



On your marks

Many Christians are familiar with the 'I am' sayings of Jesus. The seven statements as they appear in John's Gospel help readers begin to understand just who Jesus is and how they can relate to him as his followers; but there are other important 'I am' statements that appear in the New Testament. Each of these also helps us put our trust in the resurrected Jesus. The following outline for an idea is part of a series of three to use with your children's group or in an all-age worship setting. Each focuses on one of these other 'I am' sayings and as such is perhaps particularly suited for sessions in the weeks following Easter.

Get set

You will need: a piece of rope; an A to Z; Scrabble® letters; several large letter 'A's and 'Z's; a shawl; materials to make bookmarks and a printed version of Isaiah 41:4 for each member of the group.

The Barnabas Children's Bible or a version of Revelation 1 and 22.

[Messy Church](#) has sessions linking to this outline.

Go!

1. Play a game that definitely has winners and losers! (Maybe musical chairs or a ball-throwing game in a circle, in which those who drop the ball incur more and more penalties, such as having to catch one-handed or balancing on one leg, and so on.) Many games are all about winners and losers; first place and sadly last place. Amazingly God's ways are different. The ones that the world counts as winners may well turn out to be the losers, and the ones who feel themselves losers turn out to be winners. One of the things that Jesus says on many occasions is this: 'The first shall be last and the last shall be first.'

2. Illustrate this revolutionary idea by having one person at either end of a piece of rope. When they are facing the same direction, one is definitely first and one is last. But God can turn our ideas upside-down when we turn to him. If the two with the rope change direction, now the last becomes first and the first becomes last. But even that isn't quite how God has it. Add in some more people and then link up the first and the last to make a circle. Now each person could be sometimes first or sometimes last. In fact, because the beginning might be anywhere (if you tie the ends of the rope together), everybody is first and must also be last!

'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all'(Mark 9:35, RSV).

God does not work in straight lines but uses his circle of his love to change everything.

3. Three times in the last book of the Bible, Jesus gives us another 'I am' description of himself, just



like the other 'I am' statements that we can read in John's Gospel. There he is described as: 'bread' - for our journey; 'light' - for our darkness; 'the good shepherd' - to lead us; 'the way, the truth and the life' through this troubled world; 'the resurrection' - as we face death and 'the true vine' - as we look to lead fruitful lives. In Revelation 1:8, Jesus calls himself 'the Alpha and the Omega' and in Revelation 22:13:

'I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

Read in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 363, page 313 (see also the end of the final story, 365).

4. Introduce a City A to Z. Here is all we want to know about this city.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (like our A and Z). Jesus is all we need to know about life and about God and about ourselves. He is our everything.

5. Hand out letters of the alphabet from a Scrabble® set and give the group some time to come up with words they would use to describe Jesus and their experience of him that begin with the letters they have.

Here are some ideas using titles and ideas from the Bible:

An Alphabet of praise

A - Almighty God and the Amen

B - Bright morning Star

C - Comforter

D - Desire of nations

E - Emmanuel

F - Friend and Forgiver of sin

G - Glorious One

H - Healer

I - Intercessor

J - Jehovah

K - King of Kings

L - Lord of Lords



M - Maker of all and Master

N - New every morning

O - Obedient Offering

P - Perfect

Q - Quickener of the dead

R - Resurrection

S - Shepherd

T - True Vine

U - Unchanging One

T - The Victory bringer

W - Wonderful Counsellor

X - eXcellent Saviour

Y - Yeshua (Hebrew for Jesus)

Z - Zion's anointed

And here's an alphabet chorus you could teach:

'An Alphabet Song of Praise'

A B C D E F G

Jesus means the world to me

H I J K L M N

All I need is found in Him

O P Q R S T U

Trusting him each day is new

V then W, X and Y

A to Z, He said, am I



Or another traditional chorus with a similar sentiment is the one beginning:

'How good is the God we adore!'

7. In this 'I am' saying, Jesus is saying that he is the Lord of the new start and the perfect end! He promises to surround all our life and keep us safe.

Have ready a printed copy of the following verse found in Isaiah, which the group could use on a homemade, decorated bookmark... something used in a book from beginning to end.

'I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am He'(Isaiah 41:4).

8. For a time of prayer together, have a set of letter 'A's and letter 'Z's available. Lay them out at the centre of your circle. Use these to pray for different beginnings and endings, for example:

- prayers for the beginning and ending of every journey this coming week
- prayers for the beginning and ending of each new day this coming week
- prayers for the first and the last in the world's eyes (rich/poor; famous/unknown)
- prayers in praise of Jesus for being the A-Z of our lives (see the ideas in their alphabet lists)

9. Finally, introduce a baby's shawl. This could also be a grandparent's shawl.

Jesus promises to walk with us from cradle to the grave; from new birth to new body.

Read Philippians 1:6 together: **'I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.'**

God has committed himself to making us like Jesus. It is his work and he will perfect it in us. He says, as the Great Mastermind: I've started, so I'll finish!