

An aerial photograph of a city skyline at sunset. The sky is a deep orange and yellow, with the sun low on the horizon. The city is filled with tall skyscrapers and buildings, some of which are illuminated. A large body of water is visible in the foreground, with a bridge crossing it. The text 'I AM' is overlaid in large, semi-transparent, white letters across the center of the image.

I AM

WHY JESUS IS ALL WE NEED

GUIDE BOOK

# I AM

## WHY JESUS IS ALL WE NEED

Welcome to Christ Central Growth Groups in 2019! Whether you're new or old hat to our Growth Groups, we do hope that they will be places of fun and community as we explore God's word together.

Every term, we'll be studying a different book of the Bible, and this year we'll cover gospel (John), wisdom literature (Proverbs), New Testament letters (1 Corinthians) and patriarchal narrative (fancy term for looking at the book of Genesis).

In this first term together, we're going to delve into John's gospel. But it won't be a comprehensive look at the gospel. Rather, we're going to concentrate on Jesus' seven "I Am..." statements about his identity. What we'll notice is that Jesus makes startling claims about who he is and how all those who come to him will find everything they need.

If all that Jesus claims is true, then that has massive implications for our lives – but also for the lives of our family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Indeed, John explicitly states why he's written his gospel:

### **John 20:30-31**

*Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

We'll need to keep John's evangelistic aims in mind as we look at his gospel and how the I AM statements might feed into that.

So do enjoy our journey through John's gospel and most of all, experience the Jesus that provides all that we need.

# I AM...

## THE WORD MADE FLESH

In our first study, we're actually going to start where John starts to give us a sense of why John writes and how Jesus' identity is at the core of what he writes about.

What do people in our world believe about the beginning of life and the universe? How might that colour what they think life is about?

### Exploring Together

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**Arrow.** Note down any reflections on things you found challenging or applicable to you. The bible addresses our heads, hearts and hands, or if you like, our thoughts, attitudes and actions so reflect on whether the passage addresses any of these.

# Read John 1:1-18

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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Because John writes such an evangelistic minded gospel, take a moment now to also reflect on how this passage might speak to our world, our friends, our families, our neighbours and work/uni mates.



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After using the sections above to record your own thoughts, go around the group to share and discuss what you noticed. Then there will be more questions below for further reflection.



## Digging deeper

**1.** John starts his gospel with the most spectacular, cosmic picture. Why do you think he does this? How does it shed a light (excuse the pun!) on Jesus' identity?

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**2.** Why is John's identity and role so much of a focus?

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**3.** What are the benefits that believing in Jesus bestows?

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**4.** If the beginning of the world is as according to John, what effect does that have on what life is about?

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**5.** How might you answer the objection, "I could only believe if God would come and make his existence obvious to me."?

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**6.** *"Secular societies do not orient themselves around devotion to something bigger than, or beyond, themselves. They are not interested in what we can term transcendence: contact with eternal and grand phenomena. With the receding of religion there is in general nothing left to awe or relativise us. Our immediate difficulties and burdens, our conflicts and pains are, it seems, all there is – and so they loom ever larger and more desperately in our agitated minds."*

***thebookoflife.com***

Do you agree or disagree with this quote? How might John's picture of Jesus' identity fill a yearning in our secular society?

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# Prayer

Can you think of someone who would be impacted by John's message about Jesus in this passage? Throughout this series, we'll want to pray for that our world, our friends and family would know the life-giving force that Jesus is.

Take a moment to pray in light of what we've learnt about Jesus today both for us personally, and for our friends.

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# I AM...

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

In the first study, we looked at John's prologue and the grand and cosmic picture of who Jesus is. We now turn to the I AM statements. In John's gospel, there are seven places where Jesus calls people to follow him and he does it with a statement beginning with "I Am..." Today, we'll be exploring his statement, 'I am the bread of life'.

If you could choose anything, what would be the final meal of your life?

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## Read John 6:1-40

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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After using the sections above to record your own thoughts, go around the group to share and discuss what you wrote down for the Light Bulb and Question Mark. We'll come back to the Arrow and the City at the end.



## Digging deeper

**1.** Before Jesus' 'I am the bread of life' statement, is the famous feeding of the 5000 with just five small barley loaves and two small fish. There's clear parallels with Moses and the manna from heaven from Exodus 16. Do Jesus' miracles lead to belief here? Why/why not? (see also John 5:45-47)

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**2.** What is the food that endures to eternal life?

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**3.** What is Jesus ultimately claiming as the 'bread of life'?

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## Read also John 6:41-59

**4.** What does it mean to eat of Jesus flesh? How do you think all this could be related to the Lord's Supper?

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Historically, different traditions have taken Jesus' words here in different ways.

Catholics believe that we must literally eat of Jesus flesh and blood. So at Communion, they believe that, through a process known as Transubstantiation (to change substance), the bread and wine transform into Jesus' actual body and blood. The sacrifice is then distributed to the people during mass.

Most Protestants believe that the bread and wine remain plain bread and wine as a moment of remembrance and Christ is present spiritually, rather than physically. Martin Luther believed that Jesus is present in, with and under the bread and wine but there's no mystical change in the substance. Huldrych Zwingli's view is that what is most important is the remembrance of Christ's death for our sin in that moment. John Calvin goes a little further than Zwingli to say that the Spirit renders us into Christ's presence in that moment.

Having read Jesus words here, do you think Jesus meant it literally to eat of his flesh or metaphorically?

**5.** In verse 27, Jesus says 'Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.' How might we toil for food that spoils? Where do your friends and neighbours go seeking satisfaction? Share what you've noted for the **City** symbol.

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**6.** In your heart, do you cherish Jesus as satisfying life giver or do other things distract you from him? Share what you've noted under the **Arrow** symbol.

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## **Prayer**

Can you think of someone who would be impacted by John's message about Jesus in this passage? Throughout this series, we'll want to pray for that our world, our friends and family would know the life-giving force that Jesus is.

Take a moment to pray in light of what we've learnt about Jesus today both for us personally, and for our friends.

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# I AM...

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Have you ever been hopelessly lost before? What happened?

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Today, we're going to see Jesus take on the light metaphor that John mentioned back in Chapter 1. In that chapter, the light came into the world but was rejected by the world. We now see that playing out as the Pharisees argue about Jesus' merit.

### Exploring Together

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# Read John 8:12-30

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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## Digging deeper

**1.** Who is on trial? How does Jesus turn the tables?

**2.** The Light theme comes up regularly in John's gospel. Split up and look at these verses, noting down what you learn about **light**.

**John 1:1-9**

**John 9:1-5**

**John 11:5-10**

**John 12:37-50**

**3.** Who is blind and who can see in John 8?

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**4.** Do your friends and family walk in light or darkness? Does that shape the way you think about them if Jesus' words here are true?

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**5.** Who can break the hardness of heart of those around us? Does that affect the way we pray?

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**6.** By nature, light is revealing of our deeds and motivations. How does Jesus deal with our deeds and bring us into his light? Discuss any points you added in the **City** and **Arrow** sections.

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# Prayer

Can you think of someone who would be impacted by John's message about Jesus in this passage? Throughout this series, we'll want to pray for that our world, our friends and family would know the life-giving force that Jesus is.

Take a moment to pray in light of what we've learnt about Jesus today both for us personally, and for our friends.

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# I AM...

## THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP

What would the perfect day look like to you?

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### Exploring Together

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# Read John 10:1-10

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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After using the sections above to record your own thoughts, go around the group to share and discuss what you wrote down for the Light Bulb and Question Mark. We'll come back to the Arrow and the City at the end.

## Digging deeper

As mentioned earlier, Jesus continues his disputes with the Pharisees. This passage follows the Pharisee's removal of the (now-healed) blind man from the temple.

**1.** Who is Jesus referring to as the thief and the robber?

The immediate target seems to be the Pharisees own leading of the people as religious authorities. But corruption of Israel's leadership goes back a long way. The Old Testament Ezekiel referred to the "shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves".

*It is hard for us to grasp all that Jesus was saying when we have no experience in the world of sheep and shepherds, especially in that culture. Burge gives us this important background: "The Middle Eastern*

*shepherd is well known for having a personal devotion to his sheep. He talks to them and sings to them... just as Arab shepherds today can separate personal sheep from larger flocks by using peculiar calls, so Jesus knows his own sheep, they can recognize his voice, and he leads them (10:4).* **G. Burge, NIV Application Commentary**

**2.** What threats are there in our world that might draw God's people away from Jesus our shepherd?

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**3.** What is the contrast that Jesus is offering?

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In Ancient Greek literature, as it is today, it was common to perceive entering heaven by a gate.

**4.** For our friends and neighbours, what do they think it takes to enter heaven?

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**5.** How would you go about convincing them that Jesus is the only way?

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Take a moment also to discuss anything you noted down under the **City** symbol.

When John talk about life or eternal life in his gospel and letters, he doesn't simply mean the future eternity but present participation now.

**6.** How does Jesus offer abundant life beyond what we could ever hope for or imagine in this life without him?

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Discuss any other applications from this passage that you might have noted down under the **Arrow**.



## Prayer

Can you think of someone who would be impacted by John's message about Jesus in this passage? Throughout this series, we'll want to pray for that our world, our friends and family would know the life-giving force that Jesus is.

Take a moment to pray in light of what we've learnt about Jesus today both for us personally, and for our friends.

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# I AM

## WHY JESUS IS ALL WE NEED

Welcome to Guidebook 2 of our I AM series! By now, you're beginning to get the picture that Jesus makes some massive claims about who he is and what he offers us. Jesus claims to be, in himself, true satisfaction, eternal life, and he lays down his life for his sheep.

In the background, is the running conflicts with the Pharisees who have charged him with breaking their laws and blasphemy. Indeed, in one climactic moment in chapter 8, Jesus claims before the Pharisees, that he is not only God's Son but the eternal I AM (that is God himself). Under the Jewish law, claiming to be God was punishable by death – only in Jesus' case, He IS!

### **John 8:56-58**

*Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.* <sup>57</sup> "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" <sup>58</sup> "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" <sup>59</sup> At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

As we finish, we'll cover three more I AM statements – I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, and I am the way, the truth and the life. We hope that the end point of these studies is praise and adulation of the God who became flesh and walked among us. Only in Him can we find our life and satisfaction.

# I AM...

## I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

This study is a continuation of the passage about Jesus as the gate. He continues the analogy of the pasture and the sheep but this time focusses on his role as the shepherd.

For whom or what would you lay your life down for?

### Exploring Together

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# Read John 10:11-30

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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After using the sections above to record your own thoughts, go around the group to share and discuss wrote you wrote down for the Light Bulb and Question Mark. We'll come back to the Arrow at the end.



## Digging deeper

**1.** What's the difference between the hired hand and the shepherd? Can you think of an equivalent today?

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**2.** What kind of relationship does the shepherd have to his sheep?

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**3.** How does that make you feel that Jesus not only dies for our sin but knows us by name and will never let us perish?

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**4.** What does it look like to live out verse 27?

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**5.** Have a read of 1 Peter 5:1-5. Who could be an under-shepherd at Christ Central? How should Jesus example shape us who have positions of teaching or authority in church? And how does it shape the way we relate to those over us?

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**6.** How might Jesus the good shepherd be exactly what our hurting world needs? Can you think of someone in your life who's been rejected or suffered under bad leaders?

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## Prayer

Can you think of someone who would be impacted by John's message about Jesus in this passage? Throughout this series, we'll want to pray for that our world, our friends and family would know the life-giving force that Jesus is.

Take a moment to pray in light of what we've learnt about Jesus today both for us personally, and for our friends.

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# I AM...

## THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Today, we will witness one of the most emotionally intense and moving episodes in Jesus' ministry, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This will lead to Jesus' declaration that he is the resurrection and the life.

Have you ever been to a funeral before? What was it like? How does it get you to reflect on the transience of life and mortality?

### Exploring Together

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# Read John 11:17-51

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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## Digging deeper

**1.** What kind of resurrection does Martha believe in? Take a look at Daniel 12:1-4 for some clues of where Martha gets her belief from?

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**2.** Why does Martha then link the power of resurrection with being the Messiah, Son of God?

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**3.** What do you think of Jesus' response when he arrives at the tomb in v35?

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**4.** This would surely be one of Jesus' greatest miracles, yet many did not believe him – in fact, some seek to destroy Jesus. Why do you think that is? Why doesn't an incredible miracle convince everyone?

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**5.** What things do we do to avoid thinking about our mortality?

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**6.** How might our assurance of eternal life be a great witness to our friends and neighbours?

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## **Prayer**

Can you think of someone who would be impacted by John's message about Jesus in this passage? Throughout this series, we'll want to pray for that our world, our friends and family would know the life-giving force that Jesus is.

Take a moment to pray in light of what we've learnt about Jesus today both for us personally, and for our friends.

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# I AM...

## THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

This is the final I AM in our Growth Group studies, though we will cover the last I AM (the true vine) on Sunday. Things are coming to a head in John's gospel and Jesus is headed to the cross. Yet he does not leave his disciples without promises of what he provides for them.

If you could ask God to guide you in the right direction on one thing in your life right now, what would that be?

### Exploring Together

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## Read John 14:1-14

Take some time to fill out the sections below.



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## Digging deeper

**1.** What's the difference between Jesus showing the way and being the way?

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**2.** In your own words, what do you think each of the three parts of the I AM statement mean? i.e. What is the way? What is the truth? What is the life?

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**3.** Why is Jesus exclusively the only way to the Father?

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**4.** How much does your access to the Father depend on you?

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**5.** How does Jesus' identity shape where we look to for guidance?

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**6.** How might Jesus actually be appealing in a world where truth and certainty seem elusive?

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## **Prayer**

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH