

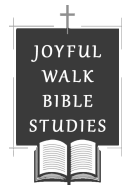
*Graceful Beginnings Series*

for Anyone New to the Bible

# Painting the Portrait of Jesus

The "I AM" Word Pictures  
Revealing the Jesus We Follow

MELANIE NEWTON



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*Painting the Portrait of Jesus* lessons focus on the “I am” statements Jesus made in the gospel of John. Jesus painted Himself with words that reveal a “picture” of who He is, how He meets our needs, and why we can trust Him enough to follow Him.

# Introduction



## GRACEFUL BEGINNINGS

The *Graceful Beginnings Series* of Bible studies are specifically designed for the anyone new to the Bible—whether you are a new Christian or you just feel insecure about understanding the Bible. The lessons are basic, introducing the inexperienced Christian to God and His way of approaching life in simple terms that can be easily understood.

Just as a newborn baby needs to know the love and trustworthiness of her parents, the new Christian needs to know and experience the love and trustworthiness of her God. *A Fresh Start* is the first book in the series, laying a good foundation of truth for you to grasp and apply to your life. The other books in the series can be done in any order.

## SOME BIBLE BASICS

Throughout these lessons, you will use a Bible to answer questions as you discover treasure about your life with Christ. The Bible is one book containing a collection of 66 books combined together for our benefit. It is divided into two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament tells the story of the beginning of the world and God's promises to mankind given through the nation of Israel. It tells how the people of Israel obeyed and disobeyed God over many, many years. All the stories and messages in the Old Testament lead up to Jesus Christ's coming to the earth.

The New Testament tells the story of Jesus Christ, the early Christians, and God's promises to all those who believe in Jesus. You can think of the Old Testament as "before Christ" and the New Testament as "after Christ."

Each book of the Bible is divided into chapters and verses within those chapters to make it easier to study. Bible references include the book name, chapter number and verse number(s). For example, Ephesians 2:8 refers to the New Testament book of Ephesians, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, and verse 8 within that 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter. Printed Bibles have a "Table of

Contents” in the front to help you locate books by page number. Bible apps also have a contents list by book and chapter.

The Bible verses highlighted at the beginning of each lesson in this study are from the New International Version® (NIV®) unless otherwise indicated. You can use any version of the Bible to answer the questions, but using a more easy-to-read translation (NIRV, NLT, NIV, NET, ESV) will help you gain confidence in understanding what you are reading. You can find all these translations in the “YouVersion App” or on [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

This study capitalizes certain pronouns referring to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit—He, Him, His, Himself—just to make the reading of the study information less confusing. Some Bible translations likewise capitalize those pronouns referring to God; others do not. It is simply a matter of preference, not a requirement.

## **PAINTING THE PORTRAIT OF JESUS**

Have you ever worked on a paint-by-number or color-by-number picture? How easy is it to tell what the picture is before you paint or color it? For some, you can look at it and guess what the picture might be. For others, you can’t really tell what it is. So, what do you need to do to start finding out what the picture will really look like? If you are like most people, you usually start with one number that represents one color and fill in all the spaces having that number with the appropriate color. After you’ve colored in that number, the picture begins to be revealed. Then, you do the same with the other colors. After adding each color to the picture, you can finally recognize what the picture represents. You get the complete picture.

You can also paint a picture with words.

***Think about 3 words true about you that you could use to describe yourself.***

***Now say, “I am...” followed by those three words.***

You just painted a picture of yourself with those words. That's similar to what Jesus did with His "I Am" statements. Just like adding each color to a paint-by-number picture enables you to recognize the picture, Jesus used the "I Am" descriptions to paint His own portrait.

A portrait is a *painting, drawing, or photograph of a person*. Usually, a portrait reveals someone's physical appearance. It is a true likeness of that person. When you look in a mirror, you see a likeness of yourself. In a sense that's a portrait.

Jesus' portrait does not reveal His physical appearance. Instead, Jesus did what I asked you to do above—describe yourself with a few words to "paint" a portrait of yourself.

Jesus painted Himself with words that reveal a "picture" of who He is, how He meets our needs, and why we can trust Him enough to follow Him.

The *Painting the Portrait of Jesus* lessons focus on what are commonly called the "I Am's." The "I Am's" are statements that Jesus made in the gospel of John. They are called the "I Am's" because each one of them starts with the same 2 words, "I am." Then, Jesus follows the words "I am" with a phrase to describe Himself to those who are listening.

As one who lived as a man among us, He understands the spiritual needs of men, women, boys, and girls. These "I am" declarations are like colors Jesus used for the canvas of His own self-portrait so His followers could know Him better and understand His significance in their lives.

These "colors" reveal the Jesus that we follow. And, studying them is in a sense "Painting the Portrait of Jesus."

Like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the gospel of John contains the good news about Jesus—who He is, why He came, and what He offers to those who trust in Him.

Jesus used specific phrases as word pictures to describe Himself to those who were listening and to describe the difference He could make in their lives when they trusted in Him.

Discovering these truths will make a difference in your life as well.

## FOLLOWING JESUS

Here's what you are going to learn in the *Painting the Portrait of Jesus* lessons—**Jesus is the answer to the spiritual needs of every person.**

He is the answer to every inner need that you have. And, you will see that His self-portrait describes that.

With each lesson, you'll be adding to your portrait of Jesus as you study the "I Am's." As He reveals Himself, you will long for a close relationship with this same Jesus, the one to whom you belong. And, you will want to **follow** Him because He is trustworthy!

As fully God and fully man, you can be confident that Jesus understands how you feel.

*"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (Hebrews 4:15)*

And, Jesus is powerful enough (as God) to take care of your every need.

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..." (Ephesians 3:20)*

Through faith in Him, you are completely accepted and loved by God your Father. And, you can enjoy awesome treasures God promises to you.

Jesus offers you a new life that is joyful and fruitful. Following Him involves trusting Him to guide you in your daily life through what you read in God's Word and through talking to God.

*You can enjoy a relationship with Him—now and forever!*

At the end of each lesson, we will include three things to help you follow Jesus: "Bible verse to learn," "Response in prayer & praise," and "Filling in the Portrait of Jesus" readings.

### 1) Bible verse to learn

This helps you to renew your thinking and make Bible truth part of your life as you journey on this adventure. Memorizing Bible verses is not just something “to do.” You are planting God’s words to you in your mind. The Bible calls it “renewing your mind” with truth about who God is and who you are.

If your Bible is a different translation from the one given in *Painting the Portrait of Jesus*, feel free to memorize the verse from your Bible rather than what is given. The point is to begin a habit of memorizing Scripture. You will be surprised at how soon it just flows from your mind.

### 2) Response in prayer & praise

This is to help you begin regular conversation with your God who loves you dearly.

You will be encouraged to talk to God about anything and everything. Tell Him what you are thinking and feeling. He is someone you can trust.

You will be encouraged to praise God for who He is and what He does. Praise is appreciation of God and giving Him credit for who He is.

### 3) Filing in the portrait of Jesus

Keep filling in the portrait of Jesus through Bible reading of the life of Jesus as told in the gospel of John. Christianity is Christ so spend a few minutes each day reading the verses and reflecting on Jesus—His life, His relationships, and His teaching.

Get to know this One who loves you dearly.

## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

The eight lessons cover these truths for you to know:

- ✓ White represents the presence of God. JESUS IS THE “I AM”. **He is the answer to the spiritual needs of every person.**

*Jesus answered, “Before Abraham was born, I am.” (John 8:58)*

- ✓ Purple represents abundance & being satisfied. JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE. **His abundant love satisfies our hunger for a relationship with God.**

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)*

- ✓ Yellow represents light & guidance. JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. **His light directs us to follow Him.**

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)*

- ✓ Orange represents safety. JESUS IS THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP. **There is safety in following Jesus and doing life His way.**

*Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep...whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. (John 10:7,9)*

- ✓ Green represents relationship. JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD. **You can enjoy a forever relationship with Him.**

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. (John 10:11, 14)*

- ✓ Blue represents the hope of eternal life. JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. **To His followers He gives eternal spiritual life now and eternal physical life in a new body after death.**

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25)*

- ✓ Red represents love, life, and celebration. JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. **He gives us His life so that we are completely loved and accepted by God our Father. Celebrate!**



*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)*

- ✓ Brown represents nourishment to bear fruit. **JESUS IS THE VINE. He nourishes us with His life so we can bear fruit in our lives that represents our connection with Him.**

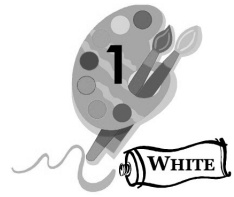
*I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

*Jesus painted Himself with words that reveal a "picture" of who He is, how He meets our needs, and why we can trust Him enough to follow Him.*

**Enjoy!**

# Jesus Is the "I Am"

*Jesus answered, "Before Abraham was born, I AM." (John 8:58)*



The *Painting the Portrait of Jesus* lessons focus on the "I am" statements Jesus made in the gospel of John. These are called the "I am's" because each one of them starts with the same 2 words, "I am." Then, Jesus follows the words "I am" with a word picture to describe Himself to those who are listening.

Jesus' word pictures were like paint colors in a portrait. Remember that a portrait is a painting, drawing, or photograph that is a true representation of that person. Each one of those "I am" statements is like another paint color being added to Jesus' portrait.

Jesus painted Himself with words that reveal not His physical appearance but a "picture" of who He is, how He is the answer to our spiritual needs, and why we can trust Him enough to follow Him.

**Jesus is the answer to the spiritual needs of every person.** He is the answer to every inner need that you and I have. And, you will see that His self-portrait describes that. We'll be adding a different color each lesson as we paint the portrait of Jesus.

## **PAINT COLOR #1: WHITE**

Our first paint color is white. White is really a mixture of all colors. Have you ever seen white light shining through a prism?

A prism is a special kind of glass that causes white light shining through it to break up into all the different colors of a rainbow. All those colors miraculously mix together to form white light. So, white represents all the colors Jesus used to paint His portrait. And, in the Bible, the color white often represents **the presence of God**.

We find the "I am" statements in the book of John, written by one of Jesus' disciples named John. The book of John is also called the gospel of John. The word "gospel" means "good news" so the book of John contains the good news about Jesus—who He is, why He came, and what He offers to those who trust in Him. In it, John emphasizes

repeatedly that Jesus is God in human flesh. He says so in the key verse for the book of John found at the end in chapter 20.

*Ask the Lord Jesus to teach you through His Word.*

**Read John 20:31.**

*What did John say was his purpose in writing his gospel?*

*And, once you know and believe this, what will happen?*

The New International Readers Version says it this way, “you will have life because you belong to Him.” Belonging to Him means you will have a relationship with Him. It’s great to belong to someone who loves you, isn’t it? And, once you belong to Him, you also get life from Him, eternal life. We’ll learn a lot about both of these special things that come to those who know that Jesus is God’s Son and believe that to be true.

Let’s talk about the two words “I am.” To us, they are just part of our English language. To the Jewish people of Jesus’ time, those words were part of God’s name. Years and years before Jesus was born, God spoke to a man named Moses and told Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Moses said to God, “What if I go to them, and they want to know your name, what shall I tell them?” We read God’s answer in Exodus chapter 3.

**Read Exodus 3:13-14.**

*What name did God give Himself?*

That's what our English Bibles say. The Old Testament where Exodus is found was written in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew name for God is spelled YHWH. We think the name was pronounced Yahweh (ya-way). This was God's personal name. Jesus knew this name for God. And, He frequently claimed that name for Himself.

One time Jesus was talking to a woman at a well. She said that one future day the promised leader known as the Messiah would come. Let's see how Jesus answered her.

**Read John 4:19-26.**

*What would the Messiah do (v. 25)?*

*How did Jesus respond to her (v. 26)?*

Since Jesus spoke Hebrew, what He originally said would have been, "Yahweh, the one speaking to you." That's what Jesus actually said.

*What was Jesus communicating to the woman about Himself?*

Another time, Jesus was talking to some Jewish leaders and told them He knew Abraham. They said, "You are not even 50 years old. How could you have seen Abraham?" Let's see how Jesus answered them.

**Read John 8:56-59.**

*What was Jesus' answer in v. 58?*

*Notice what happened next. Why do you think the Jewish leaders became so angry with Jesus?*

So, this is what you can know. When Jesus said, "I am," He is revealing something about Himself. He is God. He did the things that God does. He healed people and forgave them of their sins. He told people that He was God.

**Jesus is the "I am."** He is God. We don't think of God's name as Yahweh anymore. We often think of God's name as Jesus, don't we?

Remember that I told you the color white represents the presence of God. One day, when Jesus was on a mountain with His disciples, His clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any bleach could ever make them. His disciples saw that and knew it meant they were in God's presence.

**Read Mark 9:2-8.**

*What did the disciples hear the voice from heaven say?*

So, not only is Jesus God, He is more specifically the Son of God. He knows God as His very own Father.

Jesus obeyed His Father and lived His life as a God-man among people. That way, He knows every need that we have—every

need, both physical and spiritual. He knows what it is like to be hungry and thirsty, to know fear, to be alone, and to long to know God.

**Jesus knows that He is the answer to every need**, especially the need to know God.

**Read Hebrews 4:15.**

*How confident are you that Jesus (as man) understands how you feel but is also powerful enough (as God) to take care of your every need?*

**Jesus is the “I AM.”** He said to His disciples, “If you know me, you will know God.” That’s what Jesus is saying to you and what the rest of these lessons will be about—getting to know Jesus through His descriptions of Himself as though they were paint colors. With that we’ll paint the portrait of Jesus.

**Jesus is the answer to the spiritual needs of every person**, especially the need to have a relationship with Him, to belong to Someone who loves us dearly.

**Read Matthew 11:28-29.**

*What is the invitation and the promise?*

*What inner needs do you have that Jesus’ promise could satisfy?*

*Isn't it great to know that you are loved by someone as wonderful as Jesus?*

## **FOLLOWING JESUS**

### **1) Bible verse to learn:**

*Jesus answered, "Before Abraham was born, I AM." (John 8:58)*

### **2) Response in prayer & praise:**

Thank Jesus for coming to earth and living among us so that you can see what God is like by learning from Him. Thank Him that He wants to have a relationship with you. Ask Him to give you a longing in your heart this week to know Him closely.

### **3) Filling in the portrait of Jesus:**

Christianity is Christ so spend a few minutes each day reading the verses and reflecting on Jesus—His life, His relationships, and His teaching. Get to know Him well—this One who loves you dearly.

**Read John 1:1-28. Reflect on what you read.**

**Read John 1:29-51. Reflect on what you read.**

**Read John 2:1-12. Reflect on what you read.**

**Read John 2:13-25. Reflect on what you read.**