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# I.D.

2011 junior youth  
week of prayer



**2011 Junior Youth Week of Prayer**

**MY**

**IDENTITY**

**IN CHRIST**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## READ THIS FIRST

### EDITORIAL/INTRODUCTION

AND JESUS SAID ...

**11** 1ST SABBATH : *“I am the Light of the World”*

**19** SUNDAY : *“I am the Door”*

**27** MONDAY : *“I am the The Bread of Life”*

**36** TUESDAY : *“I am the Good Shepherd”*

**44** WEDNESDAY : *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”*

**53** THURSDAY : *“I am the True Vine*

**62** FRIDAY : *“I am the Resurrection and the Life”*

**70** 2<sup>ND</sup> SABBATH : *Jesus, the Great “I Am”*

**80** ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*The official date for the*  
***Youth Week of Prayer***

*is*

**MARCH 19-26, 2011**

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## GENERAL LEADERSHIP SUGGESTIONS

These are some suggestions for those who will work to put on this Week of Prayer, especially for the speakers. The lessons are each arranged in three parts, so that three different people can present each part, probably in about ten minutes. But if one person wants to do all three, you can do that, too.

**PLAN AHEAD.** The most important thing you can do is read over the part you are supposed to do several times in advance, until you become familiar with it. PLEASE DO NOT READ! Most people find it boring to sit and listen to someone read. Study your part, and keep it in front of you when you speak. Refer to it when you need to. Make lots of eye contact, move around, speak with expression, and make it yours.

**WHAT “I” MEANS.** “I”, in these lessons, is you, the speaker. The writer didn’t use “I” much, because she’s not you, and she doesn’t know what you might say. If there is an “I” statement that doesn’t fit you, change it so it does. If you have a personal experience or insight that works better than one given, use it. You are the speaker. You never know, God may be preparing you to be a famous preacher someday! Be humorous. Not silly, but funny. People remember things they laugh about, and laughing together makes them feel a sense of belonging and family.

**MUSIC.** Someone should pick out songs that you all like, and which fit the topic of each evening. Where possible, involve your youth choir; if your church/school or group does not have a choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Music can make a difference and help to set the tone to any service.

**CONSECRATION SERVICE.** Plan a consecration/ dedication service at the end of the week.

**NAMES.** Another minor detail: If the names of people in the stories are the same as someone in your audience, it would be a good idea to change them. These are “composite stories,” and the names can be changed to anything you like. Just keep them diverse and international, or make them appropriate for where you are.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.** There are some discussion questions at the end of each section. These can be used in the whole group if it isn't too big, but it's best if the group is divided into small groups of three to eight people for the discussions. Or they can be used as individual thought questions, maybe for writing in a journal, or something like that.

**SCRIPTURE READINGS.** Within each presentation there are scripture passages. The speaker can read them, especially if you are in a large room, like an assembly hall, but it is nice and makes everybody feel more a part of things if you can call on other people to read the texts, or take turns, a verse or two at a time, for longer passages. All passages used here are taken from the New International Version.

You may also want to make posters of the **eight Life Identity Principles** and hang the right one each night.

**DAY 1: Life Identity Principle #1.** Because Jesus is the Light of the world, I can be a candle, lighting others' paths to Him.

**DAY 2: Life Identity Principle #2.** Because Jesus is my Door, I can be a doorkeeper, welcoming others into God's family.

**DAY 3: Life Identity Principle #3.** Because Jesus is the Bread of life, I can be a grain of wheat, giving myself to feed others His Word.

**DAY 4: Life Identity Principle #4.** Because Jesus is my Shepherd, I can be a lamb that follows faithfully, and also an under-shepherd, helping to care for other lambs.

**DAY 5: Life Identity Principle #5.** Because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I can walk in His Way, hold up His Truth, and share an abundant, full life with those around me.

**DAY 6: Life Identity Principle #6.** Because Jesus is the True Vine, I can be a blessed branch, drawing my nourishment from Him and glorifying God with much fruit.

**DAY 7: Life Identity Principle #7.** Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, I can rejoice in His newness of life now and trust Him for life eternal.

**DAY 8: Life Identity Principle #8.** Because Jesus is, was, and always will be, because He lived out a True and Complete Life here on earth, I can be my true and complete self in Him.



**SCRIBE.** It is really good if you can have a person to be a scribe (maybe a different one each night) and keep notes on a white board at the front. Some of the lessons are better suited to this than others, but whenever you can include short comments or suggestions from the audience, that's always helpful.

**SOME REALLY COOL IDEAS.** Activities to go along with this series will make it even more interesting. You and your friends will be able to think of others when you read the lessons. Here is one possibility for each lesson:

- 1. Lesson 1.** [*You will need adults' permission and help for this activity.*]  
Get small candles and paper candle holders to protect your hands from wax. Have a large candle up front that is already lit, which represents Jesus, the Light of the World. Turn off the overhead lights. Choose one person (one who is willing to sing alone) to take his or her candle and light it at the big candle, singing "This little light of mine." This person lights two people's candles, and they join in singing. They each light two more, who join in singing. Soon everyone will have a light and be singing. The whole room will light up, not only with physical light, but with the light of God, as people sing together to His glory.
- 2. Lesson 2.** Use a real door or an imaginary one to role play some of the ways doors are used, both positively and negatively. For example, one person could be knocking, and another could say, "No! You can't come in here! You aren't \_\_\_\_\_ enough!" Then one person could knock and another could open the door and say, "Welcome! Come in! I'm so glad to see you!"
- 3. Lesson 3.** Bring some really good, homemade bread to share with everyone. Talk about what had to happen for you to have this good bread.
- 4. Lesson 4.** Find a video clip online of a shepherd and sheep to watch and then discuss.
- 5. Lesson 5.** Use a concordance to find all the places in Proverbs that say "in the way." You'll be amazed! You could make posters or lists with what you find, or act them out.
- 6. Lesson 6.** Bring celery or Queen Anne's Lace blossoms and put them in water that has food coloring in it. Talk about which parts of the plant draw up the colored water, and how that relates to the lesson.
- 7. Lesson 7.** Write stories or poems or draw pictures of what you think it might be like in the New Earth.
- 8. Lesson 8.** Make a poster of all the "I Am" statements, like the one the kids in the story make.

**HELPFUL RESOURCE**

A helpful guide is the book, *Hey Youth! Preach The Word* by James L. Black, Sr., Youth Director of the North American Division. It is available from AdventSource at <http://www.adventsource.org/as20/product.aspx?ID=35060>

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# DAY 1

## Jesus said, “*I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.*”

### Part One

Luana sat by herself under a tree outside her school. It was a beautiful day, but Luana was frowning. Her friend Peter came by. “What’s the matter? You look like you’re about to cry or something!”

“I thought it would be better,” Luana said.

“What would be better?”

“After we were baptized last month, Pastor Jake said being down in the water represented being buried with Jesus in His death, and then coming up was being raised up with Him. He said we were sitting in the heavenly places with Jesus. Remember?”

Jake sat down and pulled up a piece of grass to play with. “I remember. So?”

“Well, if we are sitting with Jesus in heavenly places, shouldn’t it be easier to be good?” Luana asked. “I mean, I didn’t think we’d be perfect or anything. But I don’t think I’m any different at all! Sometimes I don’t even know what I’m supposed to do or say. And if I do know, I can’t do it!”

“Well, sure, but don’t you remember when Ms. Keene showed us in Bible class that Paul said that same thing? In Romans somewhere, I think.”

“Yeah, but I thought that was before he *really* gave his heart to Jesus. I mean, I’ve always loved Jesus, since I was a little kid. Haven’t you?”

“Yeah...”

“But now we’ve made a real *choice* to follow, once and for all, right? So what’s the difference being baptized if you can’t even be a better person?”

“I’m not so sure I even know what a ‘better person’ is,” Peter admitted. “You know, there’s obvious stuff, like being nice even when people aren’t nice to you, and don’t cheat on tests.”

“Do your chores and your homework,” added Luana.

“Yeah.” Peter shrugged and threw the mangled grass blade down. “But there’s got to be more to it than that.”

“I thought I’d feel more sure of myself,” said Luana.

“Half the time I don’t even think I know *who* I really am,” said Peter.

Do you ever get bothered by these kinds of questions?

I know I do. I’ll bet everybody does, even older people, sometimes. If somebody asks, “Who are you?” what do you say?

The most obvious answer, of course, is your name. But that’s just what you’re called. It doesn’t really tell anyone who you are inside.

What are some other answers? Which of these possibilities would you say?

“I’m a girl.”

“I’m a boy.”

“I’m so-and-so’s son or daughter.”

“I’m a sister or a brother.”

“I’m a certain race.”

“I’m from a certain state.”

“I’m a Christian.”

“I’m a student in the such-and-such grade.”

“I’m a Seventh-day Adventist.”

Do you ever answer by what you do?

“I’m an artist.”

“I’m a scientific type.”

“I’m a computer geek.”

“I’m an athlete.”

Of course we all know the best answer is, “I’m a child of God,” but what does that really mean? Does it mean we look a certain way or behave a certain way? Can you always tell for sure if someone is living as a child of God, just by looking at them?

Once, long ago, so long ago we can’t even imagine it, the Son of God came to earth, and He lived as a kid, just like us. As He grew and learned, Jesus must have had questions like this, too. He could say, “I’m Mary’s son, I’m Joseph’s son (kind of), I’m a Jew, I’m from Nazareth, I’m a woodworker.”

But one of the ways we know who we are is the stories our parents and grandparents tell us. Just imagine the ones Jesus heard! “When you were a little baby, angels sang over you, and one of them told me you were going to save your people from their sins!” I hate to think how I’d feel if my mom told me that!

How did Jesus know who He really was? That’s the question we’re going to look at during this Week of Prayer. Not just, what did His mom tell Him, or what did He learn when He studied the prophecies, but how did He *really know*, deep inside, who He was and what He was sent to do? If we look at those questions and some of the ways He answered them, maybe we can find out some ways we can answer, too. Maybe we’ll learn some things about who we really, truly are on the inside.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Who are you? No, who are you *really*?
2. Do you ever wonder about the things Luana and Peter wonder about?
3. If you are already baptized, have you found that it makes it easier to be good? If you are not yet baptized, do you hope that it will help you be a better Christian when you are? Explain your answers.

## **Part Two**

In the Gospel of John, there are seven famous “I Am” statements that Jesus made. We will study all seven of them this week, and then we’ll spend some time on what that whole “I Am” thing is about. It’s more than you might think!

The first “I Am” statement we want to look at is, “I Am the light of the world.”

The first time in this gospel that Jesus is called “the Light” comes in the very first chapter. The gospel was written by John the Beloved, the youngest of Jesus’ twelve apostles. He is most famous for calling Jesus the Word here, but he also calls Him the Light. Read verses 4 and 5 with me: “*In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*” So it’s Jesus’ life itself that is the light. Just by existing, Jesus (and the Father and the Holy Spirit) bring light into the universe.

Then in verse 9, John calls Jesus “the true light,” who gives light to everyone. To everyone! Not that everyone understands or accepts it. But that’s the basic promise. Jesus comes into the world to live as a human being and to bring light to *everyone*. His life is the light, so just by being here, He’s going to bring this light.

Now let’s look at where Jesus actually makes the statement claiming to be the light. Turn with me in your Bibles to John 8:12.

*[Read, or have someone read.] “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I Am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

This is a very familiar saying, but a lot of people don’t realize what was happening when Jesus said it. It’s kind of surprising. What’s the story you see right before this text in your Bibles? It’s the story of the woman who was caught in adultery. The leaders wanted to stone her, but Jesus forgave her, and told her to “Go and stop sinning.”

Easy to say! That’s like what Luana and Peter were talking about. Why isn’t it easier to obey once we give our hearts to Jesus? Most of the time when this story is told, people stop right there. “I forgive you, now go and be good!” But Jesus didn’t stop there.

*[Read or have someone read verse 12 again.]*

Isn’t that a strange thing to say right here? It seems like a complete change of subject! “I Am” the light of the world.” What does it have to do with “go and stop sinning”?

Don’t you think the very first thing somebody needs, before they do anything at all, is light to see by? You can hardly even get dressed or eat without at least a little light. So how can we know how to live as children of God if we don’t have spiritual light to see by?

That woman who committed adultery probably didn’t do it because she just wanted to be bad. She might not have even done it because she was only interested in her own pleasure and didn’t care about what was right or wrong. Most likely, she did it because what she most wanted is the same thing every single human being is born wanting, and that’s to feel loved. People try all kinds of things to make themselves feel good and worthwhile and loved, and one really common one is to hang out with somebody who tells you nice things and compliments you, and so you pretend they really love you when in your heart you know they don’t care a thing about you. Have you ever done that? It feels good for a little while, but not for long, right?

Jesus was saying to this lonely woman, “Follow Me, and you’ll live in the true light of My love. I know who you *really truly* are, down deep inside, and I love you! I don’t love you for what I can get out of you, or because I want to control you. I love you because you are you and you are Mine. “I Am the light of this whole world. Come follow Me!”

How did Jesus know this about Himself? Yes, He was God in human flesh and knew all kinds of things, but the Bible says He learned, and we know that Mary told Him the stories about His birth and the announcements the angels made. We also know that when He went to the temple when He was twelve (just think—about like a sixth grader!), He watched the sacrifices and began to understand fully what His mission was in this world. We know He spent a lot of time studying the scrolls of the Old Testament, and praying all by Himself out in the fields with His heavenly Father. He saw that in the Bible, God was the Light Bringer, and promised even as early as to Adam and Eve that He would send a Redeemer to bring back the light that sin had dimmed. Jesus learned that He was that Redeemer.

Most of all, Jesus knew that the true light of the world is love. He knew what perfect love was like, in heaven with His Father and the Spirit, and He knew how messed up our ideas of love are. He knew people tend to either go around thinking they’re too bad for God to love, or that God *owes* them love, because they’re more lovable than everybody else. Jesus came to show us what God’s love is like. He demonstrated it every day of His life. He touched people others wouldn’t touch, healed the ones nobody thought deserved it, forgave people for all kinds of things, talked with them, laughed with them, went to their weddings and parties... He loved them! And they knew it.

Then He said, “Follow Me. Live in the light. God loves you—pass it on!”

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How do you think the woman felt when Jesus forgave her? Why? Have you ever felt that way?
2. Do you agree that love is the light of the world? Why is that so important? Why do we lose track of it so easily?

## Part Three

So far, there haven't really been any surprises. We all know Jesus is the Light of the world, and we all probably agree that love is another name for that light. But here is where it gets really unexpected.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said an astonishing thing. It's not found in John, but in Matthew. Turn to Matthew 5:14-18.

*[Read or have someone read.]*

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

What? *Who* is the light of the world? Me? You're kidding, right?

Luana and Peter would be really surprised if somebody walked up to them while they were sitting there feeling like they can't be good enough, and said, "Hey, guys, you are the light of the world!"

But that's what Jesus said. Not only did He say to all the thousands of listeners that were there that day, "*You* are the light of the world," He went on to say that they shouldn't try to hide their lights under bowls or bushels. They should put them up on lamp stands and let their lights shine on everyone around. Doesn't that seem kind of like bragging? "Hey, look at me, I'm the light of the world!" Do you think that's what Jesus meant?

It's easy to know what He meant if you just keep reading. He didn't say, "Let people see your good deeds and praise you." He said, "Let them see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven!"

It's kind of like the sun and the moon. The sun is burning and producing huge amounts of light and heat, all by itself. Nobody keeps fueling it or relighting it. God set it up and started it burning, and there it is, burning ever since. God is like that light. He produces light and love and goodness just by being there.

But the moon is just a big, round rock. It doesn't have any source of heat or light itself. So it can't shine or warm anybody up, and if it could sit under a tree outside of school, it might get pretty depressed and think it was a worthless hunk of rock! But in fact, when the sun shines on it, the moon glows in our sky like a jewel. On a full moon night, there is enough reflected light to cast shadows on the ground. Back before there was artificial light, people who had to travel long distances would pay attention to the phase of the moon so they would have light to travel by.



And would you believe that in the sunshine, the moon's temperature can get up to 123 degrees Celsius or 253 degrees Fahrenheit? As soon as it rotates away from the sun, on the dark side, it can drop down to as low as -233 C or -387 F at the poles, where it gets the least solar heating (Source: wiki.answers.com). That's a big difference!

So once we accept that Jesus is the Light of the world, several things happen. First, we tell Him, yes, please, we do want Him to bring His light and life and love into our lives. Then we spend time every day basking in His presence through Bible study and prayer and singing. Next we practice reflecting His love and light onto everyone around us.

We look to see what God's light does. It warms people up, it shines, brightens, and cheers all around. So if we want to know if we're acting like the light, we ask, do people feel brightened and cheered when they're around us? We watch for others who make us feel warmed and loved, too, and spend time in their presence, because one of the most important ways we learn God's work is from each other.

We ask ourselves questions, as Ellen White suggests:

*Do you realize that you are the light of the world? Do you, in your words and deportment [behavior] at home, leave a bright track heavenward? What is it to be the light of the world?--It is to have God for your guide, to have the companionship of holy angels, and to reflect to others the light that shines upon you from above; but if you fail to exercise Christian courtesy, forbearance, and love in your families, God and holy angels are grieved away, and instead of being the light of the world, you are bodies of darkness. (Australasian Union Conference Record; November 1, 1904 par. 8)*

But it's also possible to look too hard at ourselves. If we spend too much time examining ourselves and our actions, we'll be like the moon rotating away from the sun and looking at ourselves instead of Jesus. That's a quick way to get really cold and dark! When we keep our eyes on Jesus, walking beside Him, looking up at His face, soaking up His love, then that love will reflect on everybody else. Others will notice that we are bright and cheerful, and they'll feel better about themselves. Maybe they'll ask why we're so happy, and we can say, "Because Jesus loves me so much and I just can't help being happy about it! And He loves you, too, you know."

We are not and could never be a source of light to the world, any more than the moon could be a source of light, heat, or power to earth. But if we let Jesus shine His light and love into our lives, we will be lamps to His glory, and when others see us, they will learn to praise God, too.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Share some ways God has shone light and love into your life lately.
2. Share a way that someone else in your class has reflected God's light and love into your life this week.

**Life Identity Principle #1.**

*Because Jesus is the Light of the world, I can be a candle, lighting others' paths to Him.*

---

## DAY 2

# Jesus said, “*I AM THE DOOR.*”

### Part One

Doors were on Peter’s mind all day. First, his mom asked him to hold the door for her while she carried some flowers to the car for his grandmother. Then he opened and shut the trunk for her, too. Then they went to visit Grandma and had to wait while the nurse keyed in the security code that would keep confused old people from wandering out into the road.

Back home that evening, his older sister slammed her door in his face, when all he wanted was to borrow her laptop. It reminded him of when he was a kid and had a “fort” in the woods where nobody was allowed except his own chosen friends. “But I outgrew it!” he muttered to himself.

When he went to bed, the cat got shut on the outside of his bedroom door and yowled until he got up and let her in to sleep on the foot of his bed.

Lying in bed, Peter looked for a long time at the picture on his wall. It was the one where Jesus is knocking on the door, asking to be let in. His mom and dad had put it there so he would think every day about letting Jesus live in his heart, but tonight he was thinking about that door. What kind of a door could a heart have, anyway?

The second “I Am” statement of Jesus that we’ll examine this week is found in John 10:9:

*“I Am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”*

Some Bibles say door, and some say gate, but either one is kind of strange. For Jesus to say He is the Light of the world makes sense. We can see that He brightens and warms people by His presence. But how can a person be a door or a gate?

It’s even stranger when you look at the *context*, that is, the stories and sayings that are right around it. The last chapter is a long, detailed story of a man Jesus healed from blindness. Interestingly, He first repeated, “I Am the light of the world.” Then He healed the man. This man had been blind his entire

life, and some people thought God made him blind deliberately, because either he or his parents were sinful. Others were all upset because Jesus healed him on Sabbath. At the end of chapter 9, Jesus tells the Pharisees they have a problem with spiritual blindness. Then His very next words, in John 10:1, are about robbers and thieves climbing into a sheep pen to steal sheep, rather than going through the door. He says that the sheep won't listen to people who are not their own shepherd, but that they will listen to Him. You can tell He's working up to saying He is the Good Shepherd, and He does (we'll look at that another day) but first He says He's the door, or the gate, to the sheep pen.

It's strange. What does He mean?

In His day, the sheep fold sometimes didn't have a door or gate. It just had an open doorway, and the shepherd lay across that doorway to sleep, so no predator could get in and harm his sheep at night. If anything tried, it would wake him up, and he would fight it off. So if a thief or robber wanted to steal or harm the sheep, he would have to try to sneak over the wall without waking up the shepherd. A person could literally be a door.

What does a door do? It opens and shuts. It keeps people and animals out. It keeps people and animals in. It keeps cold or warm air out or in. It can stand open in welcome, or it can be locked tight. It even shows you where to go. If you want to go in a house, you can't just walk through the wall. You can only get there through the door. (You *could* go in through the window, but that usually means something bad.) Does Jesus do all these things?

**Open Doors:** What are some things Jesus opens up to? Obviously He opens up to love and light and truth. He always opens up to anyone who wants to talk to Him, or to listen to Him. He was welcoming to Nicodemus, who came in private at night, and He was welcoming to the people who ran all the way around the Sea of Galilee to find Him, and He was even welcoming to the woman at the well, who didn't even know what she was looking for. Jesus is open to anything anyone ever wants to tell Him, even if it's a negative or hurtful thing that He's going to ask the person to give up. In the Psalms, David says some really awful things to God when he's angry or upset. God doesn't encourage David to think that way, but He doesn't shut him away and refuse to listen to him, either. Have you ever heard a teacher or principal or pastor say they "have an open door policy"? That means they are happy to talk to you any time, and you won't be interrupting. That's how Jesus is.

**Shut Doors:** What does Jesus close the door against? The whole Bible teaches that one of these days, God will shut the door once and for all on all sin, falsehood, hatred, envy, idolatry, selfishness, and pride. People who are clinging to those sins will get shut out, too, and that's just what God doesn't want to happen, so He's holding the door open as long as He can, begging people to come

in. It began with Noah begging them to get in the ark, and it will go on until the last day that people can choose to join God's side. Then the door will shut, and sin will be destroyed forever.

**Doors keep things in:** Sometimes you want the door shut because it's winter, and you want to keep the warm air in. Sometimes you want it shut because it's summer and you want to keep the cool air in. Sometimes you shut the sheep gate because you don't want the sheep to wander. At the nursing home where Peter's grandma lives, they have to keep the door locked so the people who can't remember where they are won't get out and wander away. They could get lost, or get hit by a car. Sometimes they are angry because they feel locked in, but the people who love them want to keep them safe.

Does Jesus shut His lambs in sometimes? "Abide with Me," He says. "Stay here with Me, let Me choose the path. Don't run away." Sometimes we may feel locked in to some circumstance or rule, but in fact, if we stick with Jesus, we'll be amazed how far we'll go. We'll have higher adventures and wider experience than we ever would have expected—certainly wider than the ones who jumped over the wall and got caught in a bramble hedge! But that's okay, because Jesus goes after them, too, rescues them from the thorns, carries them back, and gives them another chance.

**Doors keep things out:** When it comes to hot or cold air, you could look at it either way. In winter, are you keeping the cold air out, or the warm air in? Yes. In summer, are you keeping the cool air in or the hot air out? Yes. Gates are like that, too. When the sheep gate is shut and locked, the sheep can't get out, but also, the hyenas and wolves and jackals and mountain lions can't get in to eat them!

In this text, Jesus talks about thieves and robbers who climb over the wall. In this world, where it's not like God meant it to be anymore, there is no perfect safety. Even with the door closed, bad things can happen. People can break into houses and steal things, and they can break into hearts and steal security and peace. Those whose houses have been robbed often say that the worst thing isn't the jewelry or money or TVs they lost. The worst thing is not feeling safe anymore. Someone's been in their room, handling their things. They feel betrayed and violated. Hearts are like that, too. Someone you thought you could trust betrays your friendship and hurts you, or someone made promises and didn't keep them.

Jesus will never do that. He isn't just someone who won't break down the door—He *is* the Door. He is the only way to life and happiness. He can open wide and make you feel welcome, and He can close up snugly and make you feel safe.

We can trust Him.

**The door show the way:** Jesus not only said He was the door, He said He was the *only* way to the Father. That's in John 14:6, right after He said He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, which we'll examine on another day. Some people worry that this means all the millions of people who never heard of Jesus will automatically be lost, but the Bible doesn't teach that. God is the perfect and true Judge, and He knows whether people are trying to follow the Creator in the best way they know how. What the Bible does teach is that for all of those people who do receive eternal life and live forever with God, the way they got there will be through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, even if they don't know it and never heard of Him. That's pretty awesome, isn't it?

Everybody in God's kingdom will have gone through that door one way or another, whether they knew it or not. Jesus says those who knowingly tried to get in another way, "climbing over the wall," He calls it, are thieves and robbers, and unless they change their mind and go around to the door, they will be cast out. The greatest blessing is being able to *see* that Jesus is the door to life, and entering into Him by choice.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some things Jesus has shut out of your life? How has this helped you to feel safe?
2. What are some ways Jesus has opened doors in your life and made you feel free?

## Part Two

But the picture on Peter's wall is another way of looking at doors. If Jesus *is* the door, the gateway to heaven even for those who don't know Him and maybe never hear of Him until they get there, we also have doors. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says,

*"Here 'I Am'! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*

Many of us have heard all our lives that Jesus wants to "live in our hearts." That can be a strange concept. Little kids sometimes ask how Jesus can get tiny enough to live inside of them. Even adults still wonder just how it works, that Jesus (through the Holy Spirit) lives in us, and helps us make choices and do the right things, but we are still in charge of our own choices and actions, too. It's complicated!

What we do know for sure is that Jesus never knocks down doors. Who made your heart? He did! Who has called out to you your whole life? He has! Who has every right and plenty of power over you? That would be Jesus. But He never forces His way in. He stands politely at the door and knocks, and waits for you to answer.

What are some of the ways Jesus “knocks on our hearts”? We might think of our consciences. Most of the time we have a pretty good idea when we are about to do something we shouldn’t. There’s this little uncomfortable *bump* inside. That’s a knock at the door. Do we answer? Or pretend we didn’t notice?

The pastor preaches a sermon that particularly appeals to us, and reminds us of eternity and of the powerful life with God we could have. Want to have. Will have . . . one of these days . . . Do we call, “Just a minute!”?

Even a song, or some loving thing a friend says or does can be a knock. Someone dies, and we think about when we’ll see them again, in the New Earth, and there’s another knock.

Sometimes we think, “Oh, man! Jesus is at the door! I’d better clean up before I let Him in! I wouldn’t want Him to see what it’s really like in here!”

News flash—He knows what it’s like in there! And He’s the only one who can clean it up, anyway. If we try to get somehow “good enough” first, we’ll never let Him in. There’s only one job we have to do, and it’s plenty hard enough. Ellen White puts it like this:

*Our work is to open the door of the heart and let Jesus come in. He is knocking for entrance . . . Will you open the door? Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. Let Him in, the heavenly Guest.* (Our High Calling, p. 352.6)

Did you hear that? “Our *work*.” Opening and letting Him in is the easiest thing ever—you just say yes. Then you get up and start doing the same things you ever did, and you realize you forgot and shut Him out there again. So you apologize, and open the door again. This time it lasts for about five minutes, and then somebody annoys you, and you yell, and you realize, okay, He’s in, but I’m not letting Him have any say—I’m keeping Him standing in the corner, out of my way. It’s work! It will take us the rest of our lives, but it’s *so* worth it! Pretty soon, we realize we’re cooperating with Him, and new things are happening, and it’s exciting.

Then there are different kinds of knocks. When we’re in middle school and high school, we start thinking about what we want to do with our lives. People are always asking, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Don’t you hate that sometimes? It’s one thing if you know for sure. “Oh, yeah, I want to be a plumber. I’ve wanted to be a plumber since I was five years old!” But most of us still have no idea, so we just shrug and try not to look too embarrassed.

Then sometimes maybe we hear someone talk about their job, or see someone on TV, or we get a compliment for something we did well, and we think, “Maybe *that’s* what I’ll do!” That can be a knock, too. Jesus doesn’t just knock once and never pay attention to us again. He has all kinds of great ideas for our lives. If we stick with Him, it will really get exciting.

But one of the questions we’re dealing with in this Week of Prayer is, how did Jesus know who He was? How did it occur to Him that He was a door or a gate?

I wonder if one way is that He found Himself being protective. That’s one of the main things doors do—protect what’s on one side from what’s on the other.

In this story in John, Jesus had healed the blind man, and then the man had actually been kicked out of the synagogue because of it! The Pharisees were saying Jesus couldn’t have the power to heal blindness, and the man just said, “Look, I don’t know anything about that. All I know is, I used to be blind and now I can see!” Then he got irritated and spoke a little too directly to the Pharisees, so they insulted him, said he’d been full of sin from birth, and threw him out of the synagogue.

When Jesus heard this, John 9:35 says He went and found the man. He knew that His protectiveness was needed. The man and his family must have been very confused. Here they were, on what should be the happiest day of their lives—a huge miracle has been done for them, and they’re kicked out of the church! Let’s see what Jesus said to the man. [*Read or have someone read vs. 35-38.*] Jesus chose to find this man and reassure him, and through him, his parents, also. It was as if He closed the angry church leaders out and closed the man and his family in where it was safe.

It was right after this that He told the story of the sheep and the gate, and said He was the gate and His own sheep knew His voice and would ignore everyone else. It’s a good thing, too. What if that man had given in to the synagogue leaders, hanging his head and agreeing about how bad he was? He would be able to see, but he would have lost some of the blessing. Instead, he stood up for Jesus and what he knew had been done for him. And he certainly had an unusual blessing right there, because he is one of the few people mentioned in the Bible as actually worshiping Jesus as Messiah.

Jesus is the door. The gate to safety. Have you gone in?

He also stands at your heart’s door. Have you let Him in?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What’s the easiest thing about opening your heart to Jesus? What’s the hardest thing?
2. What is one way Jesus has knocked on your heart’s door this month?



## Part Three

There is a very interesting story about doors and doorkeepers that you've heard a million times, but probably never thought of that way. It's in almost all the gospels. Let's look at the one in Matthew 19:13, 14. [*Read or have someone read.*]

What story is this? Right—Jesus blessing the children. What's that got to do with doorkeepers?

Psalm 84 is a really great psalm. You should read the whole thing when you get the chance. But there's one verse in particular that we're going to look at. Keep your finger in Matthew 19 and look at Psalm 84:10. [*Read or have someone read.*] What do you think this means?

A doorkeeper would not be a very high or famous person, would he? He probably was considered a pretty lowly servant. This is just someone who stands there and opens and closes the door all day for those going in and out. The psalmist says he loves being at God's house so much that he'd rather be a lowly doorkeeper than live somewhere fancier or wealthier, maybe, but with wicked people.

But there are some people who take it upon themselves not just to open and shut the door of God's house, but to decide who gets to go in and who has to stay out. Lots of people seem to think they have all the answers as to who is good enough to come to church, or who dresses nicely enough, or who behaves well enough for God to love them.

The disciples thought that, back in Matthew 19. Jesus was tired and busy, and besides, He was starting to get kind of famous and important. People came from all over to listen to Him. And the more important He got, the more important the disciples got. Or so they thought. When some mothers brought children to be blessed, they tried to run them off. "Get out of here! What makes you think the Master has time for you?"

They were being doorkeepers in a negative sense. They thought they knew who was important enough for Jesus to notice. If a synagogue ruler, or a wealthy person, or even a Roman soldier had come, they wouldn't have sent him away! But little kids and women? That was a different story!

Have you known people like that?

Well, the disciples had a surprise coming. They were not the door. Jesus was the door, and He was about to remind them of it. "Don't you stop those children! Let them come!" This was Jesus being the protective door again. The mothers and children probably had sad faces. They had probably started backing away, feeling embarrassed and apologetic for bothering the great Teacher. But not for long. Jesus smiled and held out His arms, and you know those children would have run to Him. The mothers, too, were reassured and comforted.

Jesus had just said, without words, “My door is closed to pride and judgmentalism and people who think they’re high and mighty. It’s wide open to the ones who are humble and innocent, who don’t think they deserve Me, but want to be near Me anyway.”

And He didn’t even stop there. He went on to say, “The kingdom of heaven is made up of people like these little children!” That was a surprise. So these *were* the Very Important People of Jesus’ upside-down kingdom! Even if the disciples thought they could be the doorkeepers, they would have shut out the right ones and let in the wrong ones. Heaven, then, would have been just like this messed-up earth, and who wants that?!

If Jesus is the Door, how can we be doorkeepers? Do we open wide in welcome to all those who want to come? Do we think we know who God can or cannot love or accept? Do people feel safe and protected and welcome around us?

Here’s a basic principle to keep in mind: If Jesus was open enough to include *us*, then who are we to decide somebody else is not acceptable?

Open your heart’s door.

Go through Jesus’ door.

And then live as an open door to others.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Tell about a time when you didn’t feel welcome. What happened? What would you do differently?
2. In what ways are you an open door? In what ways do you keep the door closed? How can you know when to do which?

***Life Identity Principle #2.***  
***Because Jesus is my Door, I can  
be a doorkeeper, welcoming  
others into God’s family.***

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## DAY 3

### Jesus said, ***“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.”***

#### Part One

“Can I turn it? *Please?*” Luana was practically dancing up and down in her eagerness.

“May I,” said Dad.

“*May* I, then!” exclaimed Luana.

“Okay, stand right in front of it like this, so you don’t overwork one side of yourself.” Dad helped Luana get positioned, and she began to turn the big crank around and around.

“This is *hard!*” Luana exclaimed in surprise.

“Yes, it is,” Dad replied, “but just imagine how Jesus’ mother had to do it, with two big, flat rocks.”

Luana’s family had just bought a hand-cranked grain mill. They had put wheat that had never been ground, which some people call “wheat berries,” into the metal funnel cup on top. Dad had turned the crank for awhile, and Luana had watched as fine, light brown flour sifted out between the two flat grindstones that the crank rubbed together.

As she turned the crank herself, her arms and shoulders quickly tired out. She turned the job back over to Dad. “I’m even out of breath!” she panted. “I’m sure glad I didn’t have to do it the way they did in Bible times!”

“You would have started helping your mother several years ago,” Dad pointed out. “By now you’d be strong and think nothing of it.”

“Would a father have done it?”

“Maybe sometimes, but not likely,” said Dad.

It took almost an hour for Dad and Luana (who took a few more short turns) to grind enough flour to make two loaves of bread. Then they added yeast, a

little salt and oil, just a bit of honey, and warm water. Luana stirred with a big wooden spoon until the doughy mass was too tough for her. Then Dad stirred until it was too tough for him. Then they turned the whole thing out onto the butcher block table.

This was the part Luana liked. They divided the dough into two lumps and she worked with one while Dad worked with the other. Luana kneaded and turned and pounded and punched. Sometimes they added a bit more flour if the dough got sticky.

They put their two smooth, spongy balls of dough into two bowls (so Luana would know which was hers), covered them, and set them in a warm place to rise.

Luana swiped a hand across her forehead. “Whew!” she exclaimed. “I’m sure glad I’m not a grain of wheat!”

Dad laughed. “You just streaked flour across your face. Here.” He wiped her face with a towel and they went to the sink to try to scrub the dough off their hands and out from under their fingernails. “Why are you glad you aren’t a grain of wheat?”

“Well, just think! First, you get thrown in the ground and covered up, and rained on and all that. Then you get all puffy and split open, which I bet would hurt, if wheat could feel anything. Then little roots and leaves come out and you grow into a nice, big plant. That part’s probably pretty nice, swaying in the breeze and sunshine.”

“Unless a groundhog comes along,” Dad put in, and Luana pretend-punched him on his arm.

“Then this big machine comes and chops you down!” Luana continued. “You go through all kinds of machinery to get all the wheat free from all the leaves and stuff—that’s straw, right?”

“Right. People use it for mulch, or animal bedding. Things like that.”

“Then you get bagged up and sit on a store shelf, and just about the time you think all the hard part is over, people put you in a mill and grind you up, and do all the stuff we did today. Then they bake you in a hot oven!”

“Then,” said Dad, wiggling his eyebrows and rubbing his belly, “they eat you up! Mmmm!!”

“I *really* don’t think I’d like being a grain of wheat!” Luana repeated. “And I’m glad they can’t feel anything!”

So far in our series, we’ve talked about two “I Am” statements Jesus made.

First, He said He was the Light of the world, which He shines on everybody on earth. Then we learned that Jesus said He was the Door, or the gate, and you couldn't get into the kingdom except through Him. It's almost as if the light is like a street light shining wherever you are and showing the way to the door, and then like a porch light so you can see to get to Jesus. Then you have to make a choice. Are you going to enter in through the only True Door, or are you going to turn back, or try to get in another way?

Once you choose to enter the true door and live your life with Jesus, which means both entering His door and opening your heart's door to Him, then there is something that He does first of all before anything else. Let's look at Revelation 3:20 again to find out what. *[Read or have someone read.]* So what does Jesus do first? Right—He feeds us!

It's amazing how easy it is to forget this step. We think, "Okay! I'm a new person in Jesus, and now He's going to lead me and I'm going to follow. Now, let's see. What would Jesus do first? I know! He'd go help that person!" And off we go, while Jesus is back in the kitchen calling, "Hey, you forgot something! Let's eat first, so we'll be strong enough to work!"

Once upon a time, you could say that nobody would forget such a thing in their physical daily lives, but now, lots of people go to work or school without breakfast. Maybe some of us did that today. It doesn't work so well, and it doesn't work in our spiritual lives, either.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Have you had any experiences in your life that felt like you were being buried alive, or ground up by painful circumstances? Do you think there might have been any good results?
2. Did you remember to feed your body this morning? What did you eat? Did you remember to feed your spirit this morning? What did you feed it?

## Part Two

Today we're going to study a really interesting chapter of the Bible. Turn with me to John 6. The day before this, Jesus fed a huge crowd of people that included about 5,000 men. Now the people are chasing after Him, but not because they recognize that He's the Messiah. The truth is, they're not sure whether to believe in Him or not. Look at verses 25 and 26. [*Read or have someone read.*] Jesus isn't letting them get away with anything, is He? Read verse 27. Jesus is trying to change the subject from things of earth to things of heaven. For about a minute, He has at least some of them. They say, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (Vs. 28.) What is Jesus' answer in verse 29? That's just like what we heard yesterday in our quote from Mrs. White! She said our work was to open the door, and we thought about how sometimes that's easier said than done. Jesus says here that our work is to believe, which is another way of saying the same thing, right? Apparently those people thought this was too complicated a subject. They revert right back to their stomachs, which at least they can see and feel.

Then they demand a miraculous sign to prove He is who He says He is. (I don't know how many miracles they think they need!) In verse 31 they hint that manna would be a good option. Just think—no more grinding, no more baking, just easy food to pick up off the ground. "Yeah, Jesus, that would be cool. *Then* we'd believe you for sure!" (Of course, we didn't believe You yesterday. . .)

Again Jesus tries to call them back to the things of God. Let's read through verses 32 to 37. [*Read or have someone read.*] Jesus is being pretty clear here, isn't He? Not that it's an easy subject! Devoted Christians spend their whole lives trying to understand more and more clearly what it means to "eat Jesus." Sounds weird, doesn't it?

Well, of course the people argue. Jesus says He's the Judge of people's hearts, and they grumble, "Who does He think He is?" Jesus says to stop grumbling, and in verses 46 through 48 He repeats His claim even more strongly. "I Am" the bread of life, I'm the *only* bread of life, you don't get to God except through Me, and vice versa."

More sharply than before, according to verse 52, they argue. "What's He talking about? We can't *eat* Him!"

Jesus gets even more insistent. In the next several verses He says if you don't eat His flesh and drink His blood, you will die eternally, but if you do, you will

live forever. And afterwards, in verses 61 to 65, He explains more clearly. In case anyone really thought He was talking about eating Him with a knife and fork (surely they couldn't have been that silly!) He explains in verse 63, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

Now we get it! Eating Jesus means chewing on His *words*, digesting them, making them a part of you the way bread becomes a part of you after you eat it!

Here's where one of the most important things in this chapter, maybe one of the most important things in Jesus' life, happens. Look at verse 66. [*Read or have someone read.*]

Can you imagine that? How sad for Jesus, who loved these people, argumentative as they were. But most of all, how sad for them! How sad for us today, if we decide to turn back. It's too hard. Hearing Jesus' words is one thing. Reading them over is easy.

Chewing on them?

Digesting them?

Living by them?

*That's hard!*

Is it worth it?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you think Jesus meant when He said to eat and drink His flesh and blood? Be as specific as you can. Do you eat and drink Jesus?
2. How does it help (if it does) to think of it as first seeing the light, then going to the door, then choosing to go in with Jesus and let Him in with you, then sitting down to eat *before* you go out to work? Do you think some of the questions Luana and Peter were worried about at the beginning of this series might not have been so worrisome if they remembered to feed their spirits daily on the words of Jesus?

## Part Three

All of us, I hope, are choosing to say yes. All of us have seen some light (nobody's seen it all yet—it's too blinding!) and found the door and entered in and now we're sitting down to eat with Jesus. In fact, this Week of Prayer is like a group meal—like a feast we eat together, munching on Jesus' words. Just like any gathering, each person is eating a little different food, choosing the things they want most, digesting the way *their* bodies digest. Remember not to just pick the stuff you like. Let Jesus suggest the truths you *need*, too, just like your mom or dad insisting you eat your vegetables!

So here we are, we've come in through the door, and Jesus wants us to eat with Him. What are some ways we can do that? Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is Bible study. There are lots of ways to do that. You can get a study or devotional book to follow, or a set of lessons on some topic you are interested in. Only, make sure you read the *Bible*, not just the book about the topic! Getting all your spiritual food from what other people say about Jesus' words is like eating baby food that's been mashed up and partly digested. That's good for babies, and it can be good for new Christians, too, so long as the person doing the feeding is really feeding the words of Jesus and not some sugared-up substitute. Not everything that comes in a soft form is good for babies!

But as soon as possible, new Christians need to learn to read for themselves, study the Bible, understand *why* they believe what they believe, and even be able to explain it. So the best thing to do is read the Bible itself. There are still several ways to do it. Here are three:

1. Just start at Genesis and read to the end. There are charts that will help you do this in one year, but truthfully, you'll get more out of it (if you're ready for some solid and sometimes difficult-to-digest food) if you do one of the charts that takes three years instead. But it's up to you. Pray first, read with an awareness of Jesus by your side helping you, pray afterwards, and then either talk or write about what you learned. That's the digesting part.

2. Find a Bible that is arranged chronologically, such as *The Narrative Bible in Chronological Order*. This is a really fun and interesting thing to do. A committee has sat down and done their best to figure out what order things really happened in. The stories of the Kings and Chronicles are put together into one story, and so are the gospels. The prophecies and psalms are put in where they really happened, or if we don't know that, they're put in where they fit well. It really helps you to see the whole sweep of Israel's history, and you learn a lot that way. Of course, still read it with prayer. Otherwise, you're just using it like a textbook.



3. Choose a book of the Bible and study it well and then choose another, or choose a topic you are interested in and use a concordance to find all the passages about that topic and study them all together. This is probably the most “solid-food” method. You have to be ready to track down verses that compare with each other, and pray over some passages that seem to go against each other, and ask God a lot of hard questions. God loves that! This is where you are really beginning to digest God’s Word and make it a part of your life.

In any of these methods, remember we don’t eat all alone. We eat best in groups. Study with friends, or in a small group. Study with your Bible class and your Sabbath school class. Lean on adults you trust to be godly and helpful without trying to give you all the answers.

The next thing you know, you’ll be growing! You won’t know how it happened—or feel it happening—any more than you realized it until you suddenly outgrew your jeans or your shoes. You’ll be an example to others without even meaning to, and they’ll be asking what you’re doing, and you’ll say, “I’m reading Jesus’ words, and you wouldn’t believe what I learned this week! ... and you can go on to share with them, unless they don’t want you to. Then be quiet and pray and just love them every chance you get. There’s no force-feeding at God’s table.

Here are two quotes from Mrs. White’s writings about this subject:

*In our daily lives, before our brethren and before the world, we are to be living interpreters of the Scriptures, doing honor to Christ by revealing His meekness and His lowliness of heart. As we eat and digest the bread of life, we shall reveal a symmetrical character. By our unity, by esteeming others better than ourselves, we are to bear to the world a living testimony of the power of the truth. . . . (Lift Him Up , p. 105)*

*When [people] submit entirely to God, eating the bread of life and drinking the water of salvation, they will grow up into Christ. Their characters are composed of that which the mind eats and drinks. Through the Word of life, which they receive and obey, they become partakers of the divine nature. Then . . . Christ, not man, is exalted. (The SDA Bible Commentary, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1135)*

Luana was sitting quietly at the supper table, chewing on the delicious bread she and Dad had made together, and thinking hard.

“What’s on your mind?” asked Dad.

“I was just thinking about what I said earlier about not wanting to be wheat. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad.”

“Really?” Dad looked interested. “How so?”

“Well, I remember what I read in Bible class not very long ago—that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it can’t bear fruit. I thought that didn’t make sense. If it dies, it won’t bear fruit either, right? But then today, when I was imagining that a wheat kernel could feel and think, I realized if it could, it would *feel* as if it died, wouldn’t it? Being all buried in the dark, and splitting open and everything?”

“I think you’re right,” said Dad. “In fact, as a grain of wheat, it does cease to exist.”

“Right. So then, it goes through all that hard stuff, like I talked about earlier, and it thinks ten more times that it’s dying for sure this time, and finally, it gets eaten.” Luana put her last bite in her mouth and wiped her fingers on her napkin.

Dad waited.

Luana chewed on her bread and her thoughts together. She smiled suddenly. “Then it becomes human!”

Dad looked startled. “What?”

“Yeah! Don’t you get it? I just ate that slice of bread, and now it’s down there in my stomach getting all gooshed up with that stuff—what’s that called again?”

“Hydrochloric acid.”

“Yeah, that. And it gets broken down and sent through my body, and *poof!* Like magic, it turns into blood and bone and muscle.”

Dad grinned. “And brain cells! That’s good thinking!”

They ended their meal laughing together.

If Jesus is the Bread of Life, maybe we can be little grains of wheat planted by Him. Maybe we can be taught by Him to give ourselves for others, knowing that we will, by His grace and power, turn into something better than we could have imagined. If bread nourishes and fills, even comforts and makes people feel at home, then we can ask ourselves, Do we warm and nourish others? Do we try to feed and fill them with the words of Jesus? Do we help to feed them verses that we already know if they are feeling weak and undernourished, and then let them eat on their own as they grow stronger?

Here’s Mrs. White again:

*The life spent on self is like the grain that is eaten. It disappears, but there is no increase. A man may gather all he can for self; he may live and think and plan*

*for self; but his life passes away, and he has nothing. The law of self-serving is the law of self-destruction. (Desire of Ages, p. 624)*

Jesus gave all of Himself. He fell and died, but rose again greater. His sacrifice is multiplied every time one of His children gives herself or himself for others, too. So one day, God will have a great harvest and we'll all eat together at the table of God.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What other ideas can you get from thinking of what wheat goes through to become bread?
2. In what ways has someone given himself or herself for you lately? How will you thank this person?

### **Life Identity Principle #3.**

***Because Jesus is the Bread of life, I can be a grain of wheat, giving myself to feed others His Word.***

## DAY 4

# Jesus said, “*I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD.*”

### Part One

Peter and Luana and the rest of the class leaned forward in their seats in fascination. The room was dark, and Ms. Keene had pulled the screen down. A movie was showing, which had been made by a missionary friend of Ms. Keene’s. It was in a Middle Eastern country.

The scene was just outside a large town. It was really interesting to see the square white houses and apartment blocks, looking almost like all the pictures of towns in Bible times, and yet with modern windows, and antennas, and cars in the streets. But the part the students were fascinated by was what was happening at the edge of town.

Just as you might imagine it a thousand years ago, there was a huge flock of milling sheep. There were hundreds of them, like one big, mostly white, wooly pack. The sheep moved and flowed this way and that, and the air was deafening with baas and maas and bellows. Peter privately thought it would be kind of scary to be in the middle of that ocean of sheep, and who would ever think you’d be scared of sheep?

Around the outside of the flock were several men, still dressed in the long robes their ancestors had worn when Jesus lived in their area. They had coverings on their heads, tied with ropes in fancy knots, and they carried wooden shepherd’s crooks.

“This is *so cool!*” Peter heard Luana whisper.

Then the shepherds began making calls that echoed above the noise of the milling, anxious sheep. They put their hands to their mouths and bellowed out strange-sounding yells. Were they words? Or just calls? Peter had no idea.

An amazing thing happened. The sheep, which had been milling in pretty much the same aimless directions, all together began to move in different

directions. Some shoved through each other toward the man nearest the gate. Others pushed past toward the man farthest from the gate. Still others ran in different directions toward a third or a fourth man.

The men kept calling, and the sheep were clearly dividing. There was a high-pitched wail and the camera swung around to catch a baby who had lost track of its mother. The students laughed as the baby leaped as if it had springs in its feet, high over the other sheep, this way and that, bouncing in worried circles, yelling wildly.

“Oh, poor thing!” somebody said.

But it only took about ten seconds before a fat ewe separated from the crowd and mother and baby were happily reunited. Running close by its mother, the lamb raced for the safety of its own flock.

And just like that, there were four separate flocks where there had been one mob of sheep. Each flock now pushed and shoved to be nearest to its own shepherd, and the men began to move off, heading outside of town to find pasture. Not one sheep accidentally followed the wrong man.

The movie ended, and the lights came on. The class was leaning back, exclaiming, “That was awesome! How did they know? The baby was so cute!”

Ms. Keene sat on the edge of her desk. “How do you suppose those sheep knew which voices to follow?”

Luana raised her hand. “They’d heard his voice from the day they were born.”

Another student raised his hand. “I think they were even scared of the other voices. Like, if another shepherd tried to take them, I think they wouldn’t follow.”

Peter raised his hand. “I wonder if that lamb didn’t know the shepherds’ voice very well yet? It looked like the mother knew the right shepherd, and the baby just knew its own mother.”

“Right,” agreed Luana. “So after awhile, the baby will know, too, but right now it just has to follow its mom.”

A girl asked, “I wonder how old they have to be before they know to follow the shepherd by themselves?”

“I’ll bet by the time they stop nursing and eat alone,” said Peter.

“A good thought,” agreed Ms. Keene. “That’s not very long. The sheep are just a few months old when they are weaned. How old do you think a person has to be to begin hearing the Good Shepherd’s voice for herself or himself?”

“I think we can start pretty small,” said one boy. “My mom helped my little brother say his memory verses when he could hardly talk. She would hold his hands together and pray a little prayer, like, ‘Dear Jesus, bless us today,’ and Mikey would repeat it. But he’s three now, and the other day he got hurt, and he started to cry, and then he said, ‘I pway,’ and he did! You should have seen it. He almost stopped crying, and he let me put a bandage on the cut without pulling away like he usually does.”

“Yeah,” agreed Luana. “By now, at our age, we can read our own Bibles and pray for ourselves, and sometimes I pray about something I don’t even tell another person, not even my dad. And I know there are times when I feel Jesus telling me something I should or shouldn’t do, and it’s not all stuff my parents taught me, or that I already know. It can be something I didn’t think about before, so I know it’s from Jesus.”

“What if it’s not?” asked Ms. Keene. “How do you know then?”

A girl in the back of the room shot her hand up in the air as if what she had to say was terribly important. “Sometimes you don’t know until afterwards. In my family, we used to really believe that God sent people to hell forever. I hated it, but I thought it was Bible truth, so I tried to tell other people. We really thought we were following the voice of the Good Shepherd. And I know we were, a lot of the time! We loved God and tried to obey Him, and thanked Him for His grace every day, and all that. But my mom and I were so relieved to learn that the Bible doesn’t teach that about hell! My dad is still not sure, but he’s studying about it. I know he loves God and listens to His voice, so I don’t worry. He’ll be able to figure it out.”

“Well,” said Peter, “when the sheep get over there to the shepherd, they haven’t suddenly arrived at the pasture, right? I mean, he has to lead them, maybe a long way. They don’t just have to get to his side in the morning. They have to follow him all day, and rest when he says, and go on when he says, and maybe climb mountains and who knows what, to find the grass and water they need.”

Luana added, “Yes, and then they have to follow him back home that night!”

“And start all over the next day,” someone chimed in.

“Being a sheep is hard work!” said Ms. Keene with a smile. “It’s a good thing we have a good and patient Shepherd.”

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are some ways your parents or caregivers have taught you to listen to Jesus' voice?
2. Share a time when you thought you were listening to God, but found out it wasn't Him after all. What did you do? What was the result? What did you learn?

**Part Two**

Today we're going to go back and look again at a passage we already started to study—the one where Jesus said He was the door, or gate. Turn in your Bibles to John 10:11. [*Read or have someone read.*] What does it mean that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep?

Nowadays, in most of the world, people who have flocks and herds take care of them using fencing. They herd them from trucks, or even helicopters. Nobody has to sit and stand all day with a flock to watch over them and drive away hyenas or wolves or mountain lions, or lead the animals to different places to eat, and then to a creek to drink. No one has to build a little dam with rocks so sheep will have a still place to drink, because they don't like to drink fast-running water. No one has to lead them back home at night, count each and every one, and take care of any wounds they have with their own hands. Certainly no one sleeps with them, lying across the gate to the sheep pen so no predator comes in at night without waking him up!

No one *could* do these things, because herds are huge, thousands of animals, and often the shepherds or ranchers don't even know if they have lost any animals until they round them up and count them once or twice a year. They herd them through gates and corridors made of metal panels so they can give them shots or make them walk through a trough with medicine for their hooves. It's interesting to think about whether our modern methods of raising flocks and herds is more like the good shepherd in Jesus' stories, or more like the hired man, who runs away and leaves the animals to their own devices!

At any rate, we don't always get all the lessons a passage like this can teach us. Jesus is talking about a Shepherd like the one in the movie—a Shepherd who personally knows each sheep, and cares for each one with His own hands. Mrs. White, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, still lived in times when most flocks were small

and shepherds did more hands-on care as they had in Jesus' time. She describes the good shepherd this way:

*The shepherd's life is one full of peril. If he is a trustworthy shepherd, he will not be careless and study his own ease, but he will search for the straying sheep amid storm and tempest. Perhaps he will find the lost sheep slipped into some crevice of the rock, where he cannot find his way out. He is beset with fears on every hand. The good shepherd does not come with a harsh voice, scolding the poor frightened sheep, but he speaks in pitiful, soothing, winning tones, so that when the sheep hears his voice, he will follow, unless he is imprisoned in the rocks or tangled in the brambles. Then the only means by which the shepherd can find the sheep is by following up the bleat of distress that the wanderer sends in answer to his call. And when the good shepherd finds the lost one, he puts the weary wanderer upon his shoulder, and brings him back to the fold, rejoicing at every step. (Youth's Instructor, April 28, 1886 par. 5)*

We could talk all day of ways in which Jesus does these things for us every day of our lives. But of course, the most important way in which He came searching for His lost sheep, the one without which nothing else would matter, is when He came here to earth.

It's as if a shepherd were to change himself into a sheep so that he could talk directly to his flock and they would understand him. We can't imagine what heaven is like any more than sheep could imagine living in houses and eating with silverware and using computers. But Jesus gave it all up, became a human being with a body that got tired and hungry and dirty, put up with people being mean to Him and saying bad things about Him when all He was trying to do was love them, and in the end, He let them torture and kill Him!

You could say that this whole planet was lost and stuck in the brambles of sin. Not only could we not get ourselves out, we got so used to living in briars and rocks that we thought it was normal life. We argued and fought when Jesus tried to rescue us, like a drowning person so panicked that he almost makes the lifeguard drown, too, by fighting. Did you know lifeguards are taught how to knock someone out if they have to, to save them? I'll bet sometimes Jesus felt like knocking out some of the Pharisees or some of His disciples, when they insisted He was wrong and they were right! But you can only do that if you know for sure the person really wants to be saved. Jesus won't force the will of anyone who really *insists* that He go away and leave them alone.

But imagine how He feels when He has to turn away and leave someone He loves, down over the cliff, tangled in thorns, about to fall and die, and refusing to come back with Him!



Jesus said something else about being the Good Shepherd. He repeats this statement twice in John 10, and each time He adds something. This time He added that He lays down His life for the sheep. The second time is in verse 14. What does He add this time? [*Read or have someone read.*]

That's like the movie the class in our story saw. It used to be true, and is still true in small flocks today. Sheep may be pretty silly, but they do have the ability, if they're given the chance, to learn whom to trust and whom not to. You could think of it like your pet. If you have a dog or cat, does your pet know your voice? Do you think it would go away with someone else, or would it be afraid?

Do you know Jesus' voice? Do you follow where He leads, or go off on your own? And if Jesus is the Shepherd and we are the sheep, can it also be true that we are shepherds ourselves, in some ways?

### Discussion Questions

1. How can you tell if you are learning to hear Jesus' voice for yourself?
2. What has caring for a pet taught you about the love of God?

## Part Three

Now let's look at some different texts in the Bible. Could someone look up Numbers 27:16-21? Someone else look up Isaiah 56:11, and someone look up Ezekiel 34:8? [*Have them read their texts.*] What do these texts say about people as shepherds? Is God the only Shepherd, or are human beings sometimes shepherds, too?

In the passage in Numbers, God is instructing Moses about getting Joshua ready to lead the Israelites after Moses dies. It doesn't specifically say so, but Moses was most definitely a shepherd of his people. In fact, God had trained Moses for forty years as an actual shepherd to get him ready to lead this unruly crowd. And Moses laid down his life for them, and was reviled and grumbled against in return for his efforts. Now he was nearing the end of his shift as shepherd, and he asked God for a good leader, one who would go in and come out and lead the people like a shepherd. God told Moses that Joshua was His choice. He had a HUGE reward for Moses' years of labor, but Moses didn't know it yet.

So people can be shepherds over God's sheep. And they can be good . . . or not!

The texts in Ezekiel and Isaiah talked about bad shepherds. They are in prophecies that God gave, speaking against the priests and kings of Israel and Judah. These were people to whom God, the Great Shepherd, gave the task of caring for His sheep, and they didn't do a very good job! Not only did the shepherds fail to protect the sheep against thieves and robbers like Assyria and Babylon, they sometimes worked *with* the thieves and robbers themselves!

In the New Testament, Jesus told Peter to "feed His lambs," and both Peter and Paul wrote letters about how to be a good leader, or shepherd for the church. Did you know the word Pastor comes from pasture? A good pastor is not just a good speaker. The pastor is supposed to be a shepherd, walking beside the people in the congregation, caring for them, listening to them, putting the oil of the Holy Spirit on their wounded spirits, finding them when they lose their way.

But what about us? If Jesus is our shepherd, and we're still lambs, or half-grown sheep, can we be shepherds, or do we have to wait until we're grown? And if we want to be shepherds for God's sheep, does that mean being a pastor? Or maybe a teacher? Or can anyone be a shepherd?

What does a good shepherd do?

He knows his sheep by name. He knows all about each of them, whether they have a sore hoof or need a particular plant in their diet, or get tired and have to be carried for awhile. Do we know our friends that well? Do we pay attention when they need a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on?

A good shepherd leads the sheep. We are not our friends' leaders. Not even pastors are that kind of leader. God is the leader. But we all have influence. Do we follow the shepherd and use our influence to encourage others to do so? Or do we follow the friends instead, and end up in the sticker bushes?

A good shepherd protects the sheep. Do we refuse to allow someone to be tormented, picked on, or called names in our presence?

A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus laid down His life for us in ways we can't even begin to imagine. Do we follow His lead and give our efforts to loving those around us even when it's hard or inconvenient? Or do we plan to do it *someday*? Someday never comes.

Let's end with a final quote from Ellen White on the subject of good under-shepherds:

*This is the way the true Shepherd treats the lost sinner. He goes after him; he does not hesitate at peril, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. He is intent upon bringing*

*the sin-burdened soul to repentance, to salvation, to peace, rest, and happiness in his Saviour's love. And it is the privilege of every one who has experienced the love of Jesus in his own heart, to think if there is not some one whom he can by personal effort, by studied tact and kindness, bring to Jesus, who is ready and willing to accept all who will come to him. We can all do much through personal effort. We can be laborers with Jesus Christ. Will the [church] family see what they can do to seek and to save the lost sheep? (Youth's Instructor, April 28, 1886)*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Share some ways in which someone has helped to shepherd your soul.
2. What are some ways in which you would like to help shepherd others? Can you create a shepherd's club in your class or group and encourage each other?

### **Life Identity Principle #4.**

***Because Jesus is my Shepherd,  
I can be a lamb that follows  
faithfully, and also an under-  
shepherd, helping to care for  
other lambs.***

## DAY 5

# Jesus said, “*I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.*”

### Part One

Luana was getting frustrated. “*I know* it’s right around here somewhere! Try turning left on that next street.”

Dad was pretty patient and good-natured, but he was getting a little frustrated, too. “Okay, but I’m not going to spend the entire afternoon, not to mention the entire tank of gas, on searching for your friend’s house. If we don’t find it in the next five minutes, we’re done!”

“Oh, *Dad*,” wailed Luana.

“Don’t ‘Oh, Dad’ me!” said Dad. “You should have gotten directions from her.”

Luana hung her head. “Well, see. . . that’s the thing. I did get directions, but then I forgot to bring them. I realized it right after we left the house, but I was *sure* I could remember!”

Once you’ve seen the Light of the world, and it’s led you to the Door to God’s kingdom, and Jesus has begun to feed you the Bread of Life, and to take care of you and protect you as your Good Shepherd, *then* it’s time to travel together. Not before!

Our “I Am” statement this time is found in John 14:6. Will you turn there in your Bibles? This part of the gospel, from near the end of John 13 through John 17, is the story of the last night Jesus was with His apostles. They have just eaten the Last Supper together, and these four chapters happen on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane and in the garden. Matthew, Mark, and Luke just say something like, “And on the way He spoke to them of many things.” But John remembered what Jesus said, and wrote it down for us. We can be really glad of this, because some of the most important things Jesus taught are in these chapters. He knew He was leaving them soon, and He wanted to be sure they

remembered some essential things they would need, in order to go on with the Holy Spirit instead of Jesus' physical presence with them.

You can probably say the first few verses of this chapter by heart. [*You can stop and try, if you wish. See if the group can say verses 1-3 together, if you get them started with "Let not your heart be troubled."*]

The next couple of verses aren't as well-known. Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that they know the way where He's going.

This comes as a surprise to them. Thomas probably speaks for all of them when he says in bewilderment, "But Lord! We don't even know where you're going! How can we know the way?"

What does Jesus reply?

[*Read or have someone read verses 6 and 7.*]

Now, we've all heard this so many times, in everything from sermons to bumper stickers, that we don't hear it the way they did. Imagine if a friend said to you, "I'm going away."

"Okay," you say.

"And you know the way to the place where I'm going," says your friend.

You look blank. "I don't even know where you're going—how can I know the way?"

And your friend looks at you and says, "I am the way."

I think your response would probably be something like the disciples' response—"Huh?"

What does it mean when Jesus says He is the way, and then proceeds to add, "No one comes to the Father except through me"? Lots of people believe, as we've said before, that it means no one gets to heaven except those who literally, in so many words, say, "I believe in Jesus and I accept His death for my sins and thank Him for giving me the gift of eternal life." But we know there will be lots of people in God's kingdom who had never even heard of Jesus. (Not to mention that there will be people who *did* say those words, but didn't really get to know or follow Jesus, and are *not* in the kingdom!) So the truth must be deeper and more powerful than that.

What does it mean for a person to be a "way"?

Well, what are some other words for "way"? [*Let people suggest some.*]

Path, road, trail, highway. . . Then there are other uses for that word. Like a way of doing something, or a way of being, or a way of living. If someone says,

“Walk this way,” he or she might mean, “Go in this direction,” or they might mean “Physically imitate this walk.” Which do you think Jesus meant?

Don’t you think He must have meant both? He was saying, “Go in the direction I’m going. Let your life point always upward, always toward heaven and love and God. This way of life might get twisty and wind all over the place, but it will *always* follow Me! Don’t get turned around and run toward your own will or desires, or toward hatred and selfishness and pride. And if you do discover you’ve made a u-turn somewhere and gotten lost, turn around! (That’s what the word ‘repent’ means, you know: turn around.) Go with Me again, upward to heaven.”

And He also was saying, “Imitate the way you’ve seen Me walk. While you’re here, waiting for Me to come back, use the hands I’ve given you to hug, to work for others, to help, to do deeds of kindness. Use your feet to go on God’s errands. Use your eyes to watch for the goodness and love you see in others, and use your mouth to encourage that. Walk like Me.”

It’s really important to pay attention to the fact that Jesus didn’t say, “I’m here to show you the way,” although He was; He didn’t say, “I’m giving you the way, or I’m teaching you the way,” although He did. He didn’t say, “I’ll help you find the way,” although He will. He said, *‘I AM’ the Way!*” There is a difference. Because if all we do is read about Jesus and try to do what He did, try to live His way, that’s good. That’s way better than the alternative! But it’s not the same as walking *in* Jesus, letting Him *be* the way for you. The way you walk or live, no matter how good it is, is not what saves you. Jesus does that. He’s the only One who can. And He’s the One who will save those people who will never hear His name until they get to heaven. When they realize what He’s done for them, they’ll fall down and worship and praise Him.

All who go there will do that. Because Jesus wants us where He is. He said so. And I definitely want to go! Do you?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Some of the things a road does are: show the way, keep people together, and make progress. How can you tell if your life is accomplishing these things?
2. Roads need maintenance sometimes, too, or they will get all broken up and overgrown. What are some ways you can maintain God’s way in your life?

## Part Two

Peter felt ashamed. Not only had he not finished his English paper, he had lied about it! Well, not lied, exactly, but exaggerated. “I’ve just been so busy, Ms. Keene. I tried, I really did! I *promise* I’ll do it over the weekend!”

It was kind of true that he had tried. He had looked up the subject he wanted to write about, written part of a page, and thought about it a lot. Did thinking about it count?

It was kind of true that he’d been busy. His brother’s birthday party had been this week, and he’d helped Mom get ready for it, and of course had to get a present for Joe. But he’d also played some computer games every evening, while that little voice in his head whispered, “This would be a good time to get going on that paper.”

That day in class, the worship was on Jesus’ baptism, and God saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!”

“You are God’s beloved child, too, every single one of you,” Ms. Keene said, looking around at her class. “God is well pleased with you!”

Peter kept his gaze on his desktop. Not him. Maybe God still loved him, but He sure wasn’t well pleased with him. Peter wasn’t even positive he was still God’s son.

All day, Peter felt glum. He knew he should tell Ms. Keene he needed to talk to her, but he couldn’t find the nerve. Then, worst of all, she asked him to stay after class! If he was *any* kind of a Christian, he’d have made the appointment himself! Now it would just look like he was trying to defend himself and save face.

Maybe he was doing just that.

It took Ms. Keene a few probing questions, but she managed to get the whole story out of Peter. By that time, he was trying hard not to cry in front of her. Talk about the last straw!

“I’m so lazy!” he told Ms. Keene angrily. “It’s just *stupid* to do things like that! And then I go and lie about it, just so you won’t think badly about me, and so I’ll look good. God is probably really ashamed of me! I’m such a bad person!”

“Well, now,” said Ms. Keene. “You definitely are having a problem with truth right now, and in more ways than you realize. Let’s see if we can do something about that. The worst kind of a falsehood, you know, is the one that’s partly true, because it can get you so mixed up. So let’s see if we can figure out the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

In our text, John 14:6, Jesus didn't just say He was the Way. He also said He was the Truth. And again, it's an interesting concept. How can a person *be* the truth? What is truth? Pilate asked Jesus that question, not very many hours later, but he didn't wait for the answer. Jesus had been showing the answer to that question for three and a half years. *He* was the truth. He didn't just tell the truth or point to truth or describe truth. He was and is *the* Truth.

Obviously, one thing this means is that the story of Jesus and of salvation is the bottom-line truth of the ages. God made us perfect, we sinned, God sent His Son to live and die for us. It's as if the very best possible fantasy or fairytale, too good to be true, turns out to be true after all! Yay! We get to live happily ever after, even though we don't deserve it! All we have to do is say yes and walk through the door, where we will start living a completely new and different kind of adventure. A life of complete truth.

That's hard!

But it's more than that. In fact, if it were only that, it would be impossible. Somehow, we have to live *in* Jesus, who *is* the Truth. We don't really know how it works. God does. What we do know is, once we make that choice, Jesus starts opening our eyes to truths we knew, and to truths we didn't know. Often, He uses others to help us learn this. In Peter's case, God is using his teacher, Ms. Keene. Ms. Keene says Peter has trouble with truth "in more ways than he knows." What do you think she means?

*[Allow some time for ideas to be expressed. You may wish to have a scribe, and write down the truth, just as Peter and Ms. Keene did.]*

What did Peter do wrong? He procrastinated about his English paper. Then he exaggerated the reasons that he didn't get it done so that he wouldn't look so bad.

What did he do right? He did do some work on his paper. He helped his mother and showed love to his brother. He recognized his sin. This is important. Even Peter's guilty conscience is a good thing! Where would he be without it? He admitted the truth as he saw it.

But there is another place where Peter got tangled up in falsehood. Can you see it? Let's look at what he thought and said about himself.

*[Read what he said and have the scribe write down the points.]*

He called himself lazy, bad, and stupid. Not only did he feel ashamed, he thought God was ashamed of him. Do you and I ever tell ourselves things like this? Are they true?

Here is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: *God loves us all the time, no matter what we do!*



*[You can have the whole group repeat that aloud, if you wish.]*

We are sinful, and we make mistakes, and even do things wrong deliberately, and then try to cover it up. If we feel badly about these things and try to make them right, that's a good thing. But if we let our mistakes and sins make us feel worthless and ashamed, and worse yet, assign those bad feelings about us to other people and to God, we are in way worse trouble than we already were. Now we're not just doing wrong, we are doing Satan the accuser's work for him! That's a terrible idea!

Jesus said, "I Am the truth. Listen to Me. You are my beloved child. I think more of you than I do of My own life. I can help you make restitution for wrongs, and do better, but not if you use up all your energy belittling yourself and beating yourself up."

Keep your eyes on Him, and that's the life-changing truth you will see.

Amazing!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some things you think and say and do that keep you from seeing that you are the beloved son or daughter of God? What are some things you can do to keep that truth ever before your eyes?
2. What are some things you can do to pass on Jesus' love and help others see that truth about themselves?

## **Part One**

Luana was so happy she felt like skipping. So she did. She saw Peter and stopped, laughing. "I haven't skipped since about third grade!" she exclaimed, panting. "I must have had more energy back then."

"What are you so excited about?" Peter wanted to know.

"Nothing in particular, I just feel happy."

"Why?" Peter stopped. "That sounds funny. I'm glad you're happy. I just wondered if anything happened, or something?"

Luana straightened her backpack, which weighed about three tons. No wonder she was out of breath! "It's hard to explain. Remember when we were

talking under the tree awhile back? I was all upset because I didn't feel like my life had changed much after I was baptized."

"Yeah, I remember."

"Well, when we studied about Jesus being the Bread of Life, I thought, *I've been reading my Bible every day, why isn't it doing anything?* But then we learned how He doesn't just teach you *about* truth, He *is* Truth, and He *is* the Door, and the Shepherd, and I realized, I've just been *reading* the Bible. Like a textbook." She thought about it. "More like a magic book, maybe. Ooo, that sounds awful. But, you know, like I'd find a spell or magic words that would make me be a good Christian. Like, if I memorized whole chapters, it would change me, or something. I mean, I do memorize—Oh, I don't know how to say what I mean!"

"I think I understand," Peter said thoughtfully. "Like it's a subject to learn, with right answers, like the dates of presidents, or multiplication tables, and if you learn them all correctly, then you'll be set."

"Right! Well, I decided I'd try to read as if I were sort of *reading Jesus*. As if I were putting Him and His life inside myself just like I put food inside my body. I asked Him to show me, and you know what, I'm starting to find myself thinking about Him beside me all day long—In class, and everything. Everything's different!" She stopped and thought again. "Actually, I don't know if I *act* that much different. I know I still lost my temper the other day, and didn't do the dishes last night until Mom told me four times."

"Whoa," said Peter. "No getting all ashamed and putting yourself down, remember? You did wrong, you ask for forgiveness, you see if you can make up for it. Then you move on."

Luana grinned. "Well, aren't you the expert! All I know is, like that blind guy, I can see! I'm just happier, that's all. I really believe God loves me and I'm His beloved daughter. It's cool!"

"Way cool!" agreed Peter.

In His discussion with His disciples on the last night of His life on earth, Jesus said three "I Am's" in one: I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." We've talked about the *way*, and how it may be narrow, and wind around all over the place, and be hard to see sometimes, but you follow the Shepherd, and you'll always go upward. We've talked about the *truth*, and how it's just as bad to believe Satan's lies about us as it is to sin in the first place. Now we're going to talk about *life*, and what it really means.

At first sight, the word life is an obvious one. It means "not dead." It means you're still breathing and living and doing. Jesus is the source of that physical

life, the One who, John says, created all things, and nothing was made without Him. But when Jesus said He came to give life, He meant more than that. He explains it more fully in another passage in John; it's in that same chapter we've been to twice before. Let's look up John 10:10. [*Read or have someone read.*]

So in this one story, Jesus said He was the gate or door, He was the Good Shepherd, and that He came to give life abundant, or a full life. Different Bibles translate it different ways, and they all add up to one thing: Jesus came to give us The Good Life. And He didn't mean riches and mansions and yachts and world travel—He meant the *real* Good Life.

So what is this full, abundant life? Someone once came up with an acrostic for JOY. It goes like this: [*Have a scribe write these three words in a list, one above the other: Jesus, Others, Yourself.*]

**Jesus** An abundant, full life is a life that puts Jesus first. He is the center and the purpose for everything His child does. If we know Jesus is smiling at us, we can take it when others frown. If we know Jesus is showing us what to do next, we don't have to worry about doing the wrong thing. And if we do make a mistake, we can know He'll forgive us and help us, too. If Jesus is the first one we say good morning to and the last one we say goodnight to, if He's the most important person when we're trying to plan our day, we will find a deep source of joy even in sadness or difficulty. A full life contains all the ingredients of life, and that includes loss and disappointment and struggle. A full life is almost the opposite of an easy life. But it's a life that is worth all the hard work and tears, and it's a life that doesn't get swept away by sorrow, but realizes that God is still there, weeping with us, and will make it all right one day.

**Others** The second ingredient of joyful, abundant life is love of others. In this same passage, Jesus says that's how people will know if we love God—by the fact that we love others. John writes a lot about that in the letter of 1 John. He points out that God is invisible. It's easy to *say* we love Him, but if we can't love the people we can see around us, then we aren't really loving God. So what do we do? We go back to number one—put God first. That will grow the love in us wider and deeper, and we'll find we can love even unlovable people. It doesn't necessarily mean we'll be best buddies with them. Some people aren't really safe to spend a lot of time with. Loving them anyway means we want the best for them, and we hope they will learn to live in Jesus' love and light, too.

**Yourself** The third ingredient, and this is really important, is love for ourselves. People have a lot of trouble with this concept. They usually think it means to do anything you want, and live your life by your whims and desires. How is that love? Would you call it love if you let a child have absolutely anything it wanted? Why would we think that if we give in to ourselves, spoil ourselves, set our desires above everything, that should be called self-love?

That's not love.

If you love a child, you set rules for her. You make sure that child eats healthy things and goes to bed on time. You pay attention to what she sees on TV, and limit the time she can spend online and which sites she can visit. So the third person to show healthy love for, in our JOY acrostic, is ourselves. We need to set sensible rules for ourselves, feed ourselves well both physically and spiritually, and treat ourselves as we believe a beloved child of God should be treated. This will not only *not* lead to selfishness, it's the only effective safeguard against it! The person whose deep inner needs are not being met is the one who is always out to get what he can, and he may not even know how selfish he is or how much he hurts others. Worse, he may not care.

Let's close with an Ellen White quote again:

*Christ's favorite theme was the paternal tenderness and abundant grace of God; He dwelt much upon the holiness of His character and His law; He presented Himself to the people as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let these be the themes of Christ's ministers. Present the truth as it is in Jesus. Make plain the requirements of the law and the gospel. Tell the people of Christ's life of self-denial and sacrifice; of His humiliation and death; of His resurrection and ascension; of His intercession for them in the courts of God; of His promise, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." John 14:3. (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 40)*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some specific ways in which you love Jesus first?
2. What are some specific ways in which you love others next?
3. What are some specific ways in which you love yourself third?

### **Life Identity Principle #5.**

***Because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I can walk in His Way, hold up His Truth, and share an abundant, full life with those around me.***

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## DAY 6

# Jesus said, “*I AM THE TRUE VINE.*”

### Part One

Science was one of Peter’s favorite subjects. He liked it best of all when they studied about the earth and the plants that grew on it. The teacher was very good at leading the students to pay attention both to the glories of God that are still revealed in nature, and to the evidence of decay, death, and the sinful world.

This week, they were learning about grafting. They had read about it in their book, then watched a short video on it, but today, Peter could hardly contain himself, because the class was going on a field trip to watch a woman who was an expert at grafting, and who might even let them try it themselves!

Huddled around the gardener, a young tree, and what looked like a dead branch wrapped in wet moss, the students watched carefully as the woman took a very sharp knife and sliced off the whole top of the tree at a slant.

The woman unwrapped the branch and placed its cut end against the stump of the tree. The cuts matched exactly. “You have to make sure the join is as perfect as possible, not crooked, or partly together and partly not. Only a perfect union will work. Like this, see?” The gardener bound the two stems together with special grafting tape. “The rootstock is the plant that is strongest. It can take bad weather, or insect damage, things like that. The branch we graft in, the scion, is from a weaker plant, but with the strength of the rootstock it will make beautiful flowers, or fruit, or whatever you want from the particular plant.”

Then she let them try it in teams of two. Rather than cutting off a whole tree top, they would be grafting branches onto an existing tree.

Peter and Luana, after practicing sharp, even cuts on a spare stick, carefully made a cut in their tree and grafted a branch onto it. It wasn’t as easy as the woman made it look, but they wrapped it well and felt pretty sure their graft would hold.

“How will we know for sure?” Luana asked the lady.

“If the graft takes, the branch will begin to show new growth. Here, I’ll show you.” She led the group over to a row of trees that were beginning to put out tiny green leaves. “See, here, and here? These grafts are doing nicely. They have grown together so that the scion can take nourishment from the soil directly through the cambium layer of the rootstock. But look over here. This one didn’t take. The new branch is withering and will die.”

“Can’t you do it over again?” asked Peter.

“Possibly, but it’s much harder. Usually we don’t try. We start over with another branch.”

So far, we’ve studied five “I Am” statements. We’ve seen that Jesus is a light shining on everyone, leading them to the door of Himself and urging them to choose to enter. Once a person enters, Jesus feeds them with the bread of His word, then is their Shepherd, leading them in His way, truth, and life. This time, we will look at another statement He made on that last night, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. It’s found in John 15:1-8. Let’s read it together. [*Share the reading of the 8 verses.*]

Once you know about grafting in the physical world of plants, this is a much more amazing statement, isn’t it? Jesus is the rootstock. A gardener chooses a rootstock for its strength, hardiness to different conditions, and resistance to insects and disease. Let’s try to figure out some of the ways this is true of Jesus.

**Jesus has strength.** This one is a real no-brainer, isn’t it? It’s no secret that we are *not* strong on our own. Every time we think we get something right, we mess it up. What we try to do, we can’t do, and what we’re determined *not* to do is exactly what we do! Even the strengths we do have were given to us by Jesus, and if we try to use them without Him, it doesn’t work out so well. So a person who has gifts of great leadership ends up like Hitler, or a person with musical talent becomes a so-called “star” and is mostly famous for being drunk or having three marriages and eight affairs. These gifts were given by God and were meant to be used with His strength. Just imagine if Hitler or those movie stars we hear about were truly committed to God! How would history be different?

**Jesus has hardiness for different conditions.** In the plant world, some plants can stand drought, floods, heat, and cold better than others. Sometimes you can graft a fragile rose, for instance, to a stronger rose rootstock, and the fragile rose will be better able to stand difficult conditions. If our lives are grafted into Jesus, we can handle the stresses of life, from ridicule to loneliness, from difficult home lives to illness. Neither we nor the fragile rose will ever be as strong as our rootstock, but we’ll be a lot stronger than we would have been on our own.

**Jesus can resist the “bugs and diseases” of sin.** He lived the life we live, and never gave in to Satan, so we know He has the strength to pass along to us. When we are in temptation, if we remember to quickly pray for Him to deal with it, we’ll be given words to say, or strength to get out of the situation. The Bible says to resist, or stand up to the devil, and he will flee from us. Why? Is that because he’s scared of us? No, but he sure is scared of Jesus who lives in us!

We are created as the children of God, and intended to produce beautiful flowers and fruit, but by ourselves we get scorched by stress, drowned by floods of trouble, and eaten alive by temptation and sin. If we don’t shrivel up and die, we produce crooked flowers and infested fruit. Worse yet, when that fruit falls from us and is passed on to those around us, they get infested, too! We’re in bad shape, and it all started back in the Garden of Eden, or even before that, when Lucifer rebelled in heaven.

But God knew what would happen, and He had a plan. Jesus would come, plant Himself in this earth, grow strong and tall, and then deliberately allow His life to be chopped off! All so we could be grafted in and start producing the beautiful flowers and fruit that He intended for us all along.

### Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you were just about sunk into temptation and Jesus rescued you.
2. What is a sin “disease” or “bug” you would like Jesus to give you His resistance to?

## Part Two

Jesus didn’t just say “I Am” the vine,” He also said “You are the branches.” He told the disciples (and us) that if we don’t “abide in Him,” we can bear no fruit. It’s a nice word picture, but what does it really mean?

We’ve talked about the ways in which Jesus is strong and makes a good “rootstock.” Now let’s talk about some ways we can be good branches.

First of all, the main difference between us and the plants is that we have a choice. You can pick any two plants you want, assuming that they’re correct

varieties and will go well together, and graft them. The plants have no say in the matter. But Jesus won't graft in any people who don't want to live His life. Just like the scion taking nourishment from the earth through the rootstock, the Christian who has asked Jesus to live in his or her life through the presence of the Holy Spirit actually takes in the life of Christ, and if that happened by force, it would be an evil thing! But we can choose it, and then it's a miracle.

Here is how Mrs. White describes it:

*The root of the tree has a double office to fill. It is to hold fast by its tendrils to the earth, while it takes to itself the nourishment desired. Thus it is with the Christian. When his union with Christ, the parent stock, is complete, when he feeds upon Him, currents of spiritual strength are given to him. Can the leaves of such a branch wither?--Never! As long as the soul reaches toward Christ, there is little danger that he will wilt, and droop, and decay. The temptations that may come in like a tempest will not uproot him. The true Christian draws his motives of action from his deep love for his Redeemer. His affection for his Master is true and holy. (Sons and Daughters of God, p. 288)*

When the gardener taught the students how to graft, she said that one of the most important things was a "perfect union." The cuts made in both plants have to be carefully matched in size and angle, and bound together as if they had grown there all along.

How can we have a perfect union with Jesus? Well, as the rootstock, He was the one who was cut first. He was cut off entirely, in death, just like the top of the tree was cut off when the grafting was done. It's hard for us to even imagine such a thing. But He did it for us. So, in order for our cut to match His, we have to be completely cut off from our old way of doing whatever we want, whenever we want, or of doing things to please others and make them like us, or whatever motivations we had before we decided to open the door to Jesus. We have to be cut off from our roots of sin.

If we've loved Jesus ever since we were small, as many of us have, it's harder to see this. We may have been blessed to be raised by Christian parents and taught to love the ways of God more than the ways of ourselves. If so, this is a great blessing, but it doesn't mean we aren't cut off from our roots of sin. It means we were already cut off from the bad roots we might have had while we were still small. It's as if someone did a grafting from a young, tender plant. That would be an easy graft. It would grow together really well, and you might not be able to see the join later in its life, but it would still be there.

But, although we are Christians and have accepted the Lord into our hearts, we're still sinful. We still like to have things our own way, and we still fall into temptation. We still have a choice to make every day of our lives. Do we want to



stay grafted in? Do we really want Jesus' will more than our own will? Even in what we read or watch on TV? Even in which computer games we play, or what we post online? There are tendrils of sin reaching out for us from every direction, and the fact that our parents raised us to love God gives us a huge edge, but only in one way—that is, we know about Him, and we know we can choose Him. Lots of people don't have that. But our parents can't make the choice for us. Believe me, they wish they could! But we get to decide for ourselves. Do we want to “abide,” stay in Christ, live in Him?

Then we have to be bound together as if we were one plant. Later in these chapters in John, Jesus prays to His Father in heaven to make all His children “one.” That includes us. We are to be one in Christ and one in each other. That doesn't mean we're exactly the same. In fact, if plants were all the same, nobody would ever do any grafting. Or any gardening, for that matter. Just think how boring it would be!

How do you get to be “one” with somebody? You spend a lot of time with them. You learn about each other, and each other's interests and hobbies. You even learn about each other's troubles. If we spend time every single day with Jesus, reading His word, talking to Him, singing His songs, doing His work, we'll become one with Him. We'll be bound with Him until we can't get free without cutting ourselves off.

This won't mean we lose anything of our real selves. In fact, it's the only chance we have of ever *being* our real selves. Only Jesus knows what our true, inner selves were meant to be, and His dreams for us are even bigger than the ones we dream for ourselves. The closer we get to Him, the more we'll learn about our gifts, callings, and uniqueness. The more we'll be able to bloom and bear fruit. And that's when we'll grow into the true beauty God meant us to have. Not one of us will look the same. In case you can't tell, God likes variety! Just look at the different flowers and fruit, not to mention the incredible variety of birds, animals, and fish. John, the one who wrote all this down for us, says in one of his other books, in 1 John 3:2, that “what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

And remember the last verse of the passage we began with? John 15:8 says that God is glorified when we bear much fruit, because that's how we show we are disciples of Jesus.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are some things you do to build and maintain a more perfect union with Jesus?
2. How can you tell when your union with Him has some gaps in it? What can you do then?

## Part Three

Okay, so we know how to be grafted in, and how to be bound up with Jesus. But what does it mean to bear fruit? I'm pretty sure none of us is about to sprout apples or pears! Jesus says it to His disciples, "I want you to bear lots of fruit," as if He expects them to know what He means, but He really doesn't explain it in this passage. Since they were so confused about the rest of the things He was saying, like where He was going, or how they could know the way, or what He meant when He said He was leaving and going back to God, we can probably assume they didn't understand this right away, either. But they figured it out after Jesus left and the Holy Spirit came to them in power. A later disciple, Paul, who never met Jesus while He lived on earth, but became one of His most faithful followers, wrote a whole passage about what this fruit is. It's found in Galatians 5:22, 23. Turn there with me in your Bibles. [*Read or have someone read. You may wish to have a scribe write the fruit of the Spirit on a board.*]

**Love** This is the first and greatest of the fruits. Some people say that really, love is the only fruit, and all the rest of this list are facets of love. Certainly the Bible teaches that God is love, and love is the only commandment. Love God, love everybody, do it with everything you've got, and you'll automatically keep all the rest of the commandments and bear all the rest of this fruit. We talked about this in another session—that you can only love others if you love God first, and if you don't love others, it shows you don't love Him either. So if this fruit is missing in your life, there's definitely something wrong with your graft, and you should check it out, and get help from godly people you trust.

**Joy** You know what it feels like when you are doing something you really love to do and know you are good at? As if you're more *you* somehow? Well, that's what it's like walking with Jesus, only even better. Because you really *are* more your real self! And as you grow and learn and He teaches you more and more, the joy grows deeper into your soul, like roots. But there's one important

thing to understand. All of these fruits are very different than the worldly ideas they sound like. So God's joy, for instance, isn't the same as just being happy and having everything go your way. Things will happen. Annoying things. Frustrating things. Frightening things. Even really awful, sorrowful things. A Christian doesn't always feel happy. Even Jesus was called, in Isaiah 53:3, "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." He is more familiar with suffering than we will ever be. The joy that being His child and abiding in Him brings can be an exciting, wonderful feeling. But often it is more like a quiet inner sense of security—knowing that no matter what happens, He is always there, and He'll get you through it.

**Peace** This, too, is not the same as quietness, tranquility, no conflict going on. That's what we think peace is. In fact, that's what you'd find if you looked it up in the dictionary. But Jesus warned us in this same passage, on His last night with the disciples, that His peace is not like the world's peace. Look at John 16:33. [*Read or have someone read.*]

Jesus actually promises trouble! But then He says, "Cheer up! I've overcome the world." In other words, *we* can't overcome it, and sometimes it seems like we're surrounded by trouble, little and big. But we can have peace, knowing He not only can, He already did! That makes us able to hang in there.

**Patience** Have you ever heard the warning not to pray for patience? The truth is, there's only one way to learn patience, and that's to have lots of things to be impatient about. Let's face it, anybody can be patient if things are great. In fact, that's not even patience! If you want to really learn patience, you have to have lots of things happen that will tempt you to be impatient. So watch out if you actually *ask* God to make you patient! Who knows how many irritating things you might suddenly notice! It's not as if God *causes* aggravating things to happen. He doesn't have to—there are plenty of them. But when we pray for patience, the Holy Spirit starts working on making us more aware of our own reactions to the things that happen, and suddenly it seems like patience is impossible! But don't worry—keep hanging onto that vine, let the gardener prune you if necessary, and fruit will come. You can't make it grow by thinking about it or wishing for it, but just by abiding.

**Kindness** Here is a fruit that needs no description. Everybody knows what kindness is. Everybody recognizes it when it happens to them. Not everybody turns around and practices it. But since the Bible says *all* good gifts come from God (James 1:17), then every time someone is genuinely kind, that comes from God, even if the person doesn't even know it. You can know your union with Jesus is in good shape if you can be kind, even to those who are not kind to you.

**Goodness.** This one is harder to define. We all *think* we know what goodness is, but find it hard to describe and even harder to practice. But God says it's

a fruit of the Spirit, so if you have the Holy Spirit living in you, and if you are abiding daily in Jesus' words and presence, then goodness will grow on you. Here's a hint: if you think you're good, that's not it. If you think you're bad, that's not it, either. If you don't think much about *you* at all, but others seem to think you're good, and that surprises you—that's it! And you can reply to compliments and gratitude by smiling and saying, "Thank you, but that's all God, not me."

**Faithfulness.** This has two different shades of meaning. First, it means full of faith, which is an automatic outgrowth of living daily with Jesus. We begin to see the things He does in us and for us, and our faith grows and grows until it fills us up and overflows on those around us. Second, it means doing things faithfully. Turning in homework well-done and on time. Doing home or school chores without being reminded. Being kind to those around us. Even being kind and consistent with our pets. The most important thing to be faithful about, though, and the first thing to check if you find you are being unfaithful in other things, is faithfully spending time praying and reading the Bible, and being sure when we pray to leave time for listening, too. We speak, and we know God listens. Then we listen, and know He will speak, sometimes in impressions we receive in our hearts, but mostly in either the Bible or the words of others, like sermons, songs, or even something a friend says.

**Gentleness.** Gentleness is not always popular today. You hear a lot about being strong, and standing up for yourself, and knowing what you want and going after it. Boys, in particular, are often made fun of if they are gentle, because some people think that means to be wimpy. But that's silly, when you think of it. Isn't it the biggest and strongest who have the most need to be gentle? Think about that old-fashioned word, "gentleman." We don't use it much anymore. Maybe that's because it came to mean something entirely different from what it was supposed to mean. Think about what definition you would give that word. Then take it apart. Gentle, man. Does your definition fit that? There's an even more out-of-date term, "gentlewoman." Girls, too, need the spiritual fruit of gentleness. We are all in this world together, we all have troubles, and a little gentleness goes a long way in smoothing the path for everyone around us.

**Self control.** Oh, boy, everybody's favorite! Like everything else, we've given this a negative definition. Self control, we think, means living in some kind of box, obeying rules like a robot, never having any fun! Is that what Jesus meant? Surely not! The truth is, if we're grafted into the Vine, Jesus, and the Gardener, His Father, is caring for us. If we've begun to grow some love and joy and peace and all the rest of it, self control goes right along with it. It might not mean *never* eating cake, but it certainly will mean not eating three pieces! It might not mean never having to express anger, but it will definitely mean not losing our temper or blaming others for our anger. It might not mean giving up play entirely and

spending all your time on homework because only A's are acceptable; it will mean doing your best at work *and* play.

And there you have it: a word picture from the Bible of the full and abundant life Jesus promises to those who choose to belong to Him, to grow into Him, to take their nourishment from Him, to grow up into all He wants for them, producing abundant blooms and fruit that are a blessing to all around us.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Of all these fruits, which one appeals to you today? Why?
2. Tell of a time when someone else demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit in relationship to you. What happened? How did it feel? Did it make you want to be more like Jesus? How?

**Life Identity Principle #6.**  
***Because Jesus is the True Vine,  
I can be a blessed branch,  
drawing my nourishment from  
Him and glorifying God with  
much fruit.***

## DAY 7

# Jesus said, *“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.”*

### Part One

“What’s going on?” Luana whispered to Peter.

“I don’t know,” he whispered back. “It sure is weird, though!”

All the teachers seemed really upset about something this morning. Ms. Keene had left the class to go to the office, and had been gone longer than they expected. She had seemed so strange that most of them didn’t even goof off while they waited.

When Ms. Keene came back, she seemed distracted. Their first class was hard to follow. Everyone kept losing their train of thought.

Then the principal came to the door and signaled Ms. Keene. She nodded and put down her book. “Class, I need you to listen to me. This is really important. We’re going to go to the chapel now.”

“The chapel?”

“What? Why?”

“Something terrible has happened.” Ms. Keene looked as if she would cry. Luana and Peter exchanged anxious glances. “All the classes are going to chapel together. As many as possible of your parents will be there, too.”

Luana felt a chill run down her spine. She had a really bad feeling about this.

A hubbub of voices arose, but Ms. Keene hushed them. “Everything will be explained. Let’s pray together before we go.”

Everyone bowed their heads, and Ms. Keene asked God for strength and wisdom, and to hold them all in the arms of the Holy Spirit.

Luana was starting to feel like crying herself. This was really scary!

Quietly, but with much whispering, the class made their way to the chapel. It was packed by the time all the students and many parents were in there. The teachers had told all the students they could find their own parents and

sit with them, so there was some milling and confusion before everyone settled down. Teachers sat with those whose parents had been unable to come. Luana's parents seemed upset, too. They hugged her tightly, but didn't say anything.

When all was quiet, the principal said, "Everyone, I'm very sorry to have to call you here. I'm afraid I have bad news. We thought it might be best if you all heard together, and if your parents and teachers are all here to comfort you and help you understand and deal with this tragedy."

Luana wished he would just say it! This suspense was worse than anything.

He cleared his throat. "This morning, on their way to school, the McCleary family was in a serious accident. Mrs. McCleary and Jonah were both killed." A rush of shocked sound whirred around the room. The principal held up his hands. "Jonah's little sister, Marya, is in intensive care. We don't know yet whether she will live." He choked up and stopped talking, and again the voices rose in the chapel.

Luana felt as if her throat were closed tight. She could hardly feel Mom's arm squeezing her shoulders. Around her, she could hear cries of dismay and weeping. Jonah McCleary! It didn't seem possible. "He ate with us yesterday," she said, and her voice sounded funny.

Dad's voice was choked, too. "Dear God, poor Mac!" he murmured. "I'll have to see if there's anything I can do. Not that there's anything *anyone* can do. . ."

The rest of the day was weird. Classes were distracted. Some kids spent time in the office. Some went home. Luana lasted the day, but could hardly eat any supper once she got home.

Finally, at worship, the question that had tormented her all day seemed to burst out of her. "*Why? Why would God let this happen?*"

The last of the seven specific "I Am" statements that we are studying this week is found in John 11:25. [*Read or have someone read.*] This statement is found in a very sad story. Lazarus, the only brother of two sisters, Mary and Martha, had died. All three of them were friends of Jesus, and worse yet, they had sent word to Him days ago that Lazarus was sick, but He had chosen not to come. You can see it in verse 4, when Jesus says the sickness will not end in death, and in verse 6, where He stays where He is two more days.

We could guess that Mary and Martha would be asking, "*Why?*" But we don't need to guess. We can know it, because both of them said to Jesus, "If *only* You had been here!" They had seen Jesus heal many people, and they were sure He could have healed Lazarus, too. In other words, why had He let this happen?

He is speaking to Martha when He makes this “I Am” statement. Before He has done anything at all about the sorrowful situation His friends are in, Jesus says to Martha, “I Am” the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

What is Martha’s answer? [*Read or have someone read verse 27.*]

That is what God wanted to hear. In her sorrow, in her disappointment, before she has any idea what miracle Jesus has in mind, even though she may feel angry that God (and Jesus) have allowed this to happen, Martha says, “I believe. I still believe you are the Messiah. I am not going to stop believing in you because I am hurt and confused and devastated with sorrow.”

She even says she knows her brother will rise again. Martha has the faith that this is not the end. It doesn’t stop her grief, but it eases it. Imagine if you really thought everyone who died was dead forever, and you’d never see them again?

But no. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He’s laid His own life on it.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Have you had someone close to you die? How did you deal with the grief and the questions?
2. Do you wonder why God allows bad things to happen? What do you think would happen if He stopped letting anything bad happen to anyone who follows Him?

## **Part Two**

Of course, we know the end of Lazarus’ story. Jesus raised him, he walked in the triumphal procession when Jesus entered Jerusalem before His own death, and then. . . what then? Is Lazarus still alive? No? So he died again, right?

When Jesus raised people here on earth, whether it was Lazarus, Jairus’ daughter, or the widow of Nain’s son, He didn’t give them eternal life. Technically, although His plan of salvation was complete in God’s eyes from before Creation, Jesus had not yet bought back our right to eternal life. Yet He told Martha, and others as well, that those who believed in Him, “will never die.”



He knew it was already a done deal.

It was only a short time after Lazarus was raised that Jesus went through His own valley of the shadow of death. Except, the valley He traveled was never, and will never, be traveled by another soul. Somehow (humans will never truly understand how) Jesus didn't just die the normal death we die—He died what we call the Second Death—the eternal death that is the consequence of sin. He should have stayed dead forever and ever.

But He didn't!

Let's turn in our Bibles to John 20. First, let's imagine the scene. Think of all the times you've ever lost anyone. Remember the shock and grief in all its power. Now add to that the sorrow you would feel if it were your own parent, or someone very, very close to you. Add that all up together, and imagine if you had been a friend of Jesus, and believed with all your heart that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. And now He's dead! He's *dead!!* Can you even imagine the grief and horror and shock?

He's dead.

But He *can't* be dead!

But He is.

Now what do we do?

Mary Magdalene was one of the most grief-stricken of Jesus' followers. He had rescued her from a life we can't even imagine, and she didn't see how she could go on living without Him. So practically before light on Sunday morning, she went to the tomb.

Let's read what happened.

*[Taking turns to read, go all the way through John 20:1-18. Take time to stop and discuss what your emotions would have been like if you had been there. This will take most of the rest of the time for Part Two.]*

“My Father and your Father; My God and your God.” Why do you think He said it like that? Jesus wanted to reassure them once and for all that God loved them as much as He did, and that He loved them a lot! He even stayed in the graveyard before going back up to visit His Father, from whom He had been separated for many years.

But after reassuring Mary and sending this message to the others, Jesus did go right to heaven. Mrs. White says:

*“Jesus refused to receive the homage of His people until He had the assurance that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. He ascended to the heavenly courts,*

*and from God Himself heard the assurance that His atonement for the sins of [all] had been ample, that through His blood all might gain eternal life. . . The Father. . . would love them even as He loves His Son. . . . All power in heaven and on earth was given to the Prince of life, and He returned to His followers in a world of sin, that He might impart to them of His power and glory.” (Desire of Ages, p. 790)*

Now Jesus was, in truth, the Resurrection and the Life. He came to share that with us. With you and me! Amazing!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. If you were Mary, Peter, or John, how would you have felt when you found the tomb empty? How would you have felt when you received the message from Mary that Jesus sent? They didn't believe her. Do you think you would have? Why or why not?
2. Tell about a time when knowing that there will be a resurrection has given you comfort in sorrow.

## **Part Three**

In all of these “I Am” statements, we’ve first looked at what Jesus said He is, and then at what that means for us. In this case, of course, there is no way that we are either resurrection or life! We just have to decide if we want in on His resurrection and life. However, we can also use our influence either to further Jesus’ life and newness, or to spread death and destruction. It’s surprising how often even Christians can do and say deadly things. Unkind words, gossip, stretching the truth (especially to make oneself look good and someone else look bad)—all these things are actions of death, not of life. On the other hand, kind words, loving deeds, standing up for someone who needs it—these things participate in God’s life of love and demonstrate that we “have crossed over from death to life,” as Jesus put it in John 5:24.

But how can this be true right now? We know that we can believe what Jesus says as soon as He says it, as though it had already happened. But there’s more to it than that. There is a real, physical way that we can live out the death and

resurrection of Jesus now. Turn in your Bible to Romans 6:4, 5. [*Read or have someone read.*] “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”

So we can see that, just as Luana and Peter were discussing at the beginning of our series, baptism really is the outward sign of a whole new life that is begun on the inside. Here is how Mrs. White explains it:

*“Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Self is by profession dead to a life of sin. The waters cover the candidate, and in the presence of the whole heavenly universe the mutual pledge is made. In the name of the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit, man is laid in his watery grave, buried with Christ in baptism and raised from the water to live the new life of loyalty to God. The three great powers in heaven are witnesses; they are invisible but present.”* (*The Faith I Live By*, p. 146)

When she says “by profession,” what she means is, the person has professed, or claimed, to have a new life in Christ. But the question is, does he or she really mean it? Anyone can *say* they want to follow Jesus. They might even mean it, but then it gets hard, or discouraging, and they give up. The waters of baptism are only a symbol—they aren’t what does the washing of sins. Jesus does that, and He’s the only One who can. And it isn’t done just once—it’s done over and over, every day, for the rest of your life.

Actually, just before that quote above, Ellen White has this to say:

*God asks those who take His name, How are you using the powers that have been redeemed by the death of My Son? Are you doing all in your power to rise to a greater height in spiritual understanding? Are you adjusting your interest and actions in harmony with the momentous claims of eternity?* (*ibid.*)

So when we want to know if we are living out the resurrection life Jesus has promised us, those are the questions we can ask ourselves. Are we trying to learn something new every day about God and His truth? Are we choosing what to do and say by what effect it has on our eternal lives, and the lives of others?

Meanwhile, when horrible, unexplainable things happen and we wonder where God is, and why He didn’t stop them, we will just have to put our trust in Him and ask *Him* the questions. It’s okay to show our true feelings to God, even when they are negative ones—He understands. Who else can we turn to? He may not (probably won’t) answer us now in any way we can understand, but He will be with us now, care for us tenderly, cry with us, and finally take us to live forever with Him, where there will be no more tears or death, forever.

The funeral was the hardest thing Luana had ever lived through. School had been dismissed so that all who wished to could attend. Luana and her mom and dad sat close together. Luana couldn't keep her eyes off those two closed caskets. She would have hated to have to look at a dead body made up to look asleep, but it seemed even worse that they were closed, because it made her wonder why they were closed.

She pricked up her ears suddenly, part way through the sermon. Pastor Jake had said, "We may well ask why God would allow such a terrible thing to happen." Yes, Luana did wonder just that very thing. "Jonah McCleary was only a boy," the pastor went on. "He had his whole life ahead of him. Shouldn't God have spared that life, given that Jonah might have accomplished great things for Him if he had lived? Then there's Mary McCleary, a young mother, one who has left a grieving husband and a small daughter, who is still in intensive care herself. How could God let this happen?"

Pastor Jake paused and looked around the room. Luana felt as if he looked right at her. She held her breath.

"I don't know."

Luana closed her eyes. Of course he didn't. Why had she thought he would?

"We can't answer questions like this. But I'll tell you what I do know. God hates *all* the bad things that happen on this world. Sin causes death and sorrow. If He's going to stop one thing, why not another?"

Luana opened her eyes and looked up.

"Why not stop *any* children from dying in accidents? Why not stop any from dying of starvation?"

Luana hadn't thought of it like that before. Should she be so upset just because it was *her* friend? Weren't there accidents every day? Didn't people die in them? Had she ever demanded of God why He hadn't stopped those accidents? She felt just a little guilty, thinking about it. It was almost like saying Joshua and his mom were more important than the other people she heard about who died.

"If He's going to stop one, I think He'd rather stop it all." said the pastor. "Don't you think so?"

Yes, thought Luana. Yes, I do!

A smile lit up Pastor Jake's face, which Luana had seen crying just a little while ago. "Friends, listen. He will. He *will!* That's what I'm here to remind us all. That's the thing to hang onto now. We will see Jonah again, and one day there will be no more death at all."

Luana looked at Jonah's dad. He was up in the front, and she could only see the side of his face. A tear was sliding down his cheek. The eye that she could see had a dark shadow under it. He probably had hardly slept in the days since the accident. Luana knew that he spent many hours at the hospital, at little Marya's side. Her mom had gone to sit with him there. Luana hadn't wanted to go. She was afraid of what it might be like. What if Marya died too?! But Mr. McCleary was smiling, too. He was actually smiling at the same time that he was crying!

Luana felt her eyes sting. If Jesus could give comfort to the dad and husband of the lost ones, He could certainly give comfort to a school friend like her. She leaned against her own dad's arm. *I'm sorry, Jesus. I was really mad at You. But thank You so much for promising that You are the Resurrection and the Life, and those who believe in You, even if they die, will still live forever! And give me the courage to visit with Mr. McCleary. I'll give him a hug from You. Amen.*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you know someone who is grieving? It doesn't have to be a death. It can be the loss of a job, or loss of health, or moving away from all their friends and feeling lonely. What can you do to share Jesus' comfort with that person?
2. Did the things you have said and done today share God's resurrection life, or did they spread death and destruction? Is there anything you will do to be more aware of sharing life instead of death?

### **Life Identity Principle #7.**

***Because Jesus is the  
Resurrection and the Life, I can  
rejoice in His newness of life now  
and trust Him for life eternal.***

## DAY 8

# JESUS, THE GREAT “I AM”

### Part One

Peter and Luana were working together at a long table in Peter’s basement. The table was eight feet long, and still not long enough. The long paper they were using hung off one end almost to the floor. Peter bent over the middle of the table, concentrating with all his might on painting a sheepfold and a herd of sheep. Luana was huddled at the beginning of the long poster they were making, writing with her very best lettering.

“This sheep looks stupid!” complained Peter.

Luana straightened up and looked over at his work. “It does not. I wish I could draw like you!”

“Look at its head. It looks more like—I don’t even know what. A dragon.”

Luana laughed. “Maybe it’s a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

“Very funny!” But Peter couldn’t help laughing too.

“Seriously, it’s fine. Maybe it should be a little more rounded there, across the top of its head.”

Peter tried rounding off the top of the head. It looked a little better. “My back hurts!” He stretched. “How are you doing?” He came to Luana’s end of the table, where he had painted Jesus holding a lamp and all of Him shining in all directions. Beneath Jesus’ feet, Luana had written, “Jesus is the Light of the World. He shines into all the dark corners of life. Don’t be afraid of Him. He can bring you out of the darkness and into” –it ended there.

“I want to say warmth, or love, or something. Warmth and safety, maybe? The word ‘light’ is in there enough already.”

“That’s really cool,” Peter told her. “I can never think of words like you can.”

“Hey!” Luana’s face lit up as if Jesus’ light were shining through her. “Remember when we were sitting under that tree awhile back, all worried because we didn’t feel that Jesus was really changing our lives?”

“I remember.”

“Well, I think we’ve both learned some things about how to live every minute of every day with Jesus, and I do think there has been a little more light and a little less darkness, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Well, I also remember that you said you didn’t know who you were. And this is part of the answer right here. I’m not an artist, but I’m a creative writer. You’re not a writer, but you’re an artist. Jesus gave us these gifts, don’t you think?”

“He did! And is showing us ways of using them for Him, too. Like, I always used to spend my time drawing space ships and racing cars. Not that that’s bad, or anything, but this is even better. Do you think Pastor Jake will let us hang it up at church?”

Luana grinned. “I’ll bet he not only lets us hang it, he preaches a sermon series on it!”

We have studied all the seven “I Am” statements John records Jesus as saying: “I Am” the Light of the world, “I Am” the Door of the sheepfold, “I Am” the Bread of Life, “I Am” the Good Shepherd, “I Am” the Way, the Truth, and the Life, “I Am” the True Vine, and “I Am” the Resurrection and the Life. For our last session together, we’re going to look more closely at the “I Am” itself. Where did it come from? What does it mean?

The first time this term is used is found in Exodus 3:14, 15. Let’s go there together. What story is this? [*People should be able to recognize it as the story of God calling Moses from the burning bush.*] Moses thought the life of leadership he had trained for in Egypt was long over. He had been a shepherd for forty years, and had no idea he would ever be anything else. During that time, he had also been a writer. God had inspired him to write down the story of Creation and the stories of the first godly leaders, like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob, Leah, and Rachel.

Now, his life takes a sudden, shocking turn. God says, “I want you to go get the Israelites out of Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land.

Imagine if you were Moses. *What??!!*

He argued for awhile: “I’m too shy, I can’t talk, and they’ll never listen.” God isn’t letting him argue his way out of this assignment. Now, Moses asks, “Well, whom shall I say sent me? They’ll want to know who you really are.”

Now this is an interesting thing. Moses just meant, “What’s your name?” But God knew that the question of Who You Really Are is extremely important, and

goes way deeper than your name. His answer is unexpected and a little strange. [Read or have someone read verses 14, 15.]

“I Am” Who I Am.” Weird name, don’t you think? But a much deeper and truer answer. Humans are almost never exactly who they say they are. In fact, they don’t even *know* fully who they are at heart. But God, in contrast, is always exactly and truly *who He says He is*. There’s an idea of choice implied, especially in those Bibles that translate this as “I will be who I will be.” God says, “I Am who and what I choose to be.”

And there’s even more than that in the Hebrew. Mrs. White says, “I AM” means an eternal presence; the past, present, and future are alike with God. He sees the most remote events of past history and the far distant future with as clear a vision as we do those things which are transpiring daily” (*That I May Know Him*, p. 12). A Jewish rabbi named Marcia Prager, a Hebrew scholar herself, suggests other ways to translate the Hebrew phrase: “I Am” the Eternal Am-ness,” or “I Am” the Oneness that lives and points toward life.” Or “I Am” the Eternal Being. “I Am” Being calling Being into Being each moment.”\* That’s an interesting one. In other words, God is creative not just when He first called the universe, and our world, into existence, but all the time. He is creating right now. He is re-creating us, as much as we will allow, every moment. He gives us a choice, too. We are, in many ways, who we believe we are, and who we choose to be.

And when we choose to cooperate with Him in that new creation, then in the same way that He is who He truly is, we begin to see and learn and be who we truly are, too.

### Discussion Questions

1. Which is your favorite of all the “I Am” statements we’ve studied, and why?
2. Name one way you have chosen who you are this week.

## Part Two

Besides these seven times in John that Jesus uses the term “I Am” as an identifying principle, there are four times recorded in the gospels that He uses just the name of God by itself. We will look at all four of them.



All but one are still in John's gospel. The first two are in one chapter, John 8, so please turn there in your Bibles. If you scan this chapter quickly, you'll see that it looks familiar. The first part of the chapter is the story of the woman caught in adultery, and right after Jesus forgives her, He makes the statement, "I Am the Light of the world."

At this point, leaders and Pharisees start arguing with Him. You have to admit, if a regular human being said that, you'd be tempted to throw him in the loony bin! Who did Jesus think He was? And that is the essential question, right there. Who did He think He was? Who did He say He was? And was He telling the truth, or was He crazy? Because it had to be one or the other, unless He was just plain lying, to get people to follow Him. If it was that, He'd have given it all up when it started to threaten His life, right? And this chapter, right here, is where it starts to threaten His life. Instead of giving up, Jesus gets more and more direct in His statements. When they try to say they need some other verification for who He claims to be than just His say-so, He actually claims to be the judge, and not only that, to always judge rightly!

Then, look at verse 24: "If you do not believe that "I Am" the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." Wow! That's just how God named Himself to Moses, right? "I Am" who I claim to be." And here is Jesus not only claiming that for Himself, but telling them if they don't believe, they'll "die in their sins," which means, die the Second Death—die forever! Can you see that if you don't believe He's God come to earth in human flesh, you'd have to believe He was criminally insane?

But He still doesn't stop, even though they keep arguing. In verse 28 He tells them that when they lift Him up—When is that? The crucifixion, right?—they will know He really is who He says He is. (They didn't, or at least they didn't admit it, but the Roman centurion did. Do you remember what He said after He killed Jesus? "Surely this Man was the Son of God!")

But let's go on. In verse 56, Jesus says Abraham rejoiced at the thought of His day. The people who are arguing with him scoff, "You're not even fifty years old! You claim to have seen Abraham?!"

And here it comes. Read verse 59, and try to imagine what it would have felt like to hear this, if you were in that crowd that day. Remember, this is just an ordinary looking man, wearing ordinary clothes. He has to eat and sleep, He gets sweaty and tired when He walks all day, and He looks you in the eye and says, "I tell you the truth, . . . *before Abraham was born, I Am!*" (italics added).

The exact name of God, plus the claim to have lived forever! As Mrs. White points out, "Christ was using the great name of God that was given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence" (*That I May Know Him*, p. 12).

They only had two choices: believe Him, unbelievable as it sounded, or kill Him as a blasphemer. Which did they choose? *[Read or have someone read verse 60.]*

They didn't succeed in killing Him that day, but they kept trying, and eventually, they did it. Let's turn to John 18. This is the last night of Jesus' life on earth. In John 14-16, remember, He's been explaining all kinds of things to His disciples that He wants them to know before He goes. Chapter 17 is His long prayer for all of His followers, all over the world and throughout time, including us, to be one in Him and one in the Father. Now the soldiers are coming to arrest Him, and an interesting thing happens. Let's read verses 4 through 6. *[Read or have someone read.]*

Weird again! In English, it just sounds like He said, "I'm the one. It's me you want." Did you know that the word "he" is added? That's because it doesn't make much sense in English if they say, "We're looking for Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus just says, "I Am." But you can tell by the reaction—they fell to the ground!—that it meant more than that. He was saying God's name, and using it for Himself. Here's what Mrs. White says about this moment. "A divine light illuminated the Saviour's face, and a dovelike form overshadowed Him. In the presence of this divine glory, the murderous throng could not stand for a moment. They staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, fell as dead men to the ground" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 694).

You'd think after that they'd be afraid to touch Him, but no, they hopped back up as if nothing had ever happened, tied His hands, (tied them again after He got free without effort to heal Malchus' ear), and dragged Him away for beatings and a couple of mock trials.

But Jesus wasn't finished.

The other place where He is recorded as using God's name is found in Mark 14:62. Please turn there with me. This is the part of His trial where He is standing before the high priest, Caiaphas. He has stood silently, refusing to answer any of the made-up charges against Him, until Caiaphas asks point blank (in verse 61), "Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed One?"

"I Am," says Jesus. And even that's not all. He adds a promise for the corrupted high priest who has led His people astray. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Verse 62).

I wonder what Caiaphas and the rest of those who condemned and killed the Son of God will think then?

One thing is clear. Throughout His life, and especially after long periods of prayer, such as He had just experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus

knew very clearly who He was. He made choices consistent with that identity, and He lived out clearly, honestly, and transparently who He really was. The one charge against Him at His trial which was actually true was that He made Himself equal with God.

He came for two purposes. He came to clear up people's misconceptions about who God was and show them that He is a God of infinite love and compassion, and He came to make it possible for all who will to become children of God and learn to be who they really are. He did this by His life, by His death in our place, and by His resurrection into new, eternal life. New to us, that is. He already had eternal life in Himself, or He wouldn't have been able to come back to life.

When we "die daily," as Paul says, daily making choices to be who God wants us to be, we are dying to old selves, old ways, old sins, and being resurrected into new selves, new ways of love and light.

### Discussion Questions

1. How do you think you would have reacted if you'd been in the crowd when Jesus first claimed to be the "I Am," and to have lived before Abraham. Why?
2. What are some ways you can help clear up misconceptions about God and show your friends that He is a God of love and compassion."

## Part Three

Every day this week, we've talked about who Jesus said He was, and how He knew and lived by that. Every day we've added ways in which we can reflect that reality in our own identities. Let's look back at all those ways, and give them each some more thought.

**Because Jesus is the Light of the world, I can be a candle, lighting others' paths to Him.** When we choose to dwell in the light of God, both in joyful ways and in ways that recognize truths about ourselves that are not necessarily welcome, we are getting our candles lit so that we can share light.

Then, when someone is feeling sad or down, and we notice that, and reach out to listen to them, help them, or cheer them up, we are being a candle. When we see that a close friend is in danger of falling into error or temptation, and we *carefully, lovingly, prayerfully* give them a warning, we are shining light into their dark corners. (You can't do this with anyone who is not already a close friend who trusts you not to be judgmental or critical. And you can't do it unless you are willing to receive this kind of help in return.) When we visit the sick, help the helpless, feed the hungry, and every time we praise God openly, we are shining our candles in the darkness, pointing others to the Door that leads to Life.

**Because Jesus is my Door, I can be a doorkeeper, welcoming others into God's family.** When we choose to walk through the Door that is Jesus, we will find that He is a gateway to new possibilities, taking us places we never thought possible ( and maybe didn't think we wanted to go!) And when we open our doors to Jesus and let Him live in us, we are open to new ways of serving Him.

Then, when we are welcoming to new kids in school, showing them around, inviting them to eat with us and sit with us, we are being Jesus' doorkeepers. When we welcome visitors to our churches, no matter how they dress or act, we are being godly doorkeepers. When we act to protect others, especially those younger or weaker than we are, from physical or spiritual danger, we are being doorkeepers.

**Because Jesus is the Bread of life, I can be a grain of wheat, giving myself to feed others His Word.** When we keep ourselves fed on the Word every day, and pray for deep digestion of the truths in it, we will be able to pass it out to others more effectively. When we recognize His spirit of self-sacrifice, and ask for that spirit to be reproduced in us, we will learn to be willing and joyful to give ourselves up for Him.

Then, when we physically feed the hungry at a soup kitchen, or help at a Community Services Center, we are passing out the Bread of Life. When people ask us why we are happy or how we can behave so lovingly, especially to those who may not seem very lovable, and we explain that we don't have any special ability, but we have Jesus in our life and are trying to imitate Him, we are passing out the Bread of Life. When we give up something we wanted to do or have, in order to do something loving for someone else, we are giving our lives as the grain of wheat does, so that others may grow. (And we will grow, too!)

**Because Jesus is my Shepherd, I can be a lamb that follows faithfully, and also an under-shepherd, helping to care for other lambs.** When we follow Jesus faithfully, trying to go only where He would have us go, we will be faithful lambs. When we get stuck or lost, if we immediately call to Jesus for help instead of trying to figure out a way to save ourselves, we are wiser sheep.

Then, when we use our influence to turn the flock back toward the shepherd when it gets frightened and wants to stampede, we'll be good and faithful lambs. We may even be called to be under-shepherds—hired help who *don't* run away when the flock is in danger, just to save ourselves. When we gently seek to guide others, especially younger ones, to follow Jesus (not us!) for themselves, we are faithful under-shepherds.

**Because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I can walk in His Way, hold up His Truth, and share an abundant, full life with those around me.** When we keep our minds trained to recognize God's way, by studying His word more and more deeply as we grow, when we learn God's truth inside and out so that we will recognize falsehood when we see it, our lives will be full and abundant.

Then, when we are followers of the Way, others may do so also. When we hold up the Truth (Jesus) even when it is difficult or dangerous, others may do the same. And our lives will grow ever fuller and more abundant as we gain the strength and ability to share it. The more we give away, the more we will have.

**Because Jesus is the True Vine, I can be a blessed branch, drawing my nourishment from Him and glorifying God with much fruit.** When we cling closer and closer to Jesus, learning to abide in Him *all* the time, when we strive for a union with Him so perfect that our soul's nourishment comes through Him, we will be fruitful branches.

Then we will spend the rest of our lives learning what our particular, unique gifts and talents are, and will begin to have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control—enough to give away by the basketful!

**Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, I can rejoice in His newness of life now and trust Him for life eternal.** When we have chosen Jesus and abide in Him, He promises that we *have* eternal life beginning right now. We will begin to be more fearless when we know there is nothing in this life or in death that can keep us from Jesus.

Then, we will long to find new ways to pass that trust and that life on to all we meet. We will be able to trust Him when sorrow and loss come, and to help and grieve with others that suffer or face loss. We will have a trust in God that will neither pretend everything is all right and there is no reason to cry, nor rail against God and blame Him for the losses. And we will be able to pass on that attitude to others.

**Because Jesus is, was, and always will be, because He lived out a True and Complete life here on earth, I can be my true and complete**

**self in Him.** When we keep our eyes on that one and only True and Complete Life that has ever lived, we will begin to see new things about it. We will learn when and to whom He told the truth sternly, and when and to whom He told it gently and tenderly. We'll watch how He treated people, and notice who He was most drawn to. We'll see that He didn't allow Himself to be taken before His time, and that when the time did come, He was not ashamed to fear it or to express that fear to His Father, but He bravely went through with it anyway.

Then, we'll begin to seek and understand our own true and complete selves. We'll understand that the church is to be united, but not uniform. We are God's child, and we are unique in the universe. We'll spend time asking God what He gave us to do while we are here, and how to get ready for that work, while doing the work we are given now. I will be *me*. You will be *you*.

And we will live in love with God and each other until we live eternally at His side.

### The Question that Matters Most is ...

Who are you?

No, who are you *really*?

### *Life Identity Principle #8:*

*Because Jesus is, was, and always will be, because He lived out a True and Complete life here on earth, I can be my true and complete self in Him.*

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\*Prager, Rabbi Marcia, (1998). *The Path of Blessing*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, pp. 81, 82.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Debbonnaire Kovacs** has been writing since she could hold a pencil, and sold her first story to *Guide* magazine (known in those olden days as *Junior Guide*) when she was eleven years old. When she was fourteen, she was “tricked” (when she missed Sabbath School because she was sick) into doing a mini sermon for a large youth convention, and thought she would die! But she didn’t, so she wrote a sermon herself for a youth Week of Prayer at Mount Vernon Academy when she was seventeen. She lived through that, too!

Now she has written over eleven books, including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and nearly 100 stories and articles, including lots of stories for *Primary Treasure*. She speaks at camp meetings, women’s retreats, and other events, and is hardly ever afraid anymore. Praise God! Mrs. Kovacs strongly encourages young people to follow their dreams, and not wait until they are grown up to do something God is calling them to do.

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