

John 15:1-8

”I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

I am a husband.
I am a father.
I am a son.
I am a brother.
I am a friend.
I am a pastor.
I am a Christian.

I wonder if I could come up with any more “I am” statements that are undeniably true? I listed seven in no particular order. If I had to order them, I know Christian would be first, but how would I “rank” the other 6? Is one more important than another? I suppose it may depend on the circumstances. Since I pretty much have no relationships with my siblings or Karen’s siblings, maybe “A Brother” isn’t very important in my life. My mom has passed away and I don’t talk much to my dad, so maybe “a son” isn’t that important, either. But a husband, father, friend, pastor and Christian do truly define me.

If you had to write 7 “I am” phrases to describe yourself, what would they be? Karen’s Facebook profile says, “Christian, wife, mother, teacher, lover of homeless dogs” - that’s five. I would add for her: Daughter - her father was her biggest fan and her mother loves her dearly; and Friend - she is a friend to many, especially what we would call the “under-dogs”.

But how does Jesus describe Himself? What seven phrases does He use? In the book of John, Jesus describes Himself in 7 different ways using “I am” statements.

By using the phrase ‘I Am,’ Jesus intentionally aligns himself with the God of the Old Testament who revealed his name as ‘I Am’ to Moses. This connection signifies Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God and the embodiment of God’s presence and authority.

Through these ‘I Am’ statements, Jesus reveals different aspects of his character and mission. By exploring these statements, we gain insight into Jesus’ purpose, His teachings, and the transformative power of encountering Him. The ‘I Am’ statements not only reveal Jesus’ identity as the Messiah but also invite us to personally engage with Him and experience the abundant life He offers.

I am the Bread of Life (John 6: 35-48)

The first of the seven “I Am” statements made by Jesus in the Gospel of John occurred right after He was able to take a small amount of bread and fish and turn it into enough to feed 5000 people. This statement holds deep meaning and significance. Jesus uses the metaphor of bread to convey the spiritual nourishment he offers to believers. Just as physical bread provides nourishment for the body, Jesus, as the Bread of Life, provides

nourishment for the soul. He satisfies the deepest hunger and thirst, offering eternal life to all who partake in him.

I am the Light of the World (John 8:12, 9:5)

Right after returning sight to a blind man, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world”. He said, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.” The metaphor used by Jesus in this verse speaks of the light of His Truth, the light of His Word, the light of eternal Life. Those who accept the true Light will never walk in spiritual darkness. The condition behind having this Light is that we follow Him. If we do not follow Him, we will not have this light, this truth, this eternal life.

I am the Door (John 10: 7) This statement is the third of seven “I am” declarations of Jesus. In this “I am” statement, Jesus points out for us the exclusive nature of

salvation by saying that He is “**the** door,” not “a door.” He is the *only* door by which we may enter and be saved. Jesus is the only means we have of receiving eternal life. There is no other way.

From John 10: 11, Jesus declares, “**I am the Good Shepherd**”. This was the topic of last week’s sermon. It is a comforting statement when we realize that we are all the sheep that He will forever care for and protect. No matter how lost we may be, He will always find us and save us, if we allow Him to. The title of “Good Shepherd” emphasizes Jesus’ role as the one who knows His sheep intimately, leading them to safety, and even laying down His life for them.

I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)

The fifth 'I Am' statement made by Jesus shortly before raising Lazarus from the dead. It is perhaps one of the most profound and significant declarations of his divinity. By proclaiming himself as the Resurrection and the Life, Jesus is asserting his power over death itself. He is declaring that he not only has the ability to raise the dead but is also the source of all life. This statement points to the central message of Christianity, that through belief in Jesus, one can have eternal life and be resurrected in the spiritual sense. It calls us to place our faith in Jesus as the ultimate source of life and to find comfort in the assurance of resurrection and eternal life through him.

In John 14, Jesus says to His disciples: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again

and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus responds, “**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.** When Jesus refers to Himself as “The Way,” He is declaring that He is the only path by which humanity can find true salvation and eternal life. Jesus also describes Himself as “The Truth.” This description affirms that He embodies absolute truth and authenticity, for every word and action of His bears witness to the true nature of God. Lastly, Jesus refers to Himself as “The Life.” Not only does He offer the gift of eternal life with God in our future, but He also provides abundant and meaningful life in the present. Jesus is the source of this abundant life, breathing the Holy Spirit into the souls of those who trust in Him.

The seventh 'I Am' statement of Jesus, "**I am the Vine,**" was said shortly before Judas betrayed Jesus. It conveys the idea of growth, connection, and nourishment, which are essential aspects of our spiritual journey. Just as branches draw sustenance and life from the vine, we are called to remain connected to Jesus, our source of strength and spiritual nourishment.

Jesus was preparing 11 of His disciples (Judas Iscariot had left to go and betray Jesus) for His pending crucifixion, resurrection, and departure for heaven. He had just told them that He would be leaving them. Knowing how shocked and sad they would feel, He gave them this metaphor of the True Vine to encourage them.

Jesus wanted His friends to know that He was not going to desert them, even though they would no longer enjoy His physical presence. His spirit would continue to nourish

and sustain them just as the roots and trunk of a grapevine produce the energy that nourishes and sustains its branches while they develop their fruit. Jesus wanted us to know that, even though we cannot see Him, we are as closely connected to Him as the branches of a vine are connected to its stem. Our desire to know and love Him and the energy to serve Him will keep flowing into and through us as long as we “abide” in Him.

Jesus said that no branch can live, let alone produce leaves and fruit, by itself. Cut off from the trunk, a branch is dead. Just as a vine’s branches rely on being connected to the trunk from which they receive their energy to bear fruit, Jesus’ disciples depend on being connected to Him for their spiritual life and the ability to serve Him effectively. The fruit we produce is that of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Our source of

life and spiritual fruit is not inside ourselves; it is outside us, in Jesus.

Then Jesus underscored His point even more strongly by saying, “Apart from me you can do nothing” He also reminds us that there are some who are “in” Him who bear no fruit. But these are not, as some would suppose, true branches that just happen to be fruitless. All *true* branches bear fruit. Just as we know a healthy, living tree by the good fruit it produces, so do we recognize fruitless branches as having no connection to the True Vine. This is why Jesus tells us, “By their fruit you will know them” . Those who do not produce good fruit are cut away and burned. The reference here is to those who profess to know Christ but whose relationship with Him is insincere - we can all think of many people like this. Eventually, the fruitless branches are identified as not belonging to the

Vine and are removed for the sake of truth and the benefit of the other branches.

The metaphor of the vine also emphasizes the importance of bearing fruit. Jesus teaches that those who abide in Him will bear much fruit, reflecting His love and transforming the world around them. This reminds us of the significance of living out our faith in practical ways, spreading kindness, compassion, and the message of salvation to those around us. The ‘I Am’ statement, “I am the Vine,” challenges us to examine our connection to Jesus and how it impacts our growth, purpose, and influence in the world.

By exploring and reflecting on these ‘I Am’ statements, we can delve into the depths of Jesus’ teachings and find

meaning and purpose in our own faith journey. Through His claim to be

The Bread of Life,
The Light of the World,
The Door,
The Good Shepherd,
The Resurrection and The Life,
The Way, The Truth and The Life,
and The Vine,

Jesus shows us that He is the source of our spiritual nourishment, guidance, and salvation. Embracing these teachings allows us to align our lives with the truth that Jesus offers, leading to a transformative and fulfilling relationship with God.

Even the tree in Shel Silverstine's story has "I am" statements. Think of how each one may represent one of the I am statements from Jesus:

I am a leaf provider for crown-making and fun

I am a branch provider for swinging and playing

I am an apple provider for snacks or for making money

I am a shade provider for naps and comfort

I am a wood provider for building a house or a boat

I am a stump to provide rest

I am a friend who will always be there for you.

What are your 7 “I am” statements? How have they changed over your lifetime? Are you happy with all seven?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, The mere fact that you gave your Son to die for us should be enough for us to give eternal praise to you. But, you gave us more than we could ever hope for. You gave us the path to eternal life through the Resurrection. You gave us The Way and Truth to get to that eternal life, and the Door which we can go through to

get it. You gave us a Shepherd to lead us through that Door and a Light to lead our way. And finally, You gave us Bread to live on during our journey. For all of this, we are eternally blessed and we give thanks. In His name we pray, Amen.