

# I AM

## Life Group Leaders Guide

### Objective

This guide contains the information and questions you will need to lead a life group study during our current sermon series. Our aim is to spark Spirit-led, Bible-centered conversations that anyone can participate in regardless of how biblically literate they may or may not be. **The win** that we want you to experience is when your group members **connect** more closely with each other and with God so that they are encouraged to move forward in living out their faith.

### Directions

The *Purpose* and *Move* sections are for the leader to read to the group to provide clarity. **Do not feel pressured to cover all the questions.** Decide which ones may work best for your group. You will see brief notes interspersed between groups of questions to help give the group context for their answers. The *Notes and Commentary* section (when included) is optional reading for the leader to get background information and better understanding of the passages before leading the discussion.

### Series Overview

Jesus made seven famous “I AM” statements, as recorded by John, declaring that he is God. Though there are a lot of benefits and blessings that come from a relationship with God, by far the greatest thing that Jesus offers humanity is Himself! He alone can meet our deepest needs and longings. Whatever it is you need right now at a core level, Jesus IS the answer.

### I AM Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of Sermon	Topic of Life Group
1	1/5	The Bread of Life	<b>Life Group Socials</b>
2	1/12	The Good Shepherd	The Gate
3	1/19	The Resurrection and the Life	The Light Of The World
4	1/26	The Way, the Truth and the Life	The Vine

## The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

# *I AM The Vine*

## The Big Idea

*Jesus is the One we must stay intimately connected with to live fruitful lives.*

## Flow of Study

**Icebreaker:** What experience do you have with trying to grow a thick lawn or a vegetable garden, or even a plant?

**Move 1:** Among Jesus' seven "I AM" claims in the Gospel of John, one of the easiest to visualize and most often repeated is "I am the vine." We studied this text recently in Life Group, so we will bring out some additional insights this time.

### Read John 15:1-8 (NIV)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

**Note:** In the Old Testament, Israel was pictured as a vineyard that God planted (Isaiah 5:1-7). He cared for it and cultivated it with the best possible attention, yet it came up void of grapes again and again. So he prophesied that he would cut it down. Yet, a day was prophesied of when it would be replanted and be fruitful again (Isaiah 27:2-6). In John 15, Jesus switches the identification of God's vineyard from Israel to himself. What Israel failed to do as God's chosen instrument to represent him and produce fruit for his kingdom, Jesus came to accomplish, and more. And we who follow him also become part of the messianic vineyard.

1. What does it look like to "bear much fruit" with our lives, and why is it important?
2. How are we to go about bearing this "fruit"? What is required of us? (Hint: the phrase, a command, is repeated five times in the text.)
3. Be honest. What false ideas about ourselves, God, and life keep us from prioritizing this most vital relationship with Jesus?

Re-read **John 15:5**, giving special emphasis to the last phrase, and compare it to **Philippians 4:13 (NLT): For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.**

4. If Jesus is the Vine and you are a branch, what are you presently doing to draw from him all the fruit-producing power you need? If you aren't doing something, what would have to change for that to happen?
5. Why is it that sometimes even when we read our Bible and pray, we still feel disconnected from Jesus?
6. What should you do when your time with Jesus feels unproductive?
7. How else can we pursue a deep connection with Jesus beyond saying prayers and reading the Bible?
8. Re-read verse 6. What happens to us if we choose not to be vitally connected with Jesus? What are the practical implications of the imagery?

**Move 2:** Let's review this whole series.

### Read John 20:30-31 (NIV)

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 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.

9. How has this series on Jesus' seven "I AM" statements affected how you see and experience him?
10. Which "I AM" claim resonates especially with you, and why? (review Series Schedule on previous page.)

**Next Steps:** The following are things you could challenge your members to do in order to take what you studied in this curriculum farther.

- If you haven't yet, finish reading and S.O.A.P.ing through the Gospel of John this week.
- Decide HOW you are going to stay closely connected to Jesus on a daily basis moving forward. (You could have group members share these goals.)
- To go even deeper in this study, read *I AM changes who i am* by Gregg Matte

**Prayer:** End your study with a time of praying with and for each other. Take requests, but be sure to pray also about what you've discussed today.

## Notes and Commentary

*The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.*

### On the struggle of quiet time with God

The essence of prayer is simply talking to God as you would to a beloved friend—without pretense or flippancy. Yet it is in that very attitude toward prayer so many believers have trouble.

Because communion with God is so vital and prayer so effective in the fulfillment of God's plan, the enemy attempts constantly to introduce errors into our understanding of and commitment to prayer. Every generation faces the necessity to reprioritize and purify a corrupted or confused perception of prayer. For many, prayer has been replaced with pragmatic action. Function overrides fellowship with God; busyness crowds out communication. For others, prayer lacks a sense of awe and respect. Their efforts are flippant, disrespectful, and irreverent. Then there are those who believe prayer is designed to make demands and claims on God. They attempt to force Him to do what they believe He should do for them. Finally, for some prayer is nothing more than a routine ritual.

You may hold prayer with the utmost respect, yet you find your own practice lacks purpose and vitality, so you don't spend time with God like you know you should. While there are many reasons Christians struggle to pray, I believe there is one overriding factor. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life ... Ultimately, therefore, a man discovers the real condition of his spiritual life when he examines himself in private, when he is alone with God ... And have we not all known what it is to find that, somehow, we have less to say to God when we are alone than when we are in the presence of others? It should not be so; but it often is. So that it is when we have left the realm of activities and outward dealings with other people, and are alone with God, that we really know where we stand in a spiritual sense (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 2). (John MacArthur, Jr., *Alone with God*)

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...[D]uring such "tough periods, much more than during the peak periods," we are growing into the creature God wants us to be.

I cannot stress this too strongly: *Just do it*. You remember by remembering. You learn to pray like you learned to swim—not by talking about it but by getting in the water and splashing around. You relearn prayer the same way. Prayer is a discipline before it is a joy, and remains a discipline even after it becomes a joy. A friend, a champion wrestler, keeps a poster on the wall of his basement where he works out with weights. It shows a man straining to lift a weight, sweat fairly bursting from a grimacing face, veins bulging on his neck. The caption reads: "There are two kinds of pain: the pain of discipline, and the pain of regret."

How like life—and the life of prayer. To be alive is to hurt. The choice is not whether to hurt, but how. That you can choose. You can choose the discomfort of the discipline of praying when you don't feel like it, or the desolation and terminal fatigue of life and ministry without prayer. (Patterson & Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God*)

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As central as these twin disciplines of prayer and Scripture are to our spiritual life, most believers in Christ are frustrated by hit-or-miss approaches to both. As a result, their time in prayer and the word can become unsatisfying, routine, and even boring. It is no surprise, then, that most people spend a minimal amount of time in either of these disciplines and fail to develop intimacy with the One for whom they were created.

The problem with prayer is heightened by the fact that people often succumb either to the extreme of all form and no freedom, or the opposite extreme of all freedom and no form. The first extreme leads to a rote or impersonal approach to prayer, while the second produces an unbalanced and undisciplined prayer life that can degenerate into a litany of one "gimme" after another. (Kenneth Boa, *Handbook to Prayer*)