, nourishes us, provides for us, and ultimately how He gave His life so that our relationship with our Creator could be restored. So often, people follow an earthly leader with the hopes that they will be what Jesus is. No leader, pastor, or extremely influential person will ever have the leadership qualities of Jesus Christ. There is a bit of a catch though, He does not force us to follow Him. That is one of the scariest truths in the Bible. God will let you follow whoever you choose to





## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

follow. Now, He will try to win you back, buy you back, and lead you back to Him, but He does not force His leadings onto us.

11. How do we make Jesus the leader of our lives? Have you done that?

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Disclaimer: I do not actually know that much about sheep. For a great read about shepherding I would recommend *They Smell like Sheep* by Lynn Anderson and *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by W. Phillip Keller.



## LESSON FOUR

# NOT A HIRED HAND

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## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Do you wash a rental car before you return it? Are we supposed to clean out a rental car before returning it? Most rental car companies have a cleaning fee (also called valeting fee) if a car is returned dirtier than expected. The fee is typically in the fine print and is somewhere between \$50 to \$100. Why do they have to have this fee?

Most people do not take care of rental items like they would if they owned it. This is true of rental vehicles, houses, condos, tools, and clothing. Jesus knew this when He described shepherds in John 10:11-14. He said, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”***

Shepherds are referenced 111 times in Scripture, and sheep occur 198 times. The audience knew the topic well. They knew what He meant about a ***“hired hand”*** doing just enough. His heart was not in it. He had no skin in the game. However, the ***“good shepherd”*** was a different story.

Jesus is the ***“good shepherd.”***

Psalms 23:1-4 describes the Lord, ***“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of***

***righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."***

A good shepherd meets the needs of his sheep. He directs and guides them. He provides for them. He protects them. He does not leave or forget them. He comforts them. Jesus is the ***"good shepherd."***

In Luke 15:4, Jesus took shepherding to another level, ***"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"*** Jesus is the good shepherd who cares for each of us individually. He created us and continually watches out for us.

A hired hand is in it for the paycheck. That is natural. However, instead of looking for payment, the Good Shepherd paid the debt for us. His death paid a debt we can never pay on our own.



# IDENTIFY YOURSELF

## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD • DEVOTION 2

Pat Bedell

My name is Pat Bedell. I am a husband of a wonderful woman, father of two beautiful boys, and a follower of Jesus Christ. If there was an anthem of who I am, I would want people to know this. He has helped me steer clear of unknown obstacles, kept me safe from danger, and unbeknownst, kept me on that path that He set for me before I took my first breath. How I got to this point in my life was not an easy road, but I find myself in the greatest spiritual shape in my life thanks to our Good Shepherd.

John 10:11 says, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”*** Jesus is depicted in this chapter as ***“the Good Shepherd.”*** He lays down his life for His sheep. This metaphor should not be taken lightly as being a shepherd of any kind is not an easy task. His people are the “sheep” of this world and to be quite frank, sheep need a shepherd because they are incapable of taking care of themselves. The shepherd has the experience, knowledge, and capabilities to protect his sheep from impending danger and death. Now imagine God has 7.5 billion sheep moving in all directions that need a shepherd. I remember being one of the sheep moving in dangerous directions, especially in my first couple of years of college. There are so many temptations and opportunities to succumb to the work of the devil. There were many times that I had failed God in those years but all the while He was directing me in the right direction all along. He will always work things out for my own good.

John 10:14 reiterates the Lord is ***“the Good Shepherd.”*** It says, ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”***

God knows me, and I know my God. At the moment that I realized that God knew me by name and that He will always have His best interest in my life, I could no longer deny Jesus and His everlasting gift of eternal life. The fact of the matter is, God knows me, He has always known me, and I do not know God as much as God knows me. Therefore, I need to continually and fervently learn all about God. I want to know His stories, His struggles, His accomplishments, and everything in between.

I appreciate His words, ***“I know my own and my own know me.”*** You must always seek the Lord and learn about Him. His living Word is the greatest and most reliable resource He has given us to do just that. It is in the Word and your relationship with Jesus where you will find your identity. Who you are and what you do on this earth is your legacy that your friends and family will talk about for generations. Will people know you for being a good friend or husband? Will you be remembered for running a successful business? I will say that there are so many ways a person can be remembered, but in all honesty, please remember me for being a follower of Christ, a loving husband, and a good father. Let my life celebration be not in vain, but be an opportunity for those that do not know Christ to learn and understand the Gospel so that they may find the same identity in Christ that I was so desperate and grateful to have.

# THE SHEPHERD

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## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD • DEVOTION 3

Wes McCullough

I watched a video years ago of a flock of sheep that had been covered with lights at night. Shepherds then used their sheepdogs to move the sheep. The sheep were moved back and forth, creating a scene from the classic Pong game. Next, the sheep were moved in an up and out pattern giving the appearance of exploding fireworks. My conclusion from this video is that sheep are easy to manipulate.

Sheep are not the smartest creatures. They do not have the greatest eyesight so they tend to follow the sheep in front of them. Sheep can get stuck in a bog, rescued, and then get stuck in the same way the next day. They are also prone to wandering off and getting lost and are utterly defenseless. It is humbling then to consider all the times humans are referred to as sheep in the Bible. We really need a loving, caring, thoughtful, protective leader to guide us.

How awesome is it that Jesus is the perfect complement to our problematic selves? We are prone to get lost in life but Jesus is ***“the Way”*** (John 14:6). When we find ourselves without answers we can find counsel in the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We tend to get stuck on the same problem and hung up on our individual vices but the grace of God is abundant (Lamentations 3:22-23). We are constantly being attacked by an enemy that wants to devour us, but Jesus, the Good Shepherd, sacrificed Himself so we could live (John 3:16). When we feel timid or alone we are assured that Jesus is with us, comforting us (Psalm chapter 23).

Ezekiel 34:11-16 is a wonderful passage. In this passage, we read that life will be tough. We will get lost and scared in the storms of life

#### LESSON FOUR • DEVOTION 3

but Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is coming for us. He will carry us out of the storm and into a peaceful place where we will be tended to, comforted, and fed.

Jesus is not “a” shepherd, He is “the” shepherd. I hope you know the voice of your shepherd and are always listening for it.

***“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”*** Psalm 23:1 (NIV)





# FACING THE WOLVES

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## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD • DEVOTION 4

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

I take care of our chickens. My 6-year-old daughter loves them. I make sure they have food. She makes sure that they know they are a part of our family. I give them food and water so that they give me eggs. She saves her food for them so that they know she was thinking about them.

According to Jesus Christ, the distinguishing mark of a “good shepherd” is their love for their sheep. He said this in John 10:11 when He said that a “good shepherd” is one who is willing to die to protect the sheep from harm. It defines the love that the shepherd has for the sheep. I must confess, there is not a chance that I would die to protect my chickens. Die for my kids? Of course! My chickens? Not a chance!

Now, in saying that, I am actually more like (in regards to chickens) what Jesus refers to as **“a hireling.”** He says that a “hireling” (someone who is hired to take care of sheep) is not willing to die for the sheep, but rather, **“Sees the wolf coming and (in order to protect himself) leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them”** (John 10:12 NKJV). So in striking contrast, He says that the defining mark of a “bad” shepherd (if you will) is that he **“flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep”** (John 10:13 NKJV). In other words, they are self-centered, self-concerned, self-seeking, and do not truly care about the flock. Their interest is primarily concerned with money, not with the health and safety of the sheep. Oh, how many modern-day “pastors” fall into this “hireling” camp? Unfortunately, many are self-seeking, self-centered people whose primary concern is a name and a paycheck!

Then, Jesus said, ***“I am the Good Shepherd”*** (verse 11 NKJV).

In that, He is telling us chiefly, that He loves us. In fact, He is saying that He loves us so much, that He is willing to lay down His life for us. Of course, this was not hypothetical. He would do what He says a “good” shepherd must do. Our Lord Jesus would see the wolves of sin, death, the devil, and hell coming for us. Vicious and hungry in their approach, He would not leave us alone. He would not flee. He would not let the cup pass from Him. Rather, He walked knowingly towards those “wolves” and in love for you and me, He allowed them to tear Him and kill Him. This made it that we might be free. Jesus said, ***“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”*** (John 10:17-18 NKJV).

Pause for a moment to thank this ***“Good Shepherd”*** Who defeated the wolves that would have savagely torn us apart. Stop to honor Him. Take a moment to sing His praises, to lift Him up, and to lift your voice in praise of His great work and name. He is so good.

# SALT

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## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD • DEVOTION 5

**Pastor Ben Kirkman**

The Bible is filled with wonderful illustrations to help us understand the truth of its pages. Personally, I really enjoy the lessons from farming that Jesus brings to life. Much of my life has taken place on a farm and I love it, so when Jesus starts talking farm, I pay close attention.

My wife and I now have the privilege of raising our children on a farm. We appreciate all of the life lessons that can be learned on a farm and are grateful for the opportunity the Lord has given us to raise our children in such an environment.

About four years ago, we had a baby lamb that was rejected by its mother. My two oldest daughters (6 and 8 years old at the time) begged for the opportunity to care for this lamb and try to save its life. My wife and I let our girls give it a try. They took this responsibility incredibly seriously. This involved feeding the lamb every few hours around the clock. They set an alarm for the nighttime feedings and did everything necessary to keep that lamb alive. In order to get the milk for the lamb, they had to milk our goat twice a day. The girls made custom diapers and kept the lamb in their bedroom at night. I am not sure if a lamb could have ever been loved more! We have some great memories and photos of the lamb running around the house and snuggling with our kids on the couch. Their love and commitment to this helpless lamb were incredible. My daughters proved their ability to shepherd well by their sacrificial care for their lamb. They were good shepherds. We still have a four-year-old pet sheep named Salt.

John 10:11 says, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”*** Here in the book of John, Jesus refers to Himself as the good shepherd and He tells us why He is indeed just that. In the very near future, He was going to literally lay His life down to be the propitiation (satisfactory payment) that would make a relationship possible between sinful humanity (sheep) and a holy God. You can turn to the last couple of chapters of John and read the details of the horrific death Jesus willingly died for you and me. ***“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”***

If you ever wonder if God cares for and loves you, I assure you He does. He proved it. He made his love known to you by sending Jesus, His only Son, the Good Shepherd who willingly laid down His life to give you hope of eternal life. We have a God that loves us beyond comprehension. We have a good shepherd!



# PRESCHOOL TEACHER

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## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD • DEVOTION 6

Pastor Joshua Combs

When David wrote, “*The Lord is my shepherd,*” in what we know as Psalm chapter 23, he was writing as someone who knew both the heart and duty of a shepherd and the love of the heavenly, eternal shepherd. David was not the first famous shepherd, nor the last. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses all had spent long years tending and caring for flocks. This career developed in each of them a deeper and more intimate understanding of God’s caring character. The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, is filled with cultures who would have been very familiar with the ways of shepherding sheep and goats. Jesus would use shepherds and their flocks as main characters in His teaching on multiple occasions to help illustrate profound truths about the Kingdom of God. These stories (parables) would have been relatable to the Lord’s listeners.

While we in our modern culture understand very little of actual shepherding, with some effort we can acquaint ourselves with this ancient profession and therefore enjoy some important and precious insights into the Scripture. Maybe a silly but humorous modern-day equivalent of shepherding would be a preschool teacher. Attention spans are short, snack time is crucial, bathroom breaks are essential, nap time is life or death, messes will be made, watching for wanderers is a necessity, safety is paramount, and keeping the peace between kids (or sheep - I have lost track whether we are talking about preschoolers or sheep or adults for that matter) is a constant battle. Sounds exhausting. Sounds exactly like shepherding.

Shepherding was a 24/7 gig. Like all professions, there were good shepherds and bad shepherds, caring and careless shepherds,

adoring shepherds and abusive shepherds, guarding shepherds and gorging shepherds (they would just eat the sheep).

In John chapter 10, the Apostle John records Jesus, twice, saying, ***“I am the good shepherd.”*** The audience of this important teaching includes the religious leaders who were known as ***“the shepherds of Israel.”*** (Ezekiel 34:2) These men were charged by God to shepherd His people, yet they were not good shepherds. They were (staying within the framework of the sheep and shepherd metaphor) butchering the sheep, using God’s flock for their own devious purposes and satisfaction (See Ezekiel 34:1-10 for God’s anger toward reckless shepherds). Jesus confronted them, declaring Himself as ***“THE good shepherd.”***

The heart of the Lord on multiple occasions broke, seeing ***“the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”*** (Matthew 9:36). Christ in contrast to these predatory and self-centered shepherds, details His care for His flock in John 10:27-28. The Lord declares, ***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*** This is the good, kind, leading, restoring, protective, present, comforting, nourishing, calming, and soothing Shepherd of Psalm chapter 23. He is the shepherd that ***“lays down His life for the sheep”*** (John 10:11, 15, 17).

What is so encouraging about what Jesus says is that all the truths contained in the title ***“good shepherd”*** are solidified with the words ***“I am.”*** He was, is, and always will be our good shepherd. That is what the present tense of ***“I am”*** means.

The Apostle Peter celebrates the work of Christ on the cross, writing that we, ***“Were straying like sheep, but have now returned***



## I AM: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*to the Shepherd...of [our] souls”* (1 Peter 2:25). What Christ accomplished on the cross was our rescue from the mouth of a roaring lion and restoration to the flock of ***“the good shepherd.”***



LESSON FIVE

**I AM:**  
**THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE**

PASTOR RYAN STORY



It is often said that women find the male brain hard to comprehend. One of the areas that is hard to understand for women is a man's reluctance to ask for directions. There are unwritten man laws that state that it is frowned upon within the male culture to ask for directions when not knowing where one is going. This law has been largely amended, with the influence of smartphones and GPS devices, that help a person arrive at their destination without violation of said law.

1. What type of tool do you use to help you determine where you were going?

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For three years, Jesus walked this Earth with a group of men. For three years, these men witnessed Jesus minister to those most rejected in their society. For three years, these men sat at the feet of Jesus as He taught with more authority than the religious elite. For three years, these men went on countless boat rides and witnessed miracles that defy the laws of physics. For three years, these men walked with Jesus. In John chapter 13 and 14 unbeknownst to these men, they are on their final few hours with the Christ who they have been following for three years.

John 13:36-38 says, ***"Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered him, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.' Peter said to him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.'"***

## LESSON FIVE

2. Where is it that Jesus says He is going? Why was this so hard for Peter to hear?

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For Peter, and many of the disciples, to follow Jesus for the last three years meant that they ***“left everything and followed him”*** (Luke 5:11). Peter knew he was a disciple of Jesus, and the disciple's duty was to follow the rabbi. Jesus' initial words to many of these men were in fact that, ***“follow me.”*** Peter shows he is committed to being a disciple of Jesus that not only would he always follow Jesus, but also lay down his life for Jesus.

John 14:1-4 adds, ***“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.”***

There is a lot of emotion running rampant at this moment. Jesus just told His disciples that He had to wash their feet or they could not have any part of Him. He just said someone would betray Him. Finally, He just told Peter that he would deny Him before the rooster crows.

3. What multiple encouragements does Jesus offer His disciples? Which one sticks out to you the most?

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John 14:5 continues, “**Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’**”

4. What is Thomas still fixated on knowing?

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On an amazing positive note, Thomas seems to defy the “man law” and admitted that he did not know where to go, but on the other side of the coin, he completely missed out on what Jesus was trying to teach.

Charles Spurgeon commented, “Thus we notice how they speak to him with a natural, easy familiarity; and he talks to them in full sympathy with their weakness, teaching them little by little as they are able to learn. They ask just such questions as a boy might ask of his father. Often they show their ignorance, but never do they seem timid in his presence, or ashamed to let him see how shallow and hard of understanding they are.”

Thomas was consumed with knowing where the destination was. Sadly, that was not the answer that was needed for this situation. While the disciples were focused on where they needed to go, the answer Jesus was trying to get them to understand was who was needed to get there.

5. Why is it so easy to become fixated on the wrong question?

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## LESSON FIVE

John 14:6 says, “**Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’**”

Jesus does not tell Thomas or the other disciples that He will tell them the way, rather Jesus states that He is the way. Jesus does not say that He will teach them a truth, rather that Jesus is, in fact, the truth. Finally, Jesus does not offer us the secret to a perfect life, rather Jesus states that He is, in fact, the life.

6. How does Jesus statement in John 14:6 correlate with asking for directions?

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7. Why is it we have to go through Jesus to get to “**the Father?**”

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8. What is it that Jesus prepared so we could see “**the Father?**”

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The beauty of this “**I am**” statement is that you get three for the price of one. While His disciples are trying to deduce the fact that Jesus was announcing there was a place He had to where no one else could go, His disciples were focused on a destination, not who would take them there. Life is full of ups and downs. There are seasons of great abundance and seasons of drought. Circumstances change, but our Lord does not.





## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE

If there are times when you feel lost and you do not know where you are going, remember Jesus is ***“the Way.”***

9. How can you find the way with Jesus?

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Life is confusing, overwhelming, and difficult to know what the next right step should be, remember Jesus is ***“the Truth.”***

10. Why is it so essential to know Jesus is truth?

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For some reading this, when we talk about life, Jesus, and salvation there begins to be tension in your head, heart, and soul because you know that you do not truly have the life that is only found in Jesus. Maybe you are thinking, “I am dead inside and do not know where to turn.”

Jesus is ***“the Life.”***

11. How has Jesus given you life?

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## LESSON FIVE

# LOGIC

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## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I have had a few different times when people talking about life after death have said to me, “Everyone’s view is right.” In an effort to be “tolerant,” they became irrational. I always respond, “I disagree with you, and based on your foundation that everyone is right, you have to say I too am right. Therefore, you are wrong.” Everyone can be wrong, but everyone cannot be right if they totally contradict each other.

I chuckle when I hear people say, “There are no absolutes.” I like to respond, “Absolutely.” Please realize, their statement against absolutes, is an absolute.

I believe there is an absolute. I believe there is one truth. If that sounds arrogant, then realize if I did not believe something was true, then I would not believe it. I would believe something else. That is not arrogance, it is conviction. It is the act of thinking, processing, and deciding based on facts and logic. By the way, the one who thinks I am being judgmental by thinking I am right is judging me while holding to a concept that I am wrong in doing that. Hence, they believe they are right. It is not about you or me, them or us, it is about truth.

In John 14:6, we read, ***“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*** Jesus is not “a” way; He is ***“the way.”*** This is an absolute. It is the truth. It brings life.

## LESSON FIVE • DEVOTION 1

If there was another way to get to the Father (Heaven) then God is either dumb, unloving, or both. Obviously, he is not any of these! However, if there was another way to Heaven, why would You let Your only Son die? Jesus had to die in order for our penalty to be paid. His death allows us to have freedom.

In speaking of Jesus, Acts 4:12 records, ***“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*** The Bible is consistent in saying that salvation only comes by and through Jesus.

Finally, 1 Timothy 2:5 adds, ***“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*** The only way to the Father is through the Son. Whether we believe it or not, does not change the facts. The truth remains the same.



# CONFIDENCE AND PEACE

## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE • DEVOTION 2

Patrick Bicknell

***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” John 14:6***

This ***“I am”*** saying has been one of the most influential sayings that Jesus gave in my life. This saying gives me so much confidence and peace. Jesus here is stating that there is no other way or works we can do that can get us into a relationship with the Father, but rather it all depends on Him. It is all based on what Jesus has done, what He has said, and who He is. This saying is what brings us to the fork in the road with Jesus and with the Christianity faith. Either what Jesus said is true and He truly is the only way to salvation, or He is wrong and none of what He said is true. As C.S. Lewis puts it, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

After Jesus went to the cross, died, and rose again on the third day, He proved that all of what He said is true and that He is the only way to salvation. So what does this mean for us? First off, this truth gives us confidence. Knowing that Jesus has finished the job and that He has defeated death and sin, we can surrender our entire life to Him. When we do this we are given the confidence to know that it is His power that He works through us so that we can live our lives, and further advance His Gospel. The faith we have is of infinite importance, not only for us but for everyone in the world. That is why we are called to spread the Gospel. This does not depend on our own strength but the strength of the One who rose again. We can rest in Him and have confidence knowing that it does not matter how eloquent we are, but that His power is working through us.

Secondly, we can have peace knowing that we do not need to do anything but believe and have faith in Christ to obtain salvation. Jesus makes it clear in John 14:6 that He is the only way. He solidified this when He died on the cross and resurrected three days later. He takes the burden off of ourselves because I am sure most of us know that we could never live a life worthy of the Almighty God. Rest in Him, allow His love to transform you, and know that if you come to Him, He is faithful to forgive you and to give you a new life. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28, ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”***



# DIRECTIONS

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## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE • DEVOTION 3

Philip Piasecki

My wife and I had the amazing privilege of going on a vacation to Italy a couple of years ago. My wife still has a close family in Germany, so we figured while we were in Europe this would probably be the best time to go see her family for the weekend. We booked our tickets to take the short hour and a half plane ride over to Germany from Italy. All we had to do first was take a train from our town to Pisa, and from there we would be good to go. The only issue was the train trip involved two transfers where we had to get off our train and get on a new one, everything is in Italian, and neither of us speaks or can read Italian. Still, I was confident in my navigating ability, so off we went. Everything was going great until this ancient Italian lady started telling us through hand gestures and broken English that we were going the wrong way. We heeded her advice, got off the train, only to realize she had no idea what she was talking about. We were going the right way the whole time. The ensuing hours were extremely stressful but we ended up finding the right way to go and by the grace of God we did not miss our flight to Germany.

This is just a dumb example to show how important it is to know the right way. In this Scripture, Jesus takes this idea of knowing “the right way” to a whole other level by calling Himself **“the Way.”**

In John 14:6, we read, **“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”**

The question for all of existence has been and will continue to be, “How do I get to God?” Some ask it as a question of eternity, or some

ask meaning currently on this earth. Yet, everyone is looking to get to God, and Jesus gives them their answer clear as day. He tells us that He is “the Way,” and doubles down saying that nobody will come to the Father except through Him.

Just as that day on the train there was only one way we were getting to our destination, there is only one way to God, and it is through Jesus. The sad thing is the prevailing thought in society is that there are many ways to God and many ways to eternity. Countless times I have heard people say, “As long as we all just follow our religion well, and be a good person, we are all going to make it.”

If you are reading this and are not a Christian, I hope you will understand that all other “ways” of getting to God are just poor reflections of what true Christianity really is. Every other religion misses out on the most essential part of true salvation, they miss out on Jesus. In some way or another, they do not hold Jesus in the position of ***“the way, the truth, and the life.”***

For those of you who are believers, you may have people come into your life and try and tell you that you are going the wrong way. However, if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ then you can confidently know that you are going the right way. As you are reading this, I hope you are not putting your faith in “the way” of false religions, self-help, or thinking you can just be “good enough.” My prayer is that you are confidently putting your hope in the only true ***“Way”*** that is Jesus Christ.



# ABSOLUTES

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## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE • DEVOTION 4

Pastor Jayson Combs

It is April 2020, we are smack dab in the middle of the COVID-19 quarantine. My son's school has not skipped a beat when it comes to teaching and learning. He usually works from nine in the morning until about four in the afternoon. He is only in the fourth grade. I love my son, but over the past few weeks, we have had some battles over schoolwork. Sometimes I walk away and wonder why he fights so hard over certain things.

In John 14:6, Jesus makes what I think is one of His most powerful statements, He says, ***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** Wow! Jesus fires three shots. These three shots seem like the biggest battles of our world.

What is ***"the way?"*** What is ***"the truth?"*** What is ***"the life?"*** If you turn on your TV, go to your Facebook, or check a news website, you will find battles being waged over these three things.

Is there any other way but Jesus? The world fights to tell you there is another way. It fights to say how selfish it is to think that Jesus Christ, who came to this earth some two thousand years ago and was born in a little rinky-dink town called Bethlehem, is the only way. This Jesus boldly proclaims that He is God's Son sent to this earth to save the world from sin.

Is there truth? You have heard it said, "There are no absolutes." Which is funny because it is an absolute in itself. John chapter 1 tells us Jesus came full of truth. However, the world will always oppose

Jesus and His truth. John chapter 8 says the truth is what makes you free. John chapter 14 adds that He is the truth and that truth is the only way to God.

Jesus's third bullet is life. Oh, how the world seeks "life." In the Old Testament, Moses was given everything the world had to offer, but he knew it was not life. Hebrews 11:25-26 says it like this, ***"Choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward."*** Instead of choosing Egypt, he knew that this world's pleasure only lasts for a short time. Following the Lord gives us the truth of eternal life.

The battle on this Earth will always be against the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus is either all or none of these. I contend He is the only way to the true living God.



# STELLAR DEFIANCE

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## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE • DEVOTION 5

**Pat Bedell**

As far back as I can remember, my grandfather had always had the best interests of his grandkids. I can remember for every birthday and Christmas, my siblings and I would receive a card with \$100 in it to go towards our education beyond high school. I will always remember the summer vacation after fifth grade. We spent five to six days a week together where in the morning we would cut and split wood for a couple of hours, and then we would take the fishing boat out on the lake. I learned so much from him in a short amount of time and I cherish those memories I have of him. Many of the people that knew him, remember him as a stellar person that would give the shirt off of his back to anyone in need.

He really was a stellar person, but he also struggled with alcoholism and anger issues. To be quite honest, I really do not know the details or the severity of it, but I do know that he died the day after my twenty-first birthday because his liver shut down, and the rest of his organs followed shortly thereafter. The only thing that we did to honor his life was to have a fish fry in his backyard and share stories of him and what he meant to us.

This all happened before I accepted Christ as my Savior. To this day, I often wonder, and unfortunately highly doubt, my grandfather was saved. There are so many people around us that show integrity, honor, selflessness, and humility. However, just because a person has all of those qualities does not mean that they are saved.

On a rough day, I wonder if I am actually saved with all of the wretched things I have seen and done. John 14:6 (NIV) says,

***“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*** Jesus is the only way to God. You must believe in and accept Jesus to live in eternity with God. It breaks my heart to know so many wonderful souls that do not accept Jesus into their hearts knowing what comes next for them when they leave this Earth.

Evangelizing is such a tedious and volatile practice. God called us in His last words on this Earth to do just that as He departed from the Mount of Olives. Matthew 28:19 says, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** Defiance of God’s Word comes at a price. Matthew 10:33 adds, ***“But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”***

We have all had chances to metaphorically swing at evangelizing to non-believers. I will be the first to admit that I have struck out several times and it is mentally draining to constantly be shut down and keep a positive attitude. Luckily, I have a God that is always a prayer away to boost my morale and give me the courage to keep doing so. I would like to challenge you all to find that stellar person in your life that may or may not know the Lord and spark a conversation about Jesus. Do not defy that God has called you to make disciples of all nations. Be bold in His name and speak the truth in love. Jesus is the way, He is the truth, and He is the life!



# JESUS IS EVERYTHING

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## I AM: THE WAY, TRUTH, LIFE • DEVOTION 6

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

Jesus is everything.

He is everything we need.

That is the summary of something Jesus says to one of His disciples in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. To understand what is said there, we have got to back up a little. The chapter begins with Jesus telling His disciples that He would soon be leaving them. He tells them not to be troubled and assures them that they would eventually be with Him. He says that He is going to prepare a place for them to be with Him forever. Then He says, ***“And where I go you know, and the way you know”*** (John 14:4 NKJV). Now, what Jesus meant by that was simply, “I am going into heaven and the way you will go into heaven is the same way everyone does, through physical death.”

Thomas, no doubt speaking for the rest of the guys, does not understand. None of them did. They do not understand that Jesus came to die, they cannot comprehend that He would rise from the dead, and they never expected Him to leave by ascending into Heaven. It is safe to say that they have no idea what He is talking about here. This is why, when Jesus finishes speaking, Thomas immediately pipes up and says ***“Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”*** (John 14:5 NKJV). The long and short of what Thomas said, “Jesus, we have no idea where you are going and we do not know how to get there either!” They were all thinking it, Thomas just said it.

It is to this confusion and question that Jesus says one of the most potent things that has ever been said. In verse 6 we read, ***“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’”*** (John 14:6 NKJV). Volumes have been written on this single verse, but we will do our best to summarize our Lord’s words here.

First, He says, ***“I am the Way.”*** These are words that mean, “I am the way for or to everything.” So simple, but so rich. In this Jesus is saying, “I am the way a person is saved. I am the way a person is happy. I am the way a person gets through difficulty. I am the way a person makes the right decisions. I am the way a person makes the most of their lives. I am the way a marriage is healed. I am the way a relationship is restored. I am the way sin is overcome. I am the way to know God.” Jesus is the way to every good thing. Practically speaking, this means that Jesus and His words are like north on a compass. We check our direction based on everything He has done and said. If we are off, we must adjust back to Him and His ways to get back on course.

Next, He says, I am ***“the Truth.”*** Again, words which mean, “I am the way you know what is true in life.” In this crazy world that is so full of deception, half-truths, and outright lies, it is hard to know what is really true. Yet, Jesus is always true. What He says is always true. His Word is the definition of truth. Practically, this means that we look at what He has said about any given subject and we can be sure that He is the truth concerning that thing. To use the previous illustration, it means that we actually have a “north” on the compass of life to compare everything to. Just try to imagine what life would be like if there was no absolute truth at all and you will begin to see how important these words are from our Lord Jesus.



Lastly, Jesus says, I am ***“the Life.”*** These words mean, “I am the way that a person truly lives here and the way that a person lives forever.” How do we avoid wasting our earthly lives? It is through being in a relationship with the One who made us. We find purpose, meaning, and fulfillment as we carry out His will and purposes for our lives. Life becomes beautiful as we walk with our Lord doing what He wants us to do. In this way, we become people who are truly fulfilled.

It is not just physical and earthly life that Jesus refers to here. He is also referring to the eternity that is to come for every person. As people, we have been created in the image of God and as such we are eternal beings. This means that we will exist forever. There will never be a point when you and I cease to exist! The Bible tells us that we will exist in only one of two ways. We will be either eternally dead and separated from God in Hell or eternally alive in Heaven with Him. Here, Jesus makes it clear that He is the way that a person can live forever in Heaven with the Lord. It is received through the confession of our sins, in repentance to God, and the receiving Him as Lord of our lives. It is through Jesus and His work that a person lives forever. This is why the passage goes on to say, ***“No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*** It is through Jesus that we not only come to the Father but live forever with the Lord.

Where are you at today? Would you say with Thomas, “We do not know how to get there?” Or, have you found that Jesus is ***“the way, the truth, and the life?”*** Have you come to see that He is everything?



LESSON SIX

**I AM:**  
**THE TRUE VINE**

PASTOR RYAN STORY



## I AM: THE TRUE VINE

Michigan can be the greatest state in which to live. As much as natives tend to be pessimistic about the weather at times, every person who has gazed upon the vegetation of Michigan can surely appreciate the beauty of God's creation. Around early May, many of us might be thinking the same thing, "Is there going to be another last snowfall of the year" or "is it about time to start up some yard work?" Yard work is tough work, but it is hard not to sit back and enjoy looking at the finished product.

1. What is your favorite and least favorite aspect that goes along with spring yard work?

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John 5:1-3 says, ***"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."***

2. What does Jesus say He is? What does Jesus say His Father is?

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3. What does the vine dresser do?

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Pruning is not the same as destroying. Pruning is a purposeful removal that encourages strong growth, increases flower and fruit

## LESSON SIX

production, improves overall plant health, and removes any damaged limbs, all of which give an aesthetic appeal to a tree.

This lesson Jesus is teaching should be understood through the context of our individual lives and our collective lives as God's creation. This idea that God is some wrath fueled dictator who is just obsessed with burning branches, can create a very warped view of who God is. Inasmuch, to assume that a God is "good with" people not living to the standard He desires, without showing fruit, and having no relationship, dependence, or acknowledgment of who God truly is and that it would bring no consequence, can also create major issues in our understanding of who God is.

4. Why does God prune branches in our lives?

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John 15:4-5 continues, ***"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."***

5. Who does Jesus say "you" is? Who is Jesus teaching this lesson to?

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6. What does it look like for a branch to bear fruit?

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7. How is it possible for a branch that is connected to the vine not to bear fruit?

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This Scripture displays two of the scariest mentalities within the church, and they both revolve around this idea of a branch producing fruit. Again, we are branches, and Jesus is ***“the True Vine.”*** There is so much danger of missing out on being connected to the vine. The first dangerous mentality is the branches that are not concerned with bearing fruit. The second scary mentality is a branch that believes it can grow without the vines help. A branch that does not bear fruit does not show the importance of the vine, and a branch that believes it can bear fruit alone does not understand the necessity of the vine.

8. What type of mentality do you think is scarier for a branch to have?

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John 15:6-8 adds, ***“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”***

9. What is the warning for a branch that goes along with not abiding in the vine?

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## LESSON SIX

10. What does bearing fruit prove? Why is that so essential for a branch?

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Pruning increases flower and fruit production, improves overall plant health, and removes any damaged limbs, all of which give an aesthetic appeal to a tree. Sometimes pruning can be an entire branch. This is symbolic of someone who is not truly connected to the vine but they like being associated with the beauty of what is going on around them.

Sometimes pruning can be more specific in your life. There are seasons we all go through where God will prune aspects of our lives so we may be more connected with the vine, able to grow more fruit, and that ultimately God the Father is glorified. When God prunes bad friendships, situations that are not beneficial for our spiritual growth, baggage from the past, or a toxic relationship we applaud the vinedresser. Then there are times when God prunes aspects of our lives we thought were good. It can be really hard to explain why God would prune a job, a relationship, or something that was seemingly beneficial in our walk with Jesus.

11. How much do you trust “the Vine?” Do you believe He will give you the ability to bear proper fruits?

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12. Do you trust “the Vine Dresser” to prune what He deems necessary from your life?

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That second question is hard to answer because the reality is no one likes to lose control. This is a time to examine your heart. God does not grant you the authority to tell Him what to prune. Our focus needs to be on abiding in the Vine. We need to stay connected to the Vine. It is vital to realize that the Vine is the only way we are capable of pleasing the Vine Dresser. Accepting the fact that without the Vine we would not have a life that displays any beauty is paramount.

J.C. Ryle has said, “To abide in Christ means to keep up a habit of constant close communion with Him—to be always leaning on Him, resting on Him, pouring out our hearts to Him, and using Him as our Fountain of life and strength, as our chief Companion and best Friend. To have His words abiding in us, is to keep His sayings and precepts continually before our memories and minds, and to make them the guide of our actions and the rule of our daily conduct and behavior.”

13. What are some actions you can take to be closer to the One who calls Himself “*the True Vine*?”

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## LESSON SIX



# PLUGGED IN

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## I AM: THE TRUE VINE • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

***"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*** John 15:1-5

Years ago there was a sad story that was being passed around. It was stated that there was a hospital room that was having a higher number of deaths than any of the other rooms. After weeks of testing the equipment, they found the flaw "in the system." Someone noticed that the night shift janitor was inadvertently unplugging the patient's life support system so he could plug in the floor polisher.

Snopes.com has researched and found the story to be a fable, so it has a sense of sick humor to it. Even though it was not factual, it conveys an important truth. If we are not connected to the life source, we die.

John chapter 15 reminds us of the importance of being connected to Jesus. He is the true vine and we are the branches. As long as we are "plugged in" to Him, we have power, but as soon as we become disconnected, we start to shrivel up and die.

Verse 5 closes with such a powerful phrase, ***"Apart from me you can do nothing."*** Without Jesus, we have and are nothing. The

## LESSON SIX • DEVOTION 1

crucial starting point is putting our faith in Him. By faith, and God's grace, we can be restored and given real life. This salvation is the starting point, but we need to stay connected so we can be used by Him to accomplish anything worthwhile.

Basic ways of staying connected include prayer, studying God's Word, singing praises, meeting with other believers, giving to the Lord, and serving the Lord.

Start each day making sure your spirit and His Spirit are connected. Most people regularly check the battery on their phone and make sure to recharge. Are we this focused on the Lord?

We need Jesus every day and every moment of every day. Stay connected!





# PRUNING

## I AM: THE TRUE VINE • DEVOTION 2

Pastor Pat Rowland

As I write this devotion (April 2020), Spring is upon us and I am preparing to plant my garden. This will be my fifth year gardening and I have to admit I am kind of a hack when it comes to gardening. I should probably study more and plan more for crop location, ground preparation, and fertilization. There are a few things that I can actually grow and one of those is tomatoes. What I have learned about tomatoes is the importance of supporting the vine and pruning the shoots or branches.

As Jesus was speaking to His disciples in John 15:1-5, He used an analogy or parable to illustrate the relationship of the disciples to Christ. In essence, it is a description of the relationship we are to have with Christ. Jesus said, ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”***

Jesus describes Himself as the ***“True Vine”*** and His followers as “branches,” and that we first must remain connected to Him. Any branch apart from the vine can not and will not ever produce its fruit. He also identifies the Father as the “Gardener,” or the one that prepares the ground and cares for the plant.

The purpose of a garden is the harvest. I do not plant a garden in the spring, pull weeds all summer long, cultivate the soil, and water it just to look at it or to say I have a garden. The benefit of the garden is producing a crop or as Jesus says, ***“much fruit.”*** I have had some good years and not so good years at harvest time. The good years are directly connected to my effort throughout the growing season. Jesus explains that the gardener pays close attention to his crop and through pruning increases the yield, ***“Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”***

There are two aspects to pruning. The first is the removal of deadwood or those things in our life that will never produce fruit. Did you know there are 168 hours in a week, and if we remove time for sleep (56 hours) and our work (50 hours), that leaves just 62 hours of our week or about 8 hours a day? How are you leveraging those hours to produce much fruit? The second aspect of pruning is the removal of extra branches that would produce small fruit, so you can have fewer stronger branches that produce healthy fruit. Sometimes we have to let go of “good things” for “better things.” Are there good things in your life, those you enjoy that could keep you from investing time in the better things? Deadwood trimming is easy. Cutting away a good thing for a better future not so much, and it cannot be done without looking to your gardener.

Remember the Father is your gardener and He can be trusted to help you see where trimming needs to be addressed in your life. As you abide with Jesus, listen to the pruning He wants to do in your life.



# FRUITS OF OUR LABORS

## I AM: THE TRUE VINE • DEVOTION 3

Kenny Hovis

I grew up in a small town. In many ways, we were sheltered from the activities of people that live in more populous areas. Our summers were spent taking care of our farm animals, weeding in our sizeable vegetable garden, mowing grass, and helping out in our orchard and grape vineyard. Working in the orchard and vineyard was always my favorite as I always enjoyed the “fruits” of our labors.

One of the most important aspects of owning an orchard or vineyard is the discipline of pruning. Plants that bear fruit, in most cases, have to be pruned. The trees or vines start growing new branches every year and some of these branches must be pruned. We would always make a pile of these pruned branches, and when we had them all in one pile, we would burn them as they were useless. My dad always called the branches he cut away “sucker limbs.” When I asked him for an explanation, he told me that the branch, due to its location, would more than likely not produce fruit and would just suck the life out of the other branches that were actually producing fruit.

To illustrate this to me, he took me to the grape vineyard next to our orchard. We had spent countless hours over the years in the orchard, pruning, and getting the trees producing beautiful apples, pears, and plums. The grape vineyard had not been touched for many years. The grapes it did produce were at best sub-par, and many times so unappealing to the eye that no one would even pick them, let alone eat them.

Jesus uses this whole process as an illustration in the New Testament. John 15:1-2 says, ***“I am the true vine, and my Father***

***is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.***” Jesus describes Himself as the “Vine,” and that we as the “branch” need to be bearing fruit. If we are not bearing fruit, then we are to be pruned, so that branches that are bearing fruit can produce more.

Jesus goes a little deeper into the illustration. Verses 4-5 say, ***“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*** By definition, the word ***“abide”*** means to accept or act in accordance with. Abiding with Jesus, or to accept and act in accordance with Him, allows Him to accept and act in accordance with us!

That should be enough to motivate us, but Jesus gives us a final warning. In verses 6-8, Jesus says, ***“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”*** By abiding in Jesus, we are connected to the Vine. By being connected to the Vine, we will by default produce fruit. If we are producing fruit, we will glorify God, and people will know that we belong to Him! If we are connected to the Vine, our fruit will be the same fruits of the Spirit that He displayed. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul describes what our fruit should look like, ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*** By being connected to the Vine, the Holy Spirit is given to us so that we can





## I AM: THE TRUE VINE

produce heavenly fruit. That is the fruit that will make us appealing to humanity, and will give us the opportunity to share the only way to be connected to the Vine! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is what grafts humanity into the Vine.

Our vineyard through the skilled hands of my dad, though overgrown, over time started producing beautiful Concord grapes. The pruning process removed that which was taking away from the fruit growing in a fashion the way God designed it. Your life may look like an overgrown mess right now, but allow God to remove the things in your life that distract you from abiding with Him, and before long you will be producing beautiful fruit!





# VINEDRESSER

## I AM: THE TRUE VINE • DEVOTION 4

Pastor Noble Baird

***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*** John 15:1-5

I believe that for many of us who call ourselves followers of Christ, we have heard this “I Am.” I know certainly for me, growing up at a Christian school K-12th grade, this was a passage I knew very well and heard often. Over the years, I have made two observations from this passage which I think we should all evaluate within our personal walks with Christ. First, are you truly part of the vine? To be a part of the vine, Christ, means that we truly have accepted Him as our Lord and Savior. It does not mean that we simply have said some words and believe in a higher power. This means that as Paul wrote in Romans 10:9, that we have confessed and truly believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and He is who He says He is.

The second evaluation is this, are you truly prepared to be pruned? I am not sure about you, but cutting the grass and doing landscaping is hard work! However, the work is worth the reward to see those perfect lines in the grass, or that picture-perfect tree and hedge! Here, Jesus tells us that in order for us to bear fruit, in order for us to share His Gospel in a meaningful and impactful way, we must be

willing to be pruned by our heavenly Father. This pruning is not to hurt or stop us from being effective, but to make us more effective for the cause of the Gospel of Christ.

I pray that as you continue on today and the rest of this week, you will evaluate these two questions in your life and walk with Christ. I know that at times the pruning that has taken place in my life has not been easy. Yet, as I continue to prayerfully seek the Father's will in my life and continue to stay in His Word, I am truly thankful for a Vinedresser who cares and loves me so deeply!





# THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

I AM: THE TRUE VINE • DEVOTION 5

Pastor Joshua Combs

***“But this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:8***

The timelessness of Jesus’ stories is truly extraordinary. After two thousand years, we can still understand the message of Jesus’ stories that teach, because even today we have farmers, fishermen, travelers, fathers, sons, brothers, and lost items we are searching for (usually keys and phones). In John chapter 15, Jesus once again employs an agricultural illustration. We often call these stories parables. A parable is just an understandable story that points to a much greater, heavenly truth. Jesus begins speaking about a vine. Now to most of us, vines are intrusive and require hours of frustrating, back-breaking work to uproot and clear out. Of course, vines are, for others, a welcomed addition to a well-manicured yard or garden. Even older buildings look more historical and distinguished when draped in vines. The vine that Jesus was speaking of was likely a grapevine (Cue: “I heard it through the grapevine”). The care and management of a vineyard were important and could be very profitable.

My wife and I have a grapevine in our back yard. We have surrendered to the fact that for the time being it will just be decorative. The vines drape over some metal fencing that is bent into a 30-foot long tunnel. We affectionately call it the tunnel of love. Our kids do not like the name. A couple of years ago when we finally tackled the, clearly out of control, vine, we found that there were major vines that had branches with little buds. Other branches were clearly dead, so we, like Jesus’ story, chopped them off, directing the nutrients from the main vine to the fruitful branches. Again, we do not expect a vineyard

anytime, but the maintenance of the grapevine gave us some deeper insight into Jesus' words, ***"I am the true vine."***

We are not solely dependent on our grapevine for grapes. We can just stop by the grocery store. But to people in Jesus' time, having a purely decorative, fruitless grapevine would seem, and rightfully so, absolutely pointless. The luxury of just maintaining a vine to impress the neighbors or provide some shade would be reserved for kings. Normal people would require fruit to sustain their labor.

The crux of Jesus' story is fruit. He is the vine and we, if connected to Him, will bear fruit. What exactly that fruit will be is described throughout Scripture. Paul in Galatians chapter 5 lists, what the Scripture calls, ***"The Fruit of the Spirit."*** The Spirit of God produces and causes to blossom forth in our life ***"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"*** (Galatians 5:22-23). When we are connected to Christ we will bear fruit. Jesus calls us to, ***"Bear fruit in keeping with repentance"*** (Matthew 3:8).

A fruitful life brings glory to God. He is the vine, providing nutrients (the Holy Spirit) necessary for each us to produce a spiritual harvest in our lives. We do not get the glory, but we do get the privilege of being connected to the Lord. Not only does God get the glory, while we enjoy a fruitful life, fruit is proof to ourselves and the world that we are disciples (branches) of Jesus Christ.

God's glory, the joy of living a Christ-connected life, and the opportunity to show the world what a true disciple of Jesus looks like are what Jesus was saying when He told the disciples, ***"I am the true vine."***



# ABIDE

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## I AM: THE TRUE VINE • DEVOTION 6

**Pastor Chuck Lindsey**

Fall (the season, not the activity) is something I eagerly wait for all year. I love everything about it. It is the warm days and cool nights, the uniquely fall breeze coupled with sweaters, slippers, campfires, and the decrease in mosquitos that make it one of the best times of the year to be outside. It is that magical time of year when cider mills come alive and fill up with people ignoring diets and looking to “fill up” on cider and fresh warm donuts. It is also at this time that everywhere you look, nature seems to be vying for our attention in what appears to be a two-month beauty competition. The trees in every sense, stand above it all in a staggering display. Their canopies high in the air, proudly show off their coats of many colors. However, the thing I love most is the fruit of that season. Stone fruit of any variety is a particular favorite of mine. Peaches, plums, nectarines, and apricots are at the top of my list, but of course, the God-given gift of apples cannot be ignored. Even now, I can taste the pie, warm with its fall spices.

Think about that perfect peach in your hand, do you realize how much has gone into it? The work began many months ago, and what we enjoy is the culmination of an extensive process. The farmer carefully worked the ground, breaking up the soil, removing weeds, and prepping it to receive seed. He then planted, watered, tended, pruned, and continued to protect those trees from anything that would take their vital nutrients, all in an effort to produce the peach that you and I will enjoy.

That said, it is interesting to think about the peach’s responsibility in this process. As the tree grows, it shoots forth limbs and begins to

bud. In time, these turn into flowers and eventually become a piece of fruit. It is truly a miracle of God's design! It is not overly dramatic to say that from this point on, the most important factor, is that the fruit remains connected to the tree. For we all know, that if a growing piece of fruit is severed from its tree, all growth stops. Did you catch that? Fruit cannot grow on its own, it must be connected to the tree. The tree provides what is needed for growth. To say it simply, no connection = no fruit.

Jesus said this in John chapter 15 when He said in verse 4 (NKJV), ***“Abide in me.”*** These words simply mean “stay connected to Me.” He goes on, ***“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”*** Jesus is using a picture that we understand. A branch cannot produce fruit on its own. It must be connected to the tree to produce fruit. He then tells us plainly that this is not about fruit trees at all, but about us and our growth as Christians. Verse 5 (NKJV) makes it clear, He says ***“I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.”*** Jesus is the “tree,” steady, strong, and the source and supply of all that we need. We are the “branches.” Connected to Him, the promise is that we will ***“bear much fruit.”*** However, the warning is just as sure. If we are separated from Him, we will accomplish nothing. You might think, “how does this happen?” It happens when we think we are able to bear fruit on our own. It happens when we think we are more capable than we are. In short, it happens through pride. When we think we are able, capable, and strong, we will not see our need to be connected to Him to grow. In our arrogance and independence, we are convinced that we already have what we need in ourselves. However, this is not true. Jesus says so. Hear the words, ***“without me you can do nothing.”*** In the Greek language, it is literally, “not one thing.”





## I AM: THE TRUE VINE

However, when we are convinced that we do not have what we need “inside” ourselves, then we will look to Him to supply our need and that is the thing He promises to do. Philippians 4:19 (NKJV) says, ***“And my God shall supply all of your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”***

The whole thing can all be simply summed up by saying: we grow in every way because of Him, through Him, and by Him.



LESSON SEVEN

**I AM:  
THE RESURRECTION  
AND THE LIFE**

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Jesus was very close to Lazarus and his family. In Luke chapter 10, there is the famous story of Lazarus' sister Martha welcoming Jesus and His disciples into her house. Lazarus' other sister, Mary, sits in awe at the feet of Jesus taking in the moment and Martha became overly focused on the task of hosting Jesus. After this moment we can assume that there began an amazing friendship. John 11:5 even states, ***"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."*** There are only a handful of people that are mentioned by name in the Bible to have been close to Jesus, and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus go down for eternity as those who were close to Jesus and those whom Jesus loved. Sadly, shortly after this meeting, John chapter 11 tells us that Lazarus would lose his life to an illness.

If Charles Dickens had an opportunity to paraphrase John chapter 11, he might start with, "Lazarus was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that."

John 11:5-7 says, ***"Now 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. Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.'"***

1. Why did Jesus stay ***"two days longer in the place where He was?"***

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2. How would you feel if you knew a person could help relieve grief but decided to withhold or postpone aid?

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## LESSON SEVEN

John 11:17-20 adds, ***“Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.”***

3. What were Mary and Martha's reactions to hearing Jesus had come to Bethany?

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4. What would your reactions be if you were in their shoes?

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John 11:21-24 continues, ***“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’”***

5. What would be harder to comprehend, Jesus not showing up at all to help, or Jesus showing up too late to help?

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6. Are Jesus and Martha referring to the same rising?

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Theological truths do not always bring comfort. They bring truth, insight, and understanding, but even the deepest of theological truths may not act as a remedy for what the heart is needing at that time. Christian funerals are still sad despite knowing that a loved one might be with Jesus. Hard times are still difficult to navigate through despite knowing that “God is our victory.” While Martha is hanging onto truth at this moment, she tipped her hand and showed where her true emotions were at by saying, ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”***

Charles Spurgeon pointed out, “It is clear that she (Martha) derived very little consolation from the fact of a distant and general resurrection: she needed resurrection and life to come nearer home, and to become more a present fact to her.”

7. What brings the most comfort to you during difficult times?

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John 11:25-27 says, ***“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.’”***

8. On a more personal level, why would Jesus ask Martha if she believed He was ***“the Resurrection and the Life?”***

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## LESSON SEVEN

John 11:28-35 adds, ***“When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, ‘The Teacher is here and is calling for you.’ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept.”***

9. Why do you think Jesus was so moved by Mary's response to this whole situation?

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Finally, John 11:38-44 says, ***“Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with***



*linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'*"

10. Why did Jesus resurrect Lazarus from the dead?

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11. At the moment Lazarus rose from the dead, what do you think was going through Martha's head?

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Martha was conflicted with the emotions of believing in Jesus and the reality of the situation. For four days, Mary and Martha grieved their brother's death, and Jesus seemingly was nowhere to be found. For four days, grief and bitterness consumed these sisters. Yet, the key detail in this whole event that can easily be missed is, ***"Now 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"*** (John 11:5-6). Jesus' actions are perfectly plotted and perfect in timing. Through His actions, Jesus shows us that His delays are not always denials. His delays are purposeful so in the delay, there would be greater glory given to God.

12. Why is it so hard for us to completely trust in God's plan?

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## LESSON SEVEN

13. If God loves you enough to die on a cross, what situation in your life do you think God is not handling properly?

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**I AM: THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**



## LESSON SEVEN



# ABUNDANT

## I AM: RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE • DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Happy Easter! I like the greeting, “He has risen!” The response warms my heart, “He has risen indeed!” This is the most important day of the year. It is the day of ultimate proof that Jesus is God. He gave many other proofs, but this is the granddaddy of them all. He knocked out death. He is alive.

John 11:25 says, ***“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.’”*** Jesus called it. He said, “I am the resurrection; I am life.” He called it and then He did it.

By being the resurrection and the life, Jesus has the power over death. He has two offers for us.

First, He offers us eternal life. John 3:16 says, ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*** Everyone will either perish or experience eternal life. Jesus is the difference. Romans 6:23 says, ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** In case you missed it, eternal life is a ***“free gift”*** by God’s grace through faith in Him.

Second, He offers us abundant life, life to the full. In John 10:10, Jesus says, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*** God offers us life to the full. It is a life with purpose, value, and meaning. He speaks into our lives and uses us to speak into other lives. He allows us to see Him active in the world and we are able to be a part of it.

## LESSON SEVEN • DEVOTION 1

Because of Him, we can make a difference in the world.

Jesus is alive. This fact should affect how we think, talk, and act. It should permeate every aspect of our lives. We should overflow with grace, mercy, love, and encouragement. Remember, you do not have to do it alone. He is with us and He will never leave or forsake us. This should bring peace, confidence, and courage.

Thank you, Jesus, my Savior.





# WIN, WIN!

## I AM: RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE • DEVOTION 2

John Rigg

Celebrating birthdays in our family has always been something I look forward to all throughout the year. For it seems that birthday parties have a way of resetting our family as we stop our normal routines, gather together, give gifts, and remember just how much we mean to each other. Of course, there is always a cake. It is one that is meticulously decorated and topped with candles as it awaits the traditional singing of the “*Happy Birthday*” song. Once the candles are blown out, the cake is then cut, and each slice placed on a plate ready to be paired with a flavor of ice cream. It is rare that we have only one kind of ice cream at these parties and watching everyone decide which one they want can be quite entertaining! For me, choosing which flavor I will have is not difficult, for I have never met a bowl of ice cream I did not like. I just have to remind myself that regardless of the flavor, I am getting ice cream and that is a “Win, Win” situation for me.

In a strange kind of way, I think of the following “I Am” statement by Jesus as a “Win, Win” situation for all of us as well. John 11:25–26 (NKJV) says, ***“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”***

Jesus, when making this statement, is speaking to Martha whose brother Lazarus had become sick and died. Martha obviously believes that if Jesus would have arrived sooner Lazarus would not have died, as recorded in her conversation with Him just moments before. John 11:21-24 (NKJV) says, ***“Now Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You***

***had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'"***

Martha understood that "in the future" Lazarus would be resurrected, but her choice would be that Lazarus would be there alive and with them "in the present."

By making the "I Am" statement, Jesus is saying, "I am the resurrection" (future life) and "I am the life" (present life).

Jesus states:

"I am both!"

"Live or die, you will be with Me!"

"I am a 'Win, Win' situation!"

When mankind disobeyed God and brought sin into the world, death came with it. Both present and future death became alive (Genesis 2:16-17). God has provided freedom from the judgment of present and future death through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

You may view Jesus as the resurrection.

You may view Jesus as the life.

Either way, you are with Him.

That is a "Win, Win!"

# REASSURANCE AND COMFORT

I AM: RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE • DEVOTION 3

James Mann

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”* John 11:25-26

What this verse does, is it gives us reassurance and comfort. In this passage of Scripture, we see Jesus comforting Martha after the death of Lazarus. One of the hardest things to deal with in our lives on earth is the death of someone we love. It is a feeling that never goes away. We can be going about our day just fine, and something sparks a memory that makes it hard to breathe. For me, that is my grandpa. He was my best friend. Before he passed away, he gave me an old Yukon. Ten years later, I still find myself sitting in that Yukon, and I cannot breathe. I instantly feel the tears well up and the desire to have him in my life still comes rushing back. The desire to have him tell me that he is proud of me and that he loves me one more time takes over. The feeling of sadness knowing my future family will never know that amazing man hurts me. These are the feelings that many of us have at the loss of a loved one. These are probably some of the same feelings Martha had at the loss of her brother.

Luckily, Jesus gave Martha a promise, and that promise holds true to us as well. Jesus tells us that He is the **“Resurrection and the Life.”** While this might sound confusing, that is why context is crucial because He goes on to explain Himself. By believing in Him, our death is not our final frontier. Instead, through death, we find life. Through believing in Him and dying, we enter into our complete relationship with Him. This should give us a sense of reassurance.

When we take our last breath here, we take our first one in eternity. We just have to believe in Him. This should build a sense of urgency to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and lead nonbelievers to Him.

This is where I found my comfort upon my grandpa's death. I believe that my grandpa left this earthly world and entered into Heaven with his creator. That feeling that he is in a place of perfection gives me a sense of peace. This does not mean that I still do not sit in that Yukon and cry or come across one of his old business cards and sit there holding it just thinking about him for endless amounts of time. What it does mean though, is that I know where he is, and I know where I will be someday because I believe in Him. The same goes for you if you believe.





# LIFE OF JOY

## I AM: RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE • DEVOTION 4

Philip Piasecki

Expectations are a tough thing. I know we all have had a situation in a job, family relationship, or friendship where we expected something from them and in our eyes, they let us down. This is the situation we find Martha in with Jesus when it comes to her sick brother Lazarus. Martha expected Jesus to heal her brother. When Jesus did not show up on her timing, her expectations led to disappointment. However, Jesus knew it was more important for Him to wait so that a greater truth could be taught to everyone who was there because of Lazarus' death.

John 11:21-26 says, ***“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”***

Jesus uses this moment to teach the crowd an incredible spiritual truth. It is not long from this moment that Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead, fully displaying the power that He has over death. Showing the crowd this miracle solidified what He had told them when He said, ***“I am the resurrection and the life.”*** What does that actually practically mean to us in our walk with Christ day to day? Jesus is ***“the Life.”*** He is the life inside our veins that keeps us moving day by day. Many Christians have wrong expectations about their walk with Christ that it should be easy and breezy each and

every day. This is not what Scripture teaches, what it does teach is that even through the troubles of this life, we can still live a joy-filled life because of our belief in the One who is ***“the resurrection and the life.”***

In 1 Peter 1:8-9, we read, ***“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”***

Christians should be the most joy-filled people in the world, unfortunately, most of the time we are some of the most miserable. We tend to be constantly focusing on our failures and our shortcomings instead of focusing on who Jesus is and the salvation of our souls. Peter says in his first letter that we should rejoice with joy that is inexpressible! That is how you can have an incredible life here on this Earth, by being filled with the joy of Christ that comes from understanding that He is our resurrection and our life!

One of the most powerful witnesses to our fallen world is a Christian who still rejoices through their darkest trials. Jesus is not just our life for eternity, He is our life right now on this Earth. Honor God through your life, and enjoy the life that the Lord has given you. Use the tools He has given you to share His gospel, and rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible for the ways that He has blessed you and your family. I promise your whole countenance will be lifted when you find yourself recognizing that the Lord is our life. We were dead, and yet now we are alive through Him. Live joyfully in the Lord to show the world this incredible truth.

# THE WHY OF DEATH

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## I AM: RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE • DEVOTION 5

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

Death surrounds us. Try as we might ignore it, it is always there staring us in the face with a piercing and unbroken gaze. Everywhere we turn, we are confronted with its reality. However, there are times in life, when we are forced to deal with it head-on. There are times when we must stare back into its cold eyes. The loss of a loved one, the diagnosis we never expected, or the reality of another crisis in our world are examples of death interrupting life. As people, we do not deal with it well. I guess this makes sense since we were not originally designed to die. Death is the tragic and painful result of sin coming into our world. Since our ancestors took that fateful bite into the fruit we have lived in a universal dichotomy of dying every day that we live. Yet, it is when we confront death, that we must have answers.

This is powerfully illustrated in Martha's encounter with Jesus in John chapter 11. Her brother had just died and with eyes full of tears she stares back into death's face and screams, "Why?" Then she turns to Jesus and asks the same. Maybe you have asked this question? She asks, "Why Lord, why weren't You here? You could have stopped this! You are stronger. You could have stopped death." In her voice, you can hear the searing pain of someone who was not ready. Are we ever really ready? Death had interrupted life. However, it is Jesus' reply to her that changes everything!

Initially, He simply says, "***Your brother will rise again***" (verse 23 NKJV). This is a reminder, that her brother was not gone forever. We as people are eternal. Jesus was reminding her (and us) that this life is not all there is, that there is life after we die here and that she

would see her brother again. Martha knew this. Though, in her pain and for a moment, she may have forgotten these great truths. His words brought her back and she replied, ***“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection (of the dead) at the last day”*** (verse 24 NKJV). Yet, it is what Jesus says next that tells us everything we need to hear concerning death.

He says to her, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** (verses 25-26 NKJV). To understand what Jesus is saying we must understand that according to God, death is not when our bodies stop functioning and we breathe our last. That is only physical and temporal death. According to God, real death is separation from Him. It is death spiritually and eternally. When we understand this, then we understand how Jesus can say, ***“Though he may die, he shall live and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”*** We all die physically and temporally, but we do not have to die spiritually and eternally. In fact, the promise that Jesus makes to Martha and to us is that by believing in Him we can “live” after we have died. You could say, we will not die after we die. The promise is that we will not be separated from Him after we pass from this life but rather, will live with Him forever! That is the blessed assurance that the King of Heaven makes to any and all that would turn to Him to be saved.

Therefore, it ends with a question. A question that is asked to every single person who has ever lived. ***“Do you believe this?”*** Martha answers in verse 27, ***“Yes, Lord. I believe that You are the Christ (Savior), the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*** How about you?





# FROM DEATH TO LIFE

## I AM: RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE • DEVOTION 6

Pastor Caleb Combs

“From death to life” is some of the most powerful words a person can hear. Death is the worst thing in our world, and the Bible tells us it came through sin. I have had the privilege of doing many funerals and memorials, all of which are extremely difficult because death really just sucks. However, there is a big difference in the hope one has when a believer dies than when a non-believer dies. I love to proudly proclaim at a believer’s funeral, “Heaven is a real place for real people, and (the person who has died) is alive and well, walking the streets of gold.” In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul tells us to comfort one another with these thoughts, and if I can bring comfort to someone at a funeral, that is a win. Hopefully, I can also show someone that Heaven is attainable only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In John chapter 11, we see a funeral for Lazarus. His sisters Mary and Martha along with the whole town are mourning his death. These three siblings were close to Jesus, so much so that in verse 35 we see Jesus weeping for their hurt seeing and feeling the pain that death inflicts on humanity. Even knowing that in just a few minutes He would be raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus still wept.

Jesus makes a statement to Martha in verses 25 and 26 saying, ***“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”*** Jesus is not only proclaiming this truth to Martha, but also to the world and the enemy that He has full authority given to Him and only through Him can someone find life. John 14:6 compliments this

exact statement ***“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”***

Death is appointed to all human beings, but Jesus brings hope into the world. We have a chance to go from death to life, and only through His resurrection can we be resurrected. The world has tried to come up with other ways or other thoughts on death. People run from reincarnation to the do good and you can earn your way to heaven thoughts, but none of these are truth. Jesus said all the way back in Exodus, “I am.” I Am means authority. I Am means truth. I Am the resurrection means that Jesus identifies as the way, and the only way, to go from death to life.

Death does not have to sting. We can celebrate the home-going of a child of God. In Philippians, the Apostle Paul says “Death is gain,” meaning that we should long to go from death to life. When we die as children of God, covered by the blood of Jesus, we awake to life eternal. Jesus was clearly explaining to Martha that He was in control of who dies and who lives, not this broken system of this world. Death can truly be devastating. I hate it and will always hate it. The reason we experience it is sin, but Romans 6:23 gives us hope in the darkness. Romans 6:23 says, ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** The “I am” is that gift and I Am (Jesus) has authority over death and is our way from death to life.

**I AM: THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**







# OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

## REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “we don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

## GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

## GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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