

Before Abraham Was, I Am

JOHN 8:31-59 (BSB) · TEACHER GUIDE · DIGDEEPER.AI

THE BIG IDEA · SAY IT AT LEAST FIVE TIMES

Jesus is the eternal I AM, and only the Son sets us free.

Open with it, bring it back after every section, close with it. By the end they should be able to finish the sentence for you.

- Before this passage (day 12): John 8:12-30, Light of the World. Its big idea: Jesus is the light from above, and he is who he says.
- After this passage (day 14): John 9:1-25, Once I Was Blind. Its big idea: Jesus, the light of the world, gives sight to those who never had it.

Open

Recall last time in one line: Jesus called himself the light of the world, and many began to believe him (8:30). Ask: 'When someone asks who you are, what do you reach for first: your family, your job, your hometown?' Let a few answer. Then read John 8:58 aloud: 'before Abraham was born, I am!' Say the big idea: Jesus is the eternal I AM, and only the Son sets us free. Ask one person what stuck from last time.

Run Sheet

1. Free Indeed (John 8:31-36, about 12 min)

The one thing: Freedom is not a birthright. It is the Son's gift to those who continue in his word.

Ask: They said, 'We have never been slaves to anyone.' Where do people today miss the ways they are not free?

2. Whose Children? (John 8:37-47, about 12 min)

The one thing: How we respond to Jesus shows which family we belong to.

Ask: Jesus asks, 'If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?' What keeps people from believing someone who tells them the truth?

3. Before Abraham, I Am (John 8:48-59, about 15 min)

The one thing: Jesus claims the name God gave himself, and the crowd understood exactly what he meant.

Ask: The crowd asked Jesus, 'Who do You claim to be?' Why did his answer make them pick up stones?

Close (never cut it)

This passage shows who Jesus is, so land on him, not on a task. Read v58 once more, slowly, and say plainly that the man in the temple courts spoke as the God who spoke from the burning bush, and the freedom of v36 rests on that. Then leave Jesus' own question in the room, 'If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?', and let a moment of quiet sit.

PROTECT THE ENDING

If the last section starts late, drop v48-50 and the optional points so v58-59 and the close get their full time.

KIDS SIDE ANSWERS

Story order: 1, 2, 4, 3, 5 (top to bottom) · Feelings: Abraham happy, Jesus sad, The people who argued worried, People who had just believed worried · Code: THE SON SETS YOU FREE

Act it out: Loop paper-strip chains loosely around the kids' wrists. The teacher reads 'So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,' and on 'free indeed' everyone breaks their chains. Then the teacher calls 'Before Abraham was born...' and the kids shout 'I AM!'

1. Free Indeed

JOHN 8:31-36 · ABOUT 12 MIN · SECTION 1 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Jesus speaks to people who had begun to believe him (v31).
- Real disciples keep living in his word (v31-32).
- Sin makes slaves. Only the Son makes people free (v34-36).

If you continue in My word, you are truly My DISCIPLES.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free INDEED.

Discuss: They said, 'We have never been slaves to anyone.' Where do people today miss the ways they are not free?

Freedom is not a birthright. It is the Son's gift to those who continue in his word.

MUST COVER

- v31-32: Faith that lasts keeps listening. 'Continue in My word' comes before 'the truth will set you free.'
- v34-36: A slave can be sent out of the house, but 'a son remains forever.' Jesus is the Son who frees.

IF THERE'S TIME

- v33: Their boast forgets Egypt and Babylon, and Roman soldiers were watching the festival as they spoke.
- Romans 6:17-18: Paul, an early Christian leader, says believers 'once were slaves to sin' and are now set free.

Illustration idea: A houseguest and a child in the same home. The guest leaves when the visit ends. The child's place never expires.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: Habits or addictions people can't break.
- Listen for: Being ruled by what other people think of them.

If it drifts: If talk turns to politics or personal rights, go back to v34. Jesus names one slavery, which is sin, and one person who frees, the Son.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

They thought their family line made them free. Jesus says only the Son can, because of who he is.

Short on time? Skip the history of Israel's rulers. Keep v34-36.

Bridge → They answer by pointing to Abraham, so Jesus asks who their father really is.

2. Whose Children?

JOHN 8:37-47 · ABOUT 12 MIN · SECTION 2 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Family shows in what you do, not only in your bloodline (v39-40).
- God's children love the Son God sent (v42).
- Jesus invites testing: 'Which of you can prove Me guilty of sin?' (v46).

If God were your Father, you would LOVE ME.

Whoever belongs to God hears the WORDS OF GOD.

Discuss: Jesus asks, 'If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?' What keeps people from believing someone who tells them the truth?

How we respond to Jesus shows which family we belong to.

MUST COVER

- v39-42: Abraham's children act like Abraham. God's children love the one God sent.
- v46-47: No one can charge Jesus with sin. Refusing his truth shows they are not hearing God.

IF THERE'S TIME

- v44: The devil 'was a murderer from the beginning,' and they are trying to kill Jesus (v37, 40).
- 1 John 3:8: John, who wrote this Gospel, later says the Son came 'to destroy the works of the devil.'

Illustration idea: People say 'You're just like your dad' about habits and reactions, not only faces. Family shows in behavior.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: Pride. We hate being wrong.
- Listen for: The truth would cost us something, so we'd rather not hear it.

If it drifts: If it turns into labeling groups as 'the devil's children,' go back to v37 and v40. Jesus is speaking to people plotting his death, and the test is how anyone treats him.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

The question isn't which family tree you're on. It's whether you hear the Son, the I AM who sets you free.

Short on time? Cut the 1 John link. Keep v42 and v46.

Bridge → Cornered, they turn to insults and ask the question the whole chapter has been building toward.

3. Before Abraham, I Am

JOHN 8:48-59 · ABOUT 15 MIN · SECTION 3 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Whoever keeps his word 'will never see death' (v51).
- The crowd asks, 'Who do You claim to be?' (v53).
- He answers with God's own name, and they reach for stones (v58-59).

Your father Abraham REJOICED that he would see My day.

before Abraham was born, I AM!

Discuss: The crowd asked Jesus, 'Who do You claim to be?' Why did his answer make them pick up stones?

Jesus claims the name God gave himself, and the crowd understood exactly what he meant.

MUST COVER

- v58: Abraham 'was born,' but Jesus simply 'is.' At the burning bush God told Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM' (Exodus 3:14).
- v59: The law punished blasphemy by stoning (Leviticus 24:16). The stones show they heard a claim to be God.

IF THERE'S TIME

- v56: Abraham, the father of Israel, looked ahead in faith to Jesus' day 'and was glad.'
- Isaiah 43:10: God says through the prophet, 'I am He. Before Me no god was formed.' Jesus speaks in that voice.

Illustration idea: A family tree on a wall: every name has a birth date. Jesus says he isn't one more name above Abraham. He is the one who planted the tree.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: He was claiming to be God.
- Listen for: They thought he was insulting their faith or had lost his mind.

If it drifts: If it becomes a debate about whether he was deluded, go back to v46 and v58. He invited anyone to examine his life, and the crowd did not hear a confused man. They heard God's name.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

Abraham was born. Jesus is. He is the eternal I AM, and only he sets us free.

Short on time? Skip the insults in v48-50 and go straight to v51-59.

Bridge → Let the stones and Jesus slipping away in v59 lead straight into the close.

With One Friend, Over Coffee

ABOUT 30 MINUTES · FOR A FRIEND WHO IS CURIOUS, OR NOT SURE

1. Start with who they are. Ask what makes them feel like themselves: family, work, background. The people Jesus spoke with leaned hard on being 'Abraham's descendants.'
2. Read the freedom promise. Read John 8:31-36 together. Ask where they feel stuck, and notice together that Jesus says 'everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'
3. Face the big claim. Read 8:51-59. Explain that at the burning bush God told Moses his name was 'I AM' (Exodus 3:14). Point out that the crowd reached for stones because they understood the claim.
4. Take the doubt seriously. Admit that huge claims are easy to make. Note that Jesus invited scrutiny: 'Which of you can prove Me guilty of sin?' Either the claim is true or the crowd was right to be outraged. The text leaves no middle ground.
5. Leave the question with them. Read the crowd's question in v53, 'Who do You claim to be?', and let it sit with your friend. Tell them it's a question worth taking their time over.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HEAR

"Anyone can make enormous claims. Why isn't he just a man who thinks too much of himself?"

That's a fair test. In this passage he doesn't dodge it. He dares his critics to name one sin (v46), and he says he isn't seeking his own glory (v50). Proud men usually protect themselves. He walks straight into stones.

"Is 'I am' really a claim to be God, or are Christians reading that in?"

Look at the grammar and the reaction. Abraham 'was born,' but Jesus says 'I am,' not 'I was.' The crowd picked up stones, the penalty for blasphemy. They took it as a claim to be God.

"Calling people children of the devil sounds hateful. What do I do with that?"

It's hard, and it has been misused against Jewish people, which is wrong. Jesus and his hearers were all Jewish. He is speaking to people trying to kill him (v37, 40), and his test is how anyone responds to him, not their ethnicity.

"I'm a decent person. Why would I need setting free?"

Jesus doesn't say 'bad people are slaves.' He says 'everyone who sins.' Most of us know at least one thing we can't stop doing or stop feeling. That's the kind of slavery he's talking about.

Evergreen Principles

Four standards every week. The rest rotate: each lesson brings the few that fit its passage best.

EVERY LESSON

1. Pray before you prepare

Teaching the Bible is spiritual work first (John 15:5).

If you're new: Pray for your class by name during the week.

If you've taught for years: Pray for the one person you find hardest to reach.

2. Study the text first

Understand the passage yourself before any help.

If you're new: Read it in two translations; write your own questions first.

If you've taught for years: Don't lean on old notes. What did you miss last time?

3. Teach one big idea

People remember one sentence, not four points.

If you're new: Write it in 12 words or fewer before anything else.

If you've taught for years: Test every story against it. If it doesn't serve it, cut it.

4. Point to Christ

All of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27).

If you're new: Ask: what does this show about Jesus?

If you've taught for years: Show grace as the reason for obedience, not just the rule.

FOR THIS LESSON

1. Let the Bible do the talking

The weight of this lesson is in six words: 'before Abraham was born, I am!'

If you're new: Read v58 aloud twice and let the grammar speak before you explain anything.

If you've taught for years: Have the class spot the tense change themselves ('was born' versus 'I am') before you point it out.

2. Admit what is hard

Verse 44 is harsh and has been misused against Jewish people.

If you're new: Say plainly that Jesus and his hearers were Jewish and that he is addressing people plotting his death.

If you've taught for years: Name the history of misuse briefly and show how v37 and v40 keep the verse from being read as a verdict on a people.

3. Let the passage land the way it lands

The passage ends on who Jesus is and on stones, not on a to-do list.

If you're new: Resist adding homework. End on v58-59 and Jesus' question in v46.

If you've taught for years: Let a longer silence follow v59 and trust the claim to do its own work.

BEFORE CLASS

- ☐ Read the passage three times
- ☐ Big idea in one sentence
- ☐ Opening and close chosen
- ☐ Know what you'll cut
- ☐ Handouts, pens, extra Bibles
- ☐ Prayed for the class by name

Openings, Closings & Hard Moments

Pick one opening and one close; rotate so class doesn't get predictable.

OPENINGS

- ask a real-life question: When someone asks who you are, what do you reach for first: your family, your job, your hometown?
- use an object: Show a family tree with birth dates beside each name. Ask who on it has no birth date. Then read v58.
- start in the text: Read 'before Abraham was born, I am!' cold, then ask the class what is strange about that sentence.

CLOSINGS

- restate the big idea: Abraham was born. Jesus is. He is the eternal I AM, and only the Son sets us free.
- allow quiet reflection: Read v58-59, then leave thirty seconds of silence with Jesus' question: 'If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?'
- call back to the opening: We started with who we are. The crowd leaned on Abraham. The passage ends with who Jesus is, and that is what frees us.

WHEN CLASS GETS HARD

- Someone is troubled by v44, 'You belong to your father, the devil,' and asks whether this is anti-Jewish.: Thank them for raising it. Say that Jesus and everyone in the scene were Jewish, that he is speaking to people trying to kill him (v37, 40), and that using this verse against Jewish people has been a real and serious wrong.
- Someone who once believed and drifted notices that these listeners 'had believed Him' (v31) yet ended with stones, and fears they are no different.: Point to v31 and v36. Jesus' word to beginning believers is an invitation to 'continue,' and the Son still frees. The passage doesn't close the door on them. It shows who is holding it open.
- Silence after a question: Wait. Then rephrase simpler, or ask them to talk to a neighbor first.
- One person dominates: "Thanks. Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet." Talk privately if it continues.
- A question you can't answer: Say so, write it down, bring an answer next week.
- A tangent takes over: "Great question. Let's catch it after class so we can finish the passage."

READ THIS WEEK

- Exodus 3:1-15
- Isaiah 43:8-13
- Romans 6:15-23

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/john/8-31-59/lesson

Before Abraham Was, I Am

JOHN 8:31-59 (BSB) · WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? · DIGDEEPER.AI

Key verse: “before Abraham was born, I am!” John 8:58

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus is the eternal I AM, and only the Son sets us free.

1. FREE INDEED · JOHN 8:31-36

- Jesus speaks to people who had begun to believe him (v31).
- Real disciples keep living in his word (v31-32).
- Sin makes slaves. Only the Son makes people free (v34-36).

If you continue in My word, you are truly My _____.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free _____.

Discuss: They said, 'We have never been slaves to anyone.' Where do people today miss the ways they are not free?

2. WHOSE CHILDREN? · JOHN 8:37-47

- Family shows in what you do, not only in your bloodline (v39-40).
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If God were your Father, you would _____.

Whoever belongs to God hears the _____.

Discuss: Jesus asks, 'If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?' What keeps people from believing someone who tells them the truth?

3. BEFORE ABRAHAM, I AM · JOHN 8:48-59

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- He answers with God's own name, and they reach for stones (v58-59).

Your father Abraham _____ that he would see My day.

before Abraham was born, _____!

Discuss: The crowd asked Jesus, 'Who do You claim to be?' Why did his answer make them pick up stones?

Read this week: Exodus 3:1-15 · Isaiah 43:8-13 · Romans 6:15-23

For Kids: Before Abraham Was, I Am

JOHN 8:31-59 · NAME: _____

Big idea: Jesus has always been, because Jesus is God.

1. PUT THE STORY IN ORDER! NUMBER THE BOXES.

- ☐ Jesus teaches people in the temple.
- ☐ He says the truth sets people free.
- ☐ Jesus says, 'Before Abraham was born, I am!'
- ☐ People say, 'Abraham is our father!'
- ☐ People pick up stones; Jesus slips away.

2. HOW DID THEY FEEL? CIRCLE ONE.

Abraham: happy · sad · worried

Jesus: happy · sad · worried

The people who argued: happy · sad · worried

People who had just believed: happy · sad · worried

3. WORD SEARCH

P A B R A H A M K
O O C T N D Y G U
S K Y E S N B D T
L S B M O K V D R
A B G P N Y U C U
V C K L O B F R T
E F R E E P V O H
K N D S T O N E S
S Y F A T H E R V

TRUTH · FREE · ABRAHAM · SON · SLAVE · TEMPLE · STONES · FATHER

4. SECRET CODE

1=E 2=F 3=H 4=N 5=O 6=R 7=S 8=T 9=U 10=Y

8 3 1 7 5 4 7 1 8 7 10 5 9 2 6 1 1

5. DRAW IT!

Draw a broken chain, and next to it write: 'The Son sets you free.'

6. MEMORY VERSE

"Before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58 Say it to a grown-up: ☐ ☐ ☐

Before Abraham was born, Jesus _____. _____