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BY CHARLES KISER
STORYLINE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
Storylinecommunity.com

I AM JESUS

What Jesus Said about Himself in John's Gospel

Description: People in culture at large may be antagonistic toward the church, but many of them still like the church's founder, Jesus. Perceptions about Jesus' identity in popular culture are wide ranging. But what did Jesus say about himself? This series of conversations interacts with how Jesus defined his own identity. It explores the seven "I Am" statements in John's Gospel as a way of doing so—which both comfort and challenge.

Purpose: This series of conversations hopes to help non-Christians explore the identity of Jesus, to nurture and form the faith of Christians, and to release all on mission to share the story of the one who gives life.

Calendar: I AM JESUS is connected to the Epiphany season (January 6 – February 24), in which Jesus is manifested to the world as its savior.

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Text</u>
"Bread of Life"	John 6:25-59
"Light of the World"	John 9:1-41
"The Gate"	John 10:1-10
"The Good Shepherd"	John 10:11-18
"The Resurrection and the Life"	John 11:17-44
"The Way, Truth and the Life"	John 14:5-14
"The True Vine"	John 15:1-17

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Bread of Life

Communion

- Thought: Jesus is the bread of life – when we eat this communion meal, we remember the way he nourishes our soul by giving his life for the life of the world
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an ‘out’ to any who would rather not participate
- Pray

Conversation

- Icebreaker: In what ways have you been hungry for God lately?
- Starting a new series of conversations called “I AM JESUS”—focuses on identity of Jesus through “I AM” statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we’re looking at his first “I AM” statement in John 6:25-51
- Explain: Jesus had just fed 5,000 people in a miraculous way. This miracle serves as the backdrop for the following conversation.
- Read John 6:25-51 (730-31)
- Explain: Jesus hints at the way the crowd is missing the point in their spiritual pursuit (vv 26-27)—they are “chasing after bread crumbs” when they should be chasing after the big loaf of life.
- Question: In what ways do you feel like you’re chasing after bread crumbs in your own spiritual journey?
- Explain: When Jesus offers them food that endures (v. 27), the crowd immediately asks what they have to do to get it (v. 28). Jesus replies that they don’t have to ‘do’ anything except for place their trust in the one God has sent (v. 29).
- Question: How is it tempting for you to try to “work harder” to satisfy your hunger for God (rather than to accept the gift of satisfaction that God gives you)?
- Question: How do you react to Jesus statement that he IS the bread of life? Is it hard for you to swallow? Comfort for your soul?
- Question: How would your life be different if you bet your life on Jesus words in this text?

Music

- Theme suggestions: songs that focus on the supremacy of Christ

Empty Chair

- Question: Who in your life is hungry for God and looking for satisfaction?
- Explain the empty chair metaphor
- Pray for the names mentioned.

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Light of the World

Communion

- Text: John 8:12
- Thought: Jesus is the light of the world. He gives us access to light chiefly through his death and resurrection, which we celebrate in our communion experience.
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Pray
- Question: What light or dark have you experienced in the last week? Share with the 2-3 people nearest to you.

Conversation

- Question: In what ways have you attempted to put God in a box?
- In a series of conversations called "I AM JESUS"—focuses on identity of Jesus through "I AM" statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we're looking at the second "I AM" statement in John 9:1-41, where Jesus says he is the light of the world.
- Read John 9:1-41, pp. 734-35. (Suggestion: choose readers for parts of 1) Narrator, 2) Disciples, 3) Jesus, 4) Neighbors, 5) Blind Man, 6) Pharisees, and 7) Blind Man's Parents.)
- Question: What does this story say about Jesus?
- Question: How does Jesus' statement about being the light of the world connect with the story in the broader context?
- Explain: The Pharisees refuse to believe that Jesus could be from God because he doesn't meet their religious criteria.
- Question: In what ways do you identify with the blindness of the Pharisees?
- Explain: The blind man's parents were afraid of what the Pharisees would think of them if they told them anything positive about Jesus, so they avoided saying anything at all.
- Question: In what ways do you identify with the reluctance of the parents?
- Question: In what ways do you need Jesus to help you "see the light"? (Larger groups might break out into groups of 3-4 people to discuss and pray.)
- Pray for participant's answers to the previous question.

Music

- When the blind man received his sight and realized Jesus was the Son of Man, he said, "Lord, I believe" and worshiped Jesus. We're going to sing a couple songs together that will help us to follow the way of that blind man.
- Song suggestions: Light of the World, Marvelous Light

Empty Chair

- Question: Who do you know that needs the Light of the world to shine into their life?
- Explain the empty chair metaphor
- Pray for the names mentioned.

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The Gate

Communion

- Text: Galatians 1:3
- Thought: Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age. The death and resurrection of Jesus protect us from the evil that would assault and infect us were we to remain away from him.
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Pray.
- Encourage participants to share highs / lows from the previous week with each other.

Conversation

- Question: What instances can you think of where leaders took advantage of their followers?
- In a series of conversations called "I AM JESUS"—focuses on identity of Jesus through "I AM" statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we're looking at the third "I AM" statement in John 10:7-10, where Jesus says he is the gate for the sheep.
- Read John 10:7-10, pp. 735.
- Explain: in this metaphor, sheep refers to religious followers. The phrase "thieves and robbers" refers to religious leaders who have led people astray.
- Question: What does this text say about Jesus?
- [The gate serves the function of protection for the flock from danger. Jesus protects us from danger.]
- Question: In what ways does Jesus "keep us safe" or "save us"?
- Question: Who have been "thieves and robbers" in your life? (Leaders who take advantage of their followers and lead them astray.)
- Question: What is endangering your faith currently?
- Question: How do you need Jesus to protect you? (Larger groups might break up into groups of 3-4 to talk about this question and pray for each person's response.)

Response

- Song suggestions: Be Still My Soul, You Never Let Go

Empty Chair

- Question: Who do you know that needs to be kept safe by Jesus?
- Explain the empty chair metaphor.
- Pray for the names mentioned.

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The Good Shepherd

Communion

- Text: Psalm 23
- Thought: God provides us everything we need, as a good shepherd would, through the death and resurrection of Jesus
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Pray
- Encourage participants to share highs / lows from the previous week with each other.

Conversation

- Question: Whose voice would you be excited to hear right now and why?
- In a series of conversations called "I AM JESUS"—focuses on identity of Jesus through "I AM" statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we're looking at the fourth "I AM" statement in John 10:11-30, where Jesus says he is the good shepherd.
- Read John 10:11-30, page 735. (Suggestion: go around the room and let several people take turns reading the text paragraph by paragraph.)
- Question: What does this text say about Jesus?
- Question: What makes Jesus a good shepherd?
- [Key point: Jesus lays his life down for his sheep.]
- Question: What does it mean that Jesus lays his life down for his sheep?
- Question: Jesus says no one can snatch his sheep out of his hand. What's trying to snatch you from Jesus' hand?
- Question: Jesus says his sheep listen to his voice. What are ways we can listen for Jesus' voice?

Response

- Facilitate "dwelling in the word" with 10:27-29. Ask people to relax and listen for God. Read it a couple times; have participants repeat it once. Allow a couple minutes of silence. Pray.
- Question: What did you hear?
- Song?

Empty Chair

- Question: Who do you know that needs to hear the voice of Jesus?
- Explain the empty chair metaphor.
- Pray for the names mentioned.

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The Resurrection and the Life

Communion

- Text: John 3:16
- Thought: God gave his son Jesus so that we might have life and not perish
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Pray
- Encourage participants to share highs / lows from the previous week with each other.

Conversation

- Question: If you could raise one person from the dead, who would it be?
- In a series of conversations called "I AM JESUS"—focuses on identity of Jesus through "I AM" statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we're looking at the fifth "I AM" statement in John 11:1-44, where Jesus says he is the resurrection and the life.
- Read John 11:1-44, page 735-36. (Suggestion: assign participants different parts to read: 1) narrator; 2) Jesus; 3) Disciples (including Thomas); 4) Martha; 5) Mary; 6) The Jews
- Question: What does Lazarus' resurrection reveal about Jesus?
- Question: What does it say about Jesus that he weeps and is deeply troubled?
- Question: Martha assumes life will come in the future. Yet Jesus intends to bring life in her immediate present. What things are you expecting to come in the future that Jesus would want to give you now?
- Question: What are ways we might participate in "implementing the resurrection" in our city?
- Question: What would it look like if the resurrection was implemented in your life? (Suggestion: break out into smaller groups of 3-4 to share and pray.)

Response

- Song suggestion: Mighty to Save

Empty Chair

- Question: Who do you know that needs Jesus' resurrection power?
- Explain the empty chair metaphor.
- Pray for the names mentioned.

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The Way, Truth and Life

Communion

- Text: John 1:1-5, 18
- Thought: To know Jesus is to know God; Jesus knows God in a way no one else does, and is thus able to connect us to God in a way no one else can.
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Pray
- Encourage participants to share highs / lows from the previous week with each other.

Conversation

- Question: What conversations have you had about the idea that there are "many paths to God"?
- In a series of conversations called "I AM JESUS"—focuses on identity of Jesus through "I AM" statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we're looking at the sixth "I AM" statement in John 14:1-14, where Jesus says he is the way, truth and life.
- Read John 14:1-14, page 739.
- Question: What do you hear Jesus saying about himself?
- [Explain: Jesus likens himself to a road. Those who take the Jesus road find truth and life.]
- Question: How does Jesus interact with the idea that there are many paths to God?
- Question: What would it look like for followers of Jesus take this text seriously without being jerks toward people who are on different paths?
- Question: Where are you in relation to the Jesus road? On a different road? In the ditch? Tripped and fallen? Running full speed ahead?
- Question: What roadside assistance do you need?
- Suggestion: Break out into groups of 3-4 to talk about the last question; appoint a facilitator to ask the question and pray for responses.

Response

- These songs help us to respond to the supremacy of Jesus.
- Song suggestion: In Christ Alone, When I Think About the Lord
- Pray, thanking God for Jesus and the truth and life that comes through him

Empty Chair

- Explain the empty chair metaphor.
- Trianon House Church: mention that the West Village house church is having a sending ceremony tonight—pray for them and for Trianon to be able to send soon, too.
- Pray.

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The True Vine

Communion

- Text: John 15:12-13
- Thought: Jesus loved us so much that he laid down his life for us and called us his friends.
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Pray
- Encourage participants to share highs / lows from the previous week with each other.

Conversation

- Question: Describe a relationship in which you have a certain chemistry another person.
- In a series of conversations called "I AM JESUS"—focuses on identity of Jesus through "I AM" statements he made about himself in the gospel of John
- Connects with Epiphany season of Christian calendar where Jesus is revealed to the world as Savior
- Tonight we're looking at the seventh and final "I AM" statement in John 15:1-17, where Jesus says he is the true vine.
- Read John 15:1-17, page 740.
- Explain: In this text, Jesus describes himself as a vine that gives life and nourishment to branches that are his followers. The branches are totally dependent upon the vine to bear fruit and stay alive.
- Question: In what ways have you sensed that you were totally dependent on God for your wellbeing and fruitfulness?
- Question: What is the connection between fruitfulness / fruitlessness and love in this text?
- [Loving other people seems to be the fruit that followers bear when they remain in Jesus.]
- Question: If fruitfulness is loving other people, how much fruit are you bearing?
- Question: What painful experiences are you having that God might be using to prune you so that you might love other people more?
- Suggestion: Break out into groups of 3-4 to talk about the previous two questions and have appoint a facilitator in the group to pray for people's responses.

Response

- Ask people to relax where they're at and listen again to part of the text.
- Read John 15:1-6.
- Song suggestions: Nothing Without You, Breathing the Breath
- Pray a prayer of dependence on God.

Empty Chair

- Who in your life needs you to love on them this week?
- Explain the empty chair metaphor.
- Pray for people's answers to the previous question.