

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: The Truth Will Set You Free; Before Abraham Was, I Am

John 8:31–59

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 8:31–59 builds to one of the clearest declarations of Christ's deity in all of Scripture, "before Abraham was, I am" (v. 58), and the teacher should be ready to handle it with full confidence. This is the heaviest doctrinal passage of the lesson and one of the most important in the entire study. The "I am" (ego eimi) deliberately echoes the divine name of Exodus 3:14, and Jesus' hearers understood it precisely as a claim to be God, which is why they took up stones. The passage stands directly against any view that reduces Jesus to a created being, an exalted creature, or merely a good teacher. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9, with significant weight also at Question 7 (Abraham seeing Christ's day) and Question 5 (the children of the devil).

At the same time, the chapter is deeply formational. It opens with the great promise that abiding in Christ's word leads to knowing the truth and being set free, and it exposes the unseen slavery of sin. It teaches that our actions reveal our true spiritual parentage. The teacher should let students feel both the liberating promise ("the truth will set you free") and the searching exposure of sin's bondage, and should call them to abide in Christ's word.

So aim at both: a firm, confident grasp of Christ's eternal deity, and a heart that abides in His word and walks in the freedom He gives. The disciple we are forming bows before the eternal "I am" and continues in His liberating truth.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (vv. 31–32). What is the connection between abiding in Jesus' word, knowing the truth, and being set free?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus gives a precious promise with a clear condition: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (vv. 31–32). Three things are linked: abiding in His word, knowing the truth, and being free.

Draw out the chain. Freedom is not found in autonomy or in following our own desires; it is found in the truth, and the truth is known by abiding in Christ's word. Discipleship is not a one-

time decision but a continuing in His teaching. “Truly my disciples” are those who abide, who keep going, who remain in His word.

Stress the word “abide.” It means to remain, to continue, to make our home in His word. This is more than occasional reading; it is an ongoing dwelling in Christ’s teaching that shapes how we think and live. The truth that frees us is not grasped in a moment but lived in over time.

Apply it. Knowing the truth that frees us comes through continued, humble immersion in the word of Christ. Help students see that the freedom they long for is found here, not in escaping God’s truth but in abiding in it. Ask what abiding in His word more deeply would look like in their actual schedule and habits.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Freedom found in the truth, known by abiding in Christ’s word (John 8:31–32).
- Discipleship as continuing, not merely a one-time decision.
- “Abide” as remaining and making our home in His teaching.
- The truth that frees lived in over time, not grasped in a moment.

Discussion Prompts

- How are abiding in His word, knowing truth, and freedom connected?
- What does it mean to “abide” rather than merely visit His word?
- What would abiding more deeply look like in your habits?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus exposed a slavery His hearers could not see: “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (v. 34). Where in your own life have you experienced sin as a bondage rather than mere freedom, and how have you found, or longed for, the freedom Christ gives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up Jesus’ diagnosis: “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (v. 34). His hearers could not see their bondage; they insisted they had never been enslaved. Sin’s slavery is often invisible to the one bound by it.

Help students recognize sin as bondage. We tend to think of sin as freedom, doing what we want, but Jesus calls it slavery. The patterns we cannot break, the habits that master us, the compulsions we excuse, all reveal that sin enslaves. What promised freedom delivers chains.

Invite honest reflection. Where have students experienced a sin as a master rather than a choice, something they kept returning to even when they hated it, something that owned them?

Naming sin as slavery, rather than harmless freedom, is the beginning of longing for true freedom.

Point to the freedom Christ gives. The same Jesus who diagnoses the slavery offers liberation: “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (v. 36). The freedom is real, though it often comes through ongoing repentance and abiding in His word. Ask each student where they most long for Christ’s freedom and to bring that bondage to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin as a real slavery, often invisible to the one bound (John 8:34).
- The deception that sin is freedom.
- Christ as the one who truly liberates (John 8:36).
- Freedom from sin through repentance and abiding in His word (Romans 6:16–22).

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you experienced sin as bondage rather than freedom?
- Why is sin’s slavery often invisible to us?
- Where do you most long for the freedom Christ gives?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus said, “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (v. 36). What kind of freedom does the Son give, and how is it different from the freedom the world chases?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus declares, “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (v. 36). The freedom He gives is real, deep, and lasting, freedom from the guilt and the power of sin, freedom to become what God made us to be.

Contrast it with the world’s freedom. The world defines freedom as the absence of restraint, doing whatever we want. But that supposed freedom often leads straight into the slavery of sin Jesus just described. True freedom is not freedom from all authority; it is freedom from sin’s mastery and freedom for a life of love and obedience to God.

Draw out the paradox. In Christ, we become “slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18), and that is true freedom. We are freed from the cruel master of sin to serve a good and loving Lord. The freest person is not the one with no master but the one whose master is Christ.

Apply it. Help students examine where they have bought the world’s definition of freedom and found bondage instead. The Son’s freedom is found not in throwing off God’s authority but in

coming under it. Ask what it would mean to seek Christ's kind of freedom rather than the world's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Son's freedom as real, deep, and lasting (John 8:36).
- Freedom from sin's guilt and power, and freedom for godliness.
- The world's freedom (no restraint) leading to bondage.
- True freedom as becoming slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18).

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of freedom does the Son give?
- How is it different from the freedom the world chases?
- Where have you mistaken the world's freedom for the real thing?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus told them, "the truth will set you free," but real freedom requires continuing in His word (vv. 31-32). Is there an area where you have been seeking freedom apart from God's truth, and what would it look like to seek it in His word instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the link between truth and freedom. Jesus said the truth would set them free, but only as they abide in His word (vv. 31-32). Freedom sought apart from God's truth is an illusion.

Help students see the common mistake. We often seek freedom by escaping constraints, including God's truth, imagining that fewer rules mean more freedom. But Jesus teaches that real freedom is found in the truth, not in fleeing it. The path to freedom runs through, not around, God's word.

Invite reflection on where they have sought freedom apart from truth. Perhaps in justifying a sin, in following the culture's wisdom over Scripture, in seeking relief through something God forbids. Such paths promise freedom and deliver bondage. The honest question is where they have looked for freedom in the wrong place.

Press toward seeking freedom in His word. Ask each student to name one area where they have sought freedom apart from God's truth and what it would look like to seek it in His word instead, by submitting that area to Scripture and abiding in Christ's teaching. Freedom is found at His feet, not away from them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Freedom found in God's truth, not apart from it (John 8:31–32).
- The illusion of freedom sought by escaping God's word.
- The path to freedom running through Scripture, not around it.
- Submitting specific areas of life to the truth of Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you sought freedom apart from God's truth?
- What did that path actually deliver?
- What would seeking freedom in His word look like there?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus told His opponents that their works revealed their true father, and that they were of “your father the devil... a liar and the father of lies” (vv. 39–44). What does this teach about how our actions reveal who, or what, truly fathers our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The conversation grows sharp as Jesus exposes His opponents' true spiritual parentage. They claim Abraham and God as their fathers, but Jesus says their works tell a different story: “You are doing the works your father did... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires” (vv. 41, 44). Their murderous hostility to the truth reveals who fathers them.

Draw out the principle carefully. Jesus is teaching that our actions reveal our true spiritual allegiance. To claim God as Father while hating His truth and seeking to kill His Son is to be self-deceived. The devil is “a liar and the father of lies,” and those who love falsehood and reject the truth show themselves to be his children, whatever they claim.

Apply it without harshness but without softening. We, too, can claim to belong to God while our actions reveal another master. Persistent love of sin, deception, and hostility to truth are evidence of a heart not truly submitted to God. Our deeds, not merely our claims, reveal who fathers our lives (compare 1 John 3:7–10).

Turn it to self-examination. Help students ask honestly what their patterns of life reveal about their true allegiance. This is not meant to produce despair but honest assessment and repentance. The good news is that those who come to Christ are given the right to become children of God (1:12); allegiance can change. Ask students where their actions and their claims do not yet match.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our actions revealing our true spiritual parentage (John 8:39–44).
- The devil as the father of lies, opposed to truth (John 8:44).

- The self-deception of claiming God while hating His truth.
- Children of God versus children of the devil shown by their deeds (1 John 3:7–10).

Discussion Prompts

- What does this teach about how our actions reveal who fathers us?
- Where do your claims and your actions not yet match?
- How does coming to Christ change our spiritual parentage?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus said, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God” (v. 47). When you examine your own responsiveness to God’s word, where do you find yourself resisting or tuning out what He says, and why?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up Jesus’ words, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (v. 47). Responsiveness to God’s word is a test of the heart’s true allegiance.

Help students apply this gently to themselves. The issue is not whether we physically hear Scripture but whether we truly receive it, whether we listen with a heart ready to obey. Those who belong to God have ears for His word; those who resist it reveal something about their hearts.

Invite honest reflection on where they tune God out. There are often specific areas where we resist God’s word, a command we keep sidestepping, a topic we avoid in Scripture, a conviction we keep silencing. Naming where we stop our ears is the first step to opening them.

Explore the why. We resist God’s word usually because obeying it would cost us, a comfort, a sin, a plan, a relationship. The resistance is rarely intellectual; it is a matter of the will. Ask each student where they find themselves tuning out God’s word and what it would mean to listen and obey there instead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Responsiveness to God’s word as a test of the heart (John 8:47).
- Hearing as receiving with a will ready to obey.
- Resistance to God’s word usually rooted in cost, not intellect.
- Opening our ears by naming where we have stopped them.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you find yourself resisting or tuning out God's word?
- Why do you think you resist there?
- What would it look like to truly listen and obey in that area?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus said that Abraham "rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad" (v. 56). What does it mean that Abraham, who lived long before, looked ahead to Christ, and how does this show that the whole Old Testament points to Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus makes a remarkable claim about Abraham: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad" (v. 56). Abraham, who lived roughly two thousand years before, looked ahead to the coming of Christ and rejoiced.

Unfold what this means. Abraham received God's promises that in his offspring all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18), and by faith he looked forward to their fulfillment in Christ. He "saw" Christ's day from afar, through the eyes of faith and promise, and was glad. The patriarch's hope was ultimately a hope in Christ.

Draw out the larger truth. The whole Old Testament points forward to Jesus. Abraham, Moses (5:46), the prophets, the sacrifices, and the promises all anticipate Him. Jesus is not a latecomer or an afterthought; He is the One the entire story of Israel was leaning toward. This is the consistent New Testament claim (Luke 24:27).

Apply it to how students read Scripture and hold their hope. If Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day from two thousand years away, how much more should we rejoice, who live on this side of His coming. And it teaches us to read the Old Testament looking for Christ, seeing how God prepared the way across the centuries. Ask students how seeing Christ at the center of all Scripture deepens their reading and their joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Abraham looking ahead by faith to the day of Christ (John 8:56).
- The whole Old Testament pointing forward to Jesus (Luke 24:27).
- Christ as the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham (Genesis 22:18).
- Reading Scripture with Christ at the center.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day?
- How does this show the Old Testament points to Jesus?
- How does seeing Christ at the center deepen your reading of Scripture?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus promised, “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (v. 51). How does this promise change the way you face your own mortality and the death of those you love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up Jesus’ striking promise: “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (v. 51). His hearers took it crudely (Abraham died, the prophets died), but Jesus speaks of a deeper reality: those who keep His word will never experience death as final separation from God.

Help students grasp the promise. Believers do die physically, but for them death is not the end; it is a passage into life with Christ. The sting and finality of death are removed for those who keep Christ’s word (compare 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57). They will “never see death” in the ultimate sense.

Apply it to facing mortality. The fear of death shadows much of human life. This promise speaks directly to it: for the one who belongs to Christ, death has lost its terror. We grieve, but not as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). This changes how we face our own mortality and the loss of those we love in the Lord.

Press for personal application. Ask students how the promise that they will “never see death” in the final sense changes the way they think about their own death and the death of loved ones. Encourage them to let this hope loosen the grip of fear and deepen their comfort in grief. The One who makes the promise is about to prove He has the authority to keep it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer never seeing death in the ultimate sense (John 8:51; 11:25–26).
- Physical death as a passage into life with Christ.
- Grief with hope, not without it (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
- The removal of death’s sting for those who keep Christ’s word.

Discussion Prompts

- How does this promise change the way you face your own death?
- How does it speak to grief over those you love?
- How can this hope loosen the grip of the fear of death?

Question 9

Student Question:

This is the clearest claim to deity in the chapter: Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (v. 58), and His hearers immediately picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy (v. 59). What is Jesus claiming by the words “I am,” why did His hearers understand it as a claim to be God, and how does this passage refute any view that Jesus was merely a created being or a good teacher?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson and one of the most important in the entire study. The teacher should handle it with full confidence. Jesus declares, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (v. 58). The response is immediate: “So they picked up stones to throw at him” (v. 59). They understood Him to be claiming deity, and they moved to execute Him for blasphemy.

Explain the grammar and its force. Jesus does not say “before Abraham was, I was,” which would simply claim great age. He says “I am” (ego eimi), a deliberate echo of God’s self-revelation to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM... Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). The same “I am” runs through Isaiah, where God alone says “I am he” (Isaiah 43:10). Jesus is claiming both eternal pre-existence (before Abraham) and the divine name itself.

Stress that the hearers understood Him correctly. This is crucial against the claim that Jesus never said He was God. His contemporaries, fluent in His language and Scriptures, did not hear a humble teacher or a claim merely to be old; they heard a claim to be God, and they reached for stones, the prescribed penalty for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16). Jesus did not correct them or back away. He let the claim stand because it was true.

Apply it directly against false views. This passage refutes any view that Jesus was merely a created being, an exalted angel, or simply a good teacher. He claimed eternal existence before Abraham and bore the divine name. A created being cannot say “before Abraham was, I am.” A good teacher does not accept death by stoning rather than retract a false claim to deity. As before, the options are stark: either Jesus is the eternal God He claimed to be, or He is a blasphemer. The passage is designed to bring us to the first conclusion.

Bring it to worship. The right response to “before Abraham was, I am” is not stones but worship. Help students feel the weight of this declaration: the One who walked the dusty roads of Galilee is the eternal God who spoke to Moses from the bush. To know Him rightly is to bow. Let the lesson end not in mere argument won but in adoration of the eternal “I am.”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Before Abraham was, I am” as a claim to eternal pre-existence and the divine name (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14).
- The hearers’ correct understanding, shown by their move to stone Him for blasphemy.

- A direct refutation of views that Jesus was merely created, an angel, or only a teacher.
- The eternal deity of Christ as the foundation of the faith (Isaiah 43:10; Colossians 1:16–17).
- The fitting response of worship before the eternal “I am.”

Discussion Prompts

- What is Jesus claiming by the words “I am”?
- Why did His hearers understand it as a claim to be God?
- How does this passage refute the idea that Jesus was merely a created being or a good teacher?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this passage, from “the truth will set you free” to “before Abraham was, I am.” What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to abide in His word, walk in His freedom, and bow before Him as the eternal “I am”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the lesson’s two great themes: abiding in Christ’s word to walk in His freedom, and bowing before Him as the eternal “I am.” The doctrine and the discipleship belong together.

Help students see the connection. The same Jesus who is the eternal God is the One whose word sets us free. Because He is who He claims to be, His word has the authority to liberate, and abiding in it is the path to true freedom. The high doctrine grounds the daily discipleship.

Make it concrete. Ask each student to name one way they will abide more deeply in His word this season, one area where they will seek His freedom rather than the world’s, and one way they will worship Him more fully as the eternal “I am.” Specificity is where formation happens.

Close in worship. The right response to this chapter is not to win an argument but to bow. The eternal God has spoken, has offered freedom, and has revealed Himself as the great “I am.” Let students leave both more firmly convinced of who Jesus is and more deeply surrendered to Him, abiding in His word and walking in His freedom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The eternal deity of Christ grounding the authority of His freeing word.
- Abiding in His word as the path to true freedom.
- Worship as the fitting response to the eternal “I am.”
- Concrete, specific formation as the goal of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- How will you abide more deeply in His word this season?
- Where will you seek His freedom rather than the world's?
- How does seeing Jesus as the eternal “I am” move you to worship?