

ELEV8 Basketball

2022-23 Devotional

Who is JESUS?

Learning the *Who?*, *What?*, and *Why?* about Him from His own words and interactions with those around Him

Devotional Guide

Week 1 – Welcome to ELEV8 Basketball!

Week 2 – Who do we think Jesus is? (Part 1)

Week 3 – Who do we think Jesus is? (Part 2)

Week 4 – Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life”

Week 5 – Jesus said, “I am the Light of the World”

Week 6 – Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd”

Week 7 – Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life”

Week 8 – Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”

Week 9 – Jesus said, “I am the True Vine”

Week 10 – Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do you think I am?”

Week 11 – Faith and Doubt?

ELEV8 Basketball has been serving families in Central Maryland for many years. The program offers a fun, instructional, and competitive basketball program to kids 4 years old through seniors in high school. Our vision is to positively develop strong character in boys and girls and young men and young women while seeking to honor and offer life-changing hope found in Jesus Christ. ELEV8 Sports is directed by a Leadership Team (LT) from Columbia Presbyterian Church (CPC) in partnership with Crossroads Church of the Nazarene and Bethel Korean Presbyterian Church.

Suggestion for coaches leading the devotion:

1. Read the devotional material prior to your practice and pray for your players
2. Pray for God’s Spirit to use your words to reach the hearts of your players.

Week #1: Welcome to ELEV8 Basketball!

Get to know your team!

Introduce yourself to parents and players.

Icebreaker: Have each player say their name, where they live, and something they like to do in their free time.

Take a few minutes to share with the players your name, a favorite hobby, why you're coaching ELEV8 basketball this year, when you came to know Jesus as your personal Savior, one thing that you love about Jesus, and one thing that has changed in your life as a result of your relationship with Him.

Summarize for them to prepare for our future devotions:

This year our devotion time will focus on learning about Jesus from His own words and from those people closest to him during his life here on this earth. Jesus never avoided conversations with people and asked many questions to challenge them to think about what they do each day and why they do it. His words and questions are also spoken to us today to challenge us to think about how we spend our time each day and why we do the things we do.

Our devotion next week will focus on a conversation Jesus had with a man who wanted to know who Jesus was but was afraid of what others would think of his curiosity and questions.

Pray with your team for the season.

Week #2: Who do you think Jesus is (Part 1)?

Welcome players back and introduce any new players to the team

Ice Breaker: Ask your players Who is the most famous basketball player ever?". A follow-up question is Why do you say he (or she) is the most famous?"

Question: In our country today, how do people respond to the question, "Who is Jesus?"

(52% say a good teacher, some say the Son of God, a growing number have not heard of or do not really know anything about Jesus.)

Read John 3:1-5

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.' **Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'** Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'"

Nicodemus was like many people today who think Jesus was a good teacher.

C. S. Lewis was a University Professor who started asking questions about who Jesus was. He described the man Jesus this way "If Jesus was merely a man and said the sort of things he did, he would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, a liar, or Lord"

Lewis concluded that Jesus was neither a lunatic nor a liar, but was Lord of the Universe. He wrote many books for adults, e.g., *Mere Christianity* and kids, e.g., *The Chronicles of Narnia* to proclaim the wonders of God and the gospel of Jesus.

Next week we'll look at several summaries of Jesus' life from men who spent lots of time with Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #3: Who do you think Jesus is (Part 2)?

Ice Breaker: What is a biography?

Biography - simply the story of a real person's life

Anyone know a good biography? I know of two biographies: one is *Cal Ripken, Jr.*, by Lois Nicholson and the other is *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer.

Question: How did Ms. Nicholson collect information for her biography?
(Interviews; he talked to Cal himself since he's still living, talking to others)
How did J. I. Packer collect info for his biography? (The Bible, history books)

Jesus called several men to follow him while he lived on this earth (his 12 disciples). Those men and several others spent many hours/days/years with Jesus and wrote down summaries (biographies) of what he did and what he said. The four gospels were written by four men for four different audiences:

Matthew – written to a Jewish Christian audience living near Jerusalem

Mark – written to Roman leaders who had put their faith in Jesus

Luke – written to Greek Gentiles who had put their faith in Jesus

These three “biographies” were written around the same time (~ 35 years after Jesus was crucified) and have much in common. The fourth was different.

John – written possibly 20 years after the other three gospels and written to both Jews and Gentiles so that **anyone** “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).

John's gospel makes bold statements from the beginning about Jesus

John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.”

Here, John proclaims that Jesus (the Word) has existed from the beginning of time and that Jesus is God. This is a very bold claim!

Over the next six devotions, we'll look at Jesus' claims in which he refers to himself as “I AM” (a unique name God gave the Jewish people to refer to Him).

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who He is each day.

Week #4: I am the Bread of Life

Ice Breaker: What are some of the reasons we eat food? (We eat to satisfy hunger, to enjoy the taste of food, and to live a healthy life.)

Our bodies get hungry and remind us of our constant need for food.

This year, our devotion time is focused on learning about Jesus from those who spent much time with Him and from Jesus' own spoken words.

Jesus used his power to perform many miracles. His miracles demonstrated compassion to many, but He always challenged the witnesses to see the **spiritual** blessing and invitation embedded in the **physical** miracles.

In our story today, Jesus had been teaching many, many people for several days. They became hungry but didn't have any food to eat. Jesus performed a miracle by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food to feed more than 5,000 people! Many of the people would have seen the parallel between this miracle and the miracle of the manna appearing in the wilderness to feed the Israelites many years ago.

A few days later, the crowds searched for Jesus to see more miracles and to hopefully be fed again. Jesus told them not to work only for the **food that perishes**, but also for the **food that endures to eternal life**. He said that the manna was merely physical nourishment, just like the bread and fish he gave them a few days ago.

They said to Jesus, "Sir, give us this bread."

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'" (John 6:35)

Jesus made it very clear that He was the spiritual bread that came down from heaven, and if they received Him, they would never be spiritually hungry or thirsty again.

Jesus invites each of us today to receive Him as the bread of life that came down from heaven to feed God's children, to have all our spiritual needs met, and to never hunger or thirst again.

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day

Week #5: I am the Light of the World

Ice Breaker: Solve this problem: you are blindfolded, taken to a completely dark room, and told to find a passageway out. What do you do?

Most of us have several senses other than vision (touch, smell, hear, taste). Can any of these help? Would a light help?

As we saw last week, Jesus made it very clear that he was the spiritual bread, that came down from heaven, and if they received Him, they would never be spiritually hungry or thirsty again (John 6:35).

Today, Jesus is in a conversation with many of the same Jewish leaders.

John 8:12 - “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”

As the **spiritual** light of the world, Jesus has the power to vanquish the darkness of sin. He can remove our spiritual blindness, giving us the ability to see the truth of His words.

When Jesus was talking to Nicodemus (several devotions ago) in John 3, He told him, Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

When light exposes the things we do wrong, we can try to move back into the darkness or choose to confess them to God. If we confess and place our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, He will forgive us our wrongs and work in us so that we can serve Him.

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #6: I am the Good Shepherd

Ice Breaker: In Biblical times, what did a shepherd do? Where did shepherds live while doing their job? According to Luke's gospel, what part did the shepherds play in Jesus' birth? (The angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds; they went to see the infant Jesus and then told people about him.)

Shepherds still exist in many countries — even in the U. S.

Can you think of a job in our culture today similar to a shepherd in Biblical times? (Farmers care for animals; teachers and coaches care for and encourage their students and players; elders in a church help take care of people's needs.)

Jesus refers to himself as “the good shepherd.”

John 10:11 – “Jesus said, ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.’”

What makes a shepherd a **good** shepherd? (He cares for, feeds, and protects the sheep from predators.)

How does he protect his sheep? (He uses a staff to fight off predators.)

How do sheep know the real shepherd from an imposter? (His sheep know his voice.)

If the good shepherd calls the sheep to follow him, why should they? (He has food for them; He's protecting them from danger.)

If we call Jesus our shepherd, how do we get to know Him? (By reading the Bible, by listening to others who know Him, including pastors, parents, and friends.)

Jesus says in John 10:15, I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Why would Shepherd Jesus lay down his life for his sheep (people like you and me)? Because of His great love for us and His desire to care for us both in this life and the one to come.

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #7: I am the Resurrection and the Life

Ice Breaker: What's the name of the oldest person to ever live on this earth?
In the Bible: Methuselah, who was an Israelite and lived 969 years!
In recent history: Jeanne Calment, who lived in France and lived 122 years!

In Biblical times, some Jewish groups (such as the Pharisees), believed in life after death (resurrection), while others (such as the Sadducees) did not.

Jesus had many followers, including Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, whom he loved. They **did** believe in resurrection after physical death. One day, Jesus learned that Lazarus had gotten very sick, close to dying. But instead of going to see him immediately, Jesus waited a few days with his disciples before going to see Lazarus.

“But when Jesus heard it, He said, **‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.’**” (John 11:4)

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, He discovered that Lazarus had been dead for four days and his body had been placed in a tomb.

“Martha said to Jesus, **‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’**” (v. 21)

“Jesus said to her, **‘Your brother will rise again.’**” (v. 23)

“Martha said to him, **‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’**” (v. 24)

‘Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.’” (v. 25-26)

Jesus commanded them to roll away the stone covering the tomb.

“And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, **‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this [for the benefit] of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’**” (v.41-42)

“When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, **‘Lazarus, come out!’** The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.” (v.43-44)

This demonstrated Jesus' power over death itself. This would be demonstrated again soon when Jesus himself would be resurrected from the dead.

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #8: I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life

Ice Breaker: Have you ever been afraid? What do you do when this happens? (Seek comfort or protection from someone or someplace.) What if you're in a strange place and you don't know the way to safety?

Many Jewish leaders were not happy because Jesus was challenging their misuse of authority by placing burdens on the Israelites and not shepherding them as needed. Jesus' miracles, healings and teachings had attracted lots of attention and followers, but they were growing more afraid of the Jewish leader's threats.

In John 14, Jesus says to his followers: "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?"

John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus' followers wrestled with his words, confused with their earthly fears and Jesus' somewhat cryptic directions away from the threatening environment.

Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

Jesus said to Philip: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does His works."

What is Jesus telling his followers?

1. He and the Father are one,
2. He is the way to heaven, and
3. He is going away soon (to heaven) to prepare a place for all his children and will one day return to bring his children home to be with Him.

Jesus is calling his followers to believe or have "faith in Him", no matter what happens (as He will soon die on the cross).

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #9: I am the Vine, you are the Branches

Ice Breaker: Can you name a fruit that grows on a vine? (Grapes, tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelons, and some beans.)

Branches grow out from a vine, and the fruit or vegetable forms on the branches. In order for the plant to bear fruit, the branches need the vine to supply nutrients to them.

In our devotionals focusing on who Jesus is, we come to another way that Jesus presents who He is and what He came to accomplish on earth.

John 15:5 – “Jesus said, ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.’”

What does it mean to “abide in Jesus”?

In the dictionary, “to abide” is defined as either “to tolerate” or “willingly act in accordance with” a rule or law.

Do you think Jesus wants us to “tolerate” Him OR to “willingly act in accordance with” His guidance for us?

Why would we want to “willingly act in accordance with” Jesus’ guidance for us? (To respond to His love and sacrifice for us; to honor Him and bring glory to His name.)

When we have needs, fears, or troubles, Jesus wants His followers to ask Him for guidance, courage, peace, and/or comfort. He tells his disciples (and us) in Luke 11:9-10:

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

If you know and seek to abide in Jesus, what fruit do your branches bear?

If you do not know and abide in Jesus, He calls all to seek Him and He will empower you to “abide in Him” through the Holy Spirit and bear much fruit for those around you for His honor and glory.

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #10: Who do you say that I am?

Ice Breaker: Does anyone know what the phone game is? (You tell someone a message, e.g. details about something, they then tell someone else, who tells someone else, etc., until someone tells you the message) How accurate is the message you received as compared to the original message?

As human beings, we observe events differently, we communicate details differently, etc. We are all unique and use our senses differently.

In Jesus' time, there were no phones, computers, emails, tweets, etc. People learned mostly by word of mouth, similar to the phone game.

Jesus spent much time with His disciples teaching them and others, healing many, and debating with the Jewish religious leaders about many things.

Over our last few weeks, we have focused on Jesus' words describing himself:

- "I am the Bread of Life"
- "I am the Light of the World"
- "I am the Good Shepherd"
- "I am the Resurrection and the Life"
- "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"
- "I am the True Vine"

Each of these helps us to better understand Jesus as the source of life to those who trust and put their faith in Him.

Matthew (writer of the gospel for Jewish believers) recorded a conversation Jesus had with His disciples in his gospel account (Matthew 16: 13-17):

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' He asked. **'Who do you say I am?'** **Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'** Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.'"

Jesus' disciples were regular people, and they had heard various explanations about who Jesus was. Peter's words confirmed that Jesus is the promised Messiah, sent to take away the sins of all who place their faith in Him.

Pray for Jesus to show you and your team more about who he is each day.

Week #11: Faith and Doubt (Blessings for those who have not seen but still believe)

Ice Breaker: What does it mean to doubt something? (Not believe it's true, or that it has happened in the past or going to happen in the future) What's an example of something you doubt is true? (That you'll get an "A" in your math class, that a person will fly to the Mars someday.)

It's easy for us to doubt things that are predicted to happen in the future. It's much easier to believe things that have happened in the past where we have verifiable proof. Many doubted the following events would happen but now easily believe:

- First plane flight (Wright Brothers, Dec 17, 1903)
- First moon landing and walk (Apollo 11, July 20, 1969)
- First "free solo climb" of El Capitan (Yosemite, June 3, 2017)

In John 14: 28-29, Jesus said, "You heard me say, I am going away (dying) and I am coming back to you (resurrection). I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe."

After Jesus was crucified and buried in a tomb, some of his disciples came on the third day and found it empty. They were sad and confused, but later Jesus revealed himself to some of them to demonstrate his resurrected body (John 20:16-23).

However, Thomas had not seen Jesus since his crucifixion, and even though Peter and others told Thomas, he wouldn't believe that Jesus was alive.

We read starting in John 20:24:

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

"A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**'"

Closing Prayer: "Father, please strengthen the faith of those who believe in Jesus as the resurrected Lord and Savior and give faith to those who doubt his claims."

Review

During our devotion time this year, we've focused on answering the question, "Who is Jesus?" (according to Jesus!) We've explored Jesus' invitation and call to each of us to follow him as the great "I AM". Over the last few weeks, we've focused on Jesus' words describing himself as the:

- "Bread of Life"
- "Light of the World"
- "Good Shepherd"
- "Resurrection and the Life"
- "Way, the Truth and the Life"
- "True Vine"

It is our prayer that those who don't know Jesus will consider His invitation to follow Him. The apostle Paul wrote an invitation to all in Rome (Romans 10:9-10):

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

Those with a saving faith in Jesus have a purpose in life to serve and honor Him each day. He gives us freedom in life. Not a pass to do whatever we want, but the power to love Him and our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Finally, He calls us into a personal relationship with Him and gives us His promised assurance that He'll always be with us in this life and the one to come.

If you have any questions about the ELEV8 Basketball program or would like to discuss any of this devotional material, please see any of the ELEV8 leaders listed below:

Michael Dransfield	Jim Murduck	Thomas Fahs
Julie Schellin	Andrew Parlette	Curt Husted
Bunny Amason	Paul Johnson	Mark Armstrong
Vincent Dudek		
Chuck Brogan (Crossroads)		
Dane Choe (Bethel Korean)		

I pray God's blessing on each of you as you grow and mature. May you know His love daily, forgiveness when you stumble and fall, and His promise to always be with you and never leave you. Thanks for being a great team this year! Amen.

ELEV8 Basketball Devotions 2022-23

Who is Jesus?

Learning the Who?, What? and Why? from Jesus's own words
and His interaction with those around Him

Week	Verse(s)
1	Welcome them to ELEV8. Share with them who you are as a Jesus follower.
2	John 3:3 – “Jesus answered him (Nicodemus), “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
3	John 1:1-2 – “John said, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.’”
4	John 6:35 - “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ’”
5	John 8:12 – “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”
6	John 10:11 – “Jesus said, ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.’”
7	John 11:25-26 – “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.’”
8	John 14:6 – “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”
9	John 15:5 – “Jesus said, ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.’”
10	Matthew 16:15-16 – “Jesus asked ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’”
11	John 20:29 – “Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”