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WEEK ONE

who do you say that I AM?

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

MATTHEW 16:15 (ESV)

I AM HE

Then Jesus declared,
“I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

JOHN 4:26

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

MATTHEW 16:15

Good questions inform; great questions transform.

—John Maxwell

If I were to ask you what's the most transformational question you've been asked, how would you answer?

- Will you marry me?
- What do you want out of your life?
- Do you want this job?
- Do you want to have a baby?
- Do you want to move across the country?
- Do you want to buy a house?

If you had asked Jesus' disciples about the most transformational question they had been asked, their minds likely would have traveled back to a conversation they had had with Jesus while walking through Caesarea Philippi. The conversation began with the question Jesus asked about what others thought of Him and ended with Jesus asking the most pivotal question the disciples had been asked,

Who do you say that I Am?

EXPLORE

Read Matthew 16:13–20. Write your observations.

Write out Jesus' question to the disciples in the space below, and then circle the phrase "I am."

In order to understand how important that phrase "I am" is, let's take a look at the first time God introduced Himself as *I Am*.

Read Exodus 3:1–14.

Centuries before Christ, Moses was stuck out in the Midian Desert taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. Moses had discovered that though he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, his birth mom was an Israelite slave who had lived in bondage in Egypt. Seeing God's people suffer such great oppression, Moses felt irate, and in a moment of pure rage, killed an Egyptian taskmaster. Knowing he could face death, Moses fled to the desert, married, and took care of his father-in-law's sheep. But the questions that rattled in his mind over the plight of God's people tortured him. Talk about a crisis of faith. Moses definitely had one!

There in the wilderness, wrestling with great questions of faith, Moses encountered a burning bush. The intriguing thing about the bush was that though it was on fire, it was not being consumed.

Describe Moses's reaction to the burning bush.

God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and gave him instructions. Describe the instructions God gave to Moses.

How did God introduce Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:6?

Read Exodus 3:13–14. How did God respond when Moses asked, “What should I say to the Israelites when they ask your name?”

Every Jewish child growing up at the time of Jesus would have heard this story. So when Jesus asked the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15 *ESV*), what was the implication?

JOHN’S RECORD OF THE *I AM* STATEMENTS OF JESUS

One of Jesus’ best friends recorded His *I Am* statements. His name was John, and he would have been with Jesus when Jesus asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15 *ESV*). He was one of the disciples and identified himself often throughout his writings as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). Many biblical scholars believe he was Jesus’ best earthly friend.

But, he didn’t start out that way. When Jesus first met John, He nicknamed him (and his brother James) “Son of Thunder.” John was a hothead who easily exploded.

One time when Jesus was criticized by some Samaritans, John wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy the whole town (Luke 9:52–56). Jesus explained to John that vengeance wasn’t the way He did things.

Not only did John lose his temper, but he was also a bit self-centered and arrogant. In one instance, he asked Jesus to do for him whatever he asked because he wanted a seat of prominence, power, and authority in Christ's kingdom. The other followers of Jesus who overheard this conversation were not very happy about John's request (Mark 10:35–44). Hotheaded, arrogant, craving power and authority—not exactly the type you'd imagine Jesus being best friends with, right?

But as Jesus loved, accepted, affirmed, and challenged John, he changed. Being with Jesus completely transformed him. John was an eyewitness to the miracles of Jesus and was the only one of His friends standing at the foot of the cross when Jesus died.

John was one of the first people to witness the resurrected Christ and eventually became one of the founding leaders of the early church. He authored the gospel of John; 1, 2, and 3 John; and the book of Revelation. His relationship with Jesus was transformational.

When John wrote his gospel, he said his desired intent was for his readers to believe that Jesus was exactly who He said He was, the great I Am. “. . . but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31 ESV).

John is the only gospel writer who recorded all of Jesus' *I Am* statements.

To give you an overview of the *I Am* statements of Jesus that we'll be considering throughout this study, look up the following verses and write the *I Am* statement next to each one.

THE / AM STATEMENTS OF JESUS

John 4:26

John 6:35

John 8:12

John 10:11

John 11:25

John 14:6

John 15:1

Revelation 1:17

Let's return to the scene where Jesus was asking the disciples about His identity.

Read Matthew 16:15–16. Notice Peter's response to Jesus Christ's question and write it in the space below.

The Greek word for Christ that's used here is from the Hebrew word meaning Messiah. Peter was acknowledging that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. Keep that in mind for tomorrow when we'll look at another person who recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah!

REFLECT

In your life, have you ever had a crisis of faith? If so, describe that crisis below.

How can a crisis of faith be transformed into a catalyst for deeper faith?

What are you hoping for out of this study?

MEMORIZE

This week, memorize Romans 8:1–2.

PRAISE

Listen to the worship song “I Am” by Influence Music & Melody Noel featuring William Matthews. As you listen—even if you are in a season of doubt—intentionally praise God that He is the great I Am. Praise awakens deeper faith in our hearts.

WEEK 1 | DAY 2

IN NEED OF A MESSIAH

If there is anything that can create a crisis of faith, it's guilt! Often when someone feels guilty, they back up from God rather than run toward God. In their prison of shame they cry out, "Why would God want me? He can't forgive me; I'm such a mess!"

This was the case for Jade. After experiencing the horror of rape, Jade entered the porn industry. Because she felt God hadn't protected her, she thought—why not give up and enter an industry where she could make money with her body? When a friend invited her to come to God, Jade's response spoke volumes about the shame she felt: "Why would He want me now?"

The irony is that Jesus *always* pursues the sinner! In Jade's case, God continually placed concerned Christians in her path who loved her and prayed for her. Eventually, Jade found the courage to come to Jesus and allow Him to cleanse her shame with His living water. Jade now speaks all over the country helping others to find Jesus.

Jesus once had a conversation with a woman who, like Jade, had a shameful history and desperately needed a Messiah.

Who do you say that I Am?

I Am He

EXPLORE

Read John 4:1–26. Write your observations in the space below.

I believe that Jesus' choice to travel through Samaria was intentional. Many Jews avoided the region of Samaria like the plague. To help you understand why the Jews and Samaritans hated each other, here's a little history.

Under Solomon's son Rehoboam, Israel split in two (1 Kings 12). The northern part of Israel was led by Jeroboam, and the southern part of Israel, which was called Judah, was ruled by Rehoboam. Jeroboam was afraid that the two kingdoms would once again unite and that he would not be the new king of the northern kingdom, so he established his own pagan religion rather than encouraging his people to worship Jehovah. He constructed two golden calves and told his people to worship those (1 Kings 12:25–33). (Steve and I recently visited that exact spot in Israel. What a reminder to never let idolatry in any form into our lives!)

Later, a wicked king named Omri built the city of Samaria, which became synonymous with the entire northern kingdom. He also built a temple and created an altar to Baal (1 Kings 16:24–34).

When the Assyrians defeated Israel, many Israelites intermarried with the heathen nations, resulting in a nation of mixed races and pagan beliefs (2 Kings 17:23). Israel's religion intermingled with idolatry,

and the Samaritans developed their own kind of religion. Although they professed to believe in the God of Israel and the coming Messiah (see John 4:25), they accepted only the first five books of the Law and rejected the rest of the Old Testament.¹

I love that Jesus stepped past cultural norms and racial prejudice to seek out the Samaritan woman. In a culture that devalued women, Jesus makes His first *I Am* statement to a woman! While religious systems often devalue women, Jesus honors women.

It was noon when Jesus sat by the well. Most women traveled to the well in groups early in the morning or late in the evening in order to avoid heat, but the Samaritan woman made the trek alone in the heat of the day.

Read John 4:6. Why do you think the Samaritan woman came in the heat of the day to draw water?

Read John 4:7–9. Describe the woman's attitude when Jesus asked her for a drink of water.

Read John 4:10–14. What is the meaning behind the “living water” that Jesus spoke of?

Read John 4:15–18. How did Jesus respond when the woman asked for living water?

Read John 4:19–20. Describe the Samaritan woman’s response to Jesus.

Read John 4:21–24. How did Jesus describe true worship?

What do you think it means to worship in spirit and in truth?

Read John 4:25–26. When the woman said she knew the Messiah was coming, how did Jesus respond? Write His *I Am* statement here:

REFLECT

Are there people groups you feel prejudice toward? How does your prejudice manifest?

If you were to describe “living water” to a friend, how would you describe it?

When someone confronts you with a fault, how do you usually respond?

What generally triggers your guilt? Thoughts about your past, your present, or your relationships?

Write out Romans 8:1–2. What does it mean to you to be “in Christ”?

PRAISE

Listen to “Into the Deep” by Citipointe Live. As you listen, praise God that His living water is always available and accessible.

WEEK 1 | DAY 3

THE MESSIAH WHO TAKES AWAY YOUR GUILT

The Samaritan woman said she knew the Messiah would come. The word *messiah* in the Greek literally means, “anointed one” (Strong’s #3323).² As the Messiah, Jesus came as the anointed one to heal our guilt and shame.

The truth is, we are all guilty because none of us are perfect (Rom. 3:23). Our guilt separates us from God, and according to God’s Word, sin must be punished. The great news is that as the Messiah, Jesus came and took the punishment by dying on the cross so that we wouldn’t have to be punished for our sin. He offers us forgiveness and freedom from shame.

When we receive Christ’s forgiveness, we are forever set free from guilt and shame. However, we often still ask the question: “Why do I still feel guilty?” Today, let’s talk about guilt, conviction, and repentance.

EXPLORE

Read Romans 3:23. What does this Scripture teach you about sin?

Read Romans 6:23. According to this verse, what is the penalty for sin?

Read John 3:16. How did God take care of this problem for us?

Read James 2:10. Write your own personal definition of guilt. According to this passage, why do you personally need a Messiah?

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GUILT AND CONVICTION

Guilt felt before repentance is the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but guilt felt after repentance is condemnation and does not come from God. After we have received Jesus Christ as our Savior, condemnation is *never* God's plan for us. Conviction about sin as a believer *is* part of His plan, because God's primary goal in our lives is to transform us into the image of Jesus.

Read Romans 8:1–2. Write it out in the space below.

What do these verses teach you about being set free from guilt?

Read John 16:8.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. The word “convict” is a translation of the Greek word *elencho*, which means “to convince someone of the truth.”³

When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we come to realize the truth about our wrongdoing, and we experience godly sorrow that leads to repentance. We turn from our sin and move toward obedience to God's commands.

When the Spirit of God brings conviction, we can respond in several ways:

- Defensiveness
- Denial
- Regret that we got caught
- Godly sorrow
- Diverting attention from our sinfulness
- Shame and depression

Read John 4:16–20. Which of the responses listed above do you see in how the Samaritan woman responded to Jesus?

Which of those responses is most often the way you respond?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. Describe godly sorrow in your own words.

Read 1 John 1:9.

The word for confess in this verse carries the idea of “agreeing with.” When we confess our sins, we agree with God that what we’ve done is wrong. It’s the idea behind the ability to say, “I was wrong.”

According to this verse, what happens when we agree with God that what we’ve done is wrong?

REFLECT

Is it hard for you to say, “I was wrong”? If so, how do you most often respond when someone points out wrongdoing in your life?

Is there an area of your life where the Spirit of God has convicted you recently? Conviction prompts confession. Write a prayer of confession below about the area where the Holy Spirit has most recently convicted you.

PRAISE

Listen to “Lord You Know” by Riana Nel. As you listen, thank Jesus that though He knows everything you’ve ever done, He loves you deeply and died for you!