

Eight Sessions to Help You  
Discover What It Means to Follow Jesus  
Together with Fellow Believers



I  
**Am A  
Christian**

**PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE**

**THOM S. RAINER**  
WITH ASHLEY WIERSMA

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*I Am a Christian Participant's Guide: Eight Sessions to Help You Discover What It Means to Follow Jesus Together with Fellow Believers*

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# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I have been in vocational ministry for more than four decades; and though I could fill several books with the sheer delights of such a role, *nothing* has brought me more joy over the years than seeing believers embrace the seven statements we will explore during this study. When people finally grasp who they are in Christ and what their participation means to the church, *everything* changes. Life begins to make sense. Love seems more possible. Light begins to penetrate all that had previously been dark.

In Christ, our identity is secured.

Our purpose is clarified.

Our mission is confirmed.

Our hearts start longing to cooperate with God.

Our lives become framed by seven simple “I am” statements that make all the difference.

During this study, you will be invited to grow in your understanding of the following key characteristics that mark the life of every Christian:

- I am a believer.
- I am a church member.
- I am a disciple.
- I am a servant.

- I am a witness.
- I am a prayer warrior.
- I am a Christian.

These days there is no shortage of groups that seek to define our identity. Democrat or Republican? On Facebook or Instagram? Using an Android or an iPhone? Where I'm from, the question was always about football: "Auburn or 'Bama?" But though these designations, and a thousand others, have their place, God longs for us to define ourselves by one fact, and one fact alone. He longs for us to find our identity *in Christ*—that is, to believe in his Son, know his Son, love his Son, and make it our life's work to be transformed into his Son's perfect image.

*Christian* should be the primary identity that people associate with us when they survey our lives. This study includes eight sessions—one introductory meeting and seven sessions focused on seven key statements—looking carefully at what it means to say, "I am a Christian." In the process, we'll answer questions such as these:

- What thoughts do Christians think?
- What actions do Christians take?
- What priorities do Christians uphold?
- What choices do Christians make?
- What do Christians pray about?
- Why do Christians serve?
- How do Christians mature in their faith?
- What brings Christians joy?

It's no exaggeration to say that I'm *ecstatic* for you as you begin the process of answering these and other vital questions about what it means to follow Jesus.

*I Am a Christian Participant's Guide* was created to help you deepen both your sense of intimacy with Jesus and your involvement with his bride, the church.

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Each session includes both group-oriented discussion questions and opportunities for personal reflection. Your group leader will encourage you to share with the full group, but only those aspects of your story that you are comfortable sharing.

As you take this journey, I'm praying that curiosity will compel you, hope will inspire you, and ever-deepening intimacy with God will sustain you step-by-step.





# OVERVIEW AND LEADER'S GUIDE

## Planning Your Group Experience

This study was born of two driving beliefs: (1) As Christians, we ought to know what it *means* to be a Christian, and (2) we ought to understand why being connected to a local church is *essential* to realizing our full potential in Christ. There is no better way to set ourselves up for success in life as followers of Jesus than to impart these fundamental truths. Thus, I am deeply grateful for small group leaders like you.

*Thank you*—sincerely—for agreeing to lead an *I Am a Christian* group. I would offer you some sort of reward for your courage, but the real reward will be having a front-row seat to your group members' life-changing experiences. As they come to understand all that awaits them, as they deepen their connection to Jesus and his church, look out! There will be joy. There will be laughter. There will be amazement. There will be celebration of the undeniable goodness of God.

You will see people who have been sidelined for *years* get connected to the living, breathing body of Christ. You will see selfish people become excited about serving. You will see hard-hearted people learn to sacrifice on behalf of those in need.

The list could go on, but you get the idea. Great things are in store for your group—and for you as their leader.

You will want to be prepared for each session so you can steward this responsibility well. To that end, take some time to complete the following Foolproof Facilitation grid, making notes in the right-hand column of ideas you have or things you don't want to forget as you go.

## FOOLPROOF FACILITATION

### *Tips for an Engaging Experience*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose your group. Ideally your group will number seven to ten members.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Obtain copies of <i>I Am a Christian</i> and this participant's guide for each group member.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confirm all eight meeting dates before your first meeting. To cut down on preventable absences, be sure everyone knows ahead of time when the sessions—an introductory session plus seven study sessions—will occur. See “A Study in Eight Sessions” on page 4.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Familiarize yourself with the session sections noted below. Prior to your first meeting, preview this guide so that you know what's coming and when.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Obtain access (digital or hard copy) to the New Living Translation of the Bible. With one or two exceptions, every Scripture passage in this guide is drawn from the NLT.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and complete each lesson prior to the corresponding meeting. Be sure to carefully read the entire session's content before you gather for group time. Note the facilitation cues.	

## OVERVIEW AND LEADER'S GUIDE

<input type="checkbox"/>	Preview each session's video prior to the meeting.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pray, pray, and pray some more. We have a real enemy, and he would love nothing more than to distract us from spiritual growth. Prioritize praying for your group every day during this experience.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate with group members. Ask how you can serve them, pray for them, encourage them, and support them.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep the group time moving along. Each session is based on a meeting time of 90 minutes (plus time for fellowship before and after the study). Allow time for people to participate, but keep an eye on the clock as you lead each session.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Draw out timid members and help subdue chatty ones. A variety of personalities make groups interesting, but you may need to create opportunities for quieter members to participate. Quiet doesn't mean uninvolved. It may just mean these members are thinking or don't want to interrupt.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep the group focused on the main thing. The twofold goals of this experience are (1) understanding what it means to be a Christian, and (2) understanding why participation in a local church is crucial to our lives as believers. When the discussion drifts from these goals, draw the group back to the primary focus.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Celebrate God's goodness and grace. One mark of a mature believer is giving God the glory, not seeking our own. Frequently remind your group of who is behind every positive step forward.	

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says that “where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.” Rest assured that as you come together to study God’s Word, to better understand his plan for the church, and to commit yourself to his will and ways, he is there, *with* you and *for* you, cheering you on.

## A STUDY IN EIGHT SESSIONS

To maximize your group’s discussion time, encourage group members to complete the entire content for each session prior to attending the corresponding group meeting.

Giving group members an opportunity to develop and “sit with” their answers to each session’s questions before being asked to share their thoughts often helps them sort out what they truly think and discern what they’re prepared to share with the full group.

Remember: Depending on their life experiences and current circumstances, some group members may not feel comfortable sharing some answers aloud. Though it’s fine to invite these people to talk with you one-on-one outside of the group experience, always be respectful of requests for privacy, and never pressure someone to share with the group.

## BUDGETING GROUP TIME

With the exception of the introductory session, which is an abbreviated meeting, each session in this study is designed to last 90 minutes, divided as follows:

- **Getting Started:** 10 minutes [Welcome/review/brief prayer]
- **Video and Reflection:** 15 minutes [Show the video and discuss the “Reflection on the Video” question.]

## OVERVIEW AND LEADER'S GUIDE

- **Group Discussion:** 55 minutes [You may not have time to discuss every question in each session, so be prepared to pick and choose the ones most relevant for your group.]
- **Taking It Home:** 10 minutes [Closing thoughts and group prayer]

Many groups prefer to enjoy a time of fellowship both before and after each session, which brings the total meeting time to around two hours. As group leader, be sure to communicate your time expectations to all group members prior to gathering for your first meeting.



## SESSION 1

# THE KICKOFF MEETING

## Overview and Getting to Know Your Group

The first meeting will be an hour-long get-together to kick off the study with an icebreaker, an overview of the seven sessions, and a time of prayer. The group leader will hand out the book and participant's guide to each group member, screen the introductory session video, and answer any questions. During this introductory session, the group will address the following topics:

- Overview of the series and goals for the study
- Schedule for the remaining seven sessions
- Explanation about completing session content prior to each group meeting

Here is a suggested schedule for this initial meeting:

- Welcome to group members and opening prayer: 7 minutes
- Icebreaker: 10 minutes. Ask everyone to share something about themselves that nobody else (except maybe their spouse) would know.



## I AM A CHRISTIAN

- Overview of the remaining seven sessions: 10 minutes
- Introductory session video: 13 minutes
- Reflection on the video: 5 minutes. What does the phrase “I am a Christian” mean to you?
- Q&A: 10 minutes
- Closing prayer: 5 minutes