

A VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY ON

*the letters of  
John*



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# Introduction

Last year I had a c-section with our second child, and let me tell you, the recovery was not easy. The lockdown didn't help either. I feel like I've been trying to get back in shape ever since. Thankfully, I was able to go back to the gym right away, but most of the classes were not the challenge I was hoping for and I struggled to find a consistent workout that would really push me. But then I thought, *hey, why not run?* I mean, honestly, what's worse than running? Maybe I'm just saying that because I am *very* bad at running. (But maybe it's because running really is the worst.)

Either way, I decided to take on running. I found a training schedule online and started following it. I even looked for upcoming 5ks in Phoenix. And then I started to see some progress and I thought, *why do a 5k when I can do a 10K?* (Because that's not biting off more than I can chew.) But every time I would start to make progress, something would happen to interrupt my training—going out of town, getting sick, getting bug bites on my foot that turn my whole ankle into a balloon (*that's normal, right?*). Things kept getting in the way of my running. And I quickly realized how much work is required to train for a 10k.

Some of you might feel the same way about starting a new Bible study. It's always exciting to set new goals for yourself and think of the ways you can grow closer to God. You might even be overly ambitious in your eagerness to get started. But then the rubber hits the road. And things start to get in the way. And you start to realize how much work is required to reach your goals. Maybe you realize how "out of shape" you are spiritually. Maybe you realize how hard it is to wake up early day after day to spend time with

God. Maybe you get sick or go out of town and lose momentum and feel discouraged.

But our lives are dictated by what is most important to us. And my prayer is that God would be the most important thing to you. My prayer is that you would be disciplined in the way that you study and memorize and meditate upon his word. My prayer is that you would put him first, even when things are busy or difficult. My prayer is that you would not study the Bible out of any sense of obligation or pride, but out of a longing to grow in knowledge and love for your Creator.

This study will likely challenge you, but my prayer is that you would stick with it. My prayer is that you would develop a joy and a fervor for studying God's word that is unwavering throughout the ebb and flow of our earthly burdens.

Welcome to our study on 1, 2, and 3 John.

## **ABOUT THIS STUDY**

Speaking of this study, there are a few things we should mention before we get started.

First, let's talk about the different Bible translations that are available to us. There are plenty of English versions that are helpful for quick reading. But when it comes to intense Bible study, we need to be more selective about which version we choose. And here's why. We will often analyze individual words and make arguments based on the underlying Greek. If your English Bible strays too much from that underlying Greek, it becomes very difficult to see those arguments in the text. That's why it is really important to choose an English translation that is as close to literal as possible. In other words, what that means is that the translators have translated the Bible word for word (as much as they can)

instead of providing interpretations or paraphrases of the biblical text. Some examples of literal (or nearly literal) translations would be ESV, NASB, (N)RSV, (N)KJV, (H)CSB, and NET.

The second thing I would like to discuss is the layout of the study. As you have probably seen, the lessons are broken up into daily devotionals. Each day follows the same pattern: preparing our hearts with an opening prayer, reading the Bible and background information, personal reflection/application, and closing prayer. Although these are such basic steps, they can be easy to miss in our daily practice—especially starting our Bible reading with prayer! But we should *always* approach the Bible with prayer. We should pray that God would help us to understand and apply his word to our lives, and that he would remove distractions and help us to focus solely on him. Each day will start with a prompt to pray. Sometimes this might be through a verse or a quote from church history, but each day will begin with prayer before leading into the daily reading, the personal reflection, and the closing prayer.

This brings us to the third thing I would like to mention. While each day has a pattern, each week has a pattern too. Every week will include a memory verse and a different spiritual discipline. Yes, a spiritual discipline. If that sounds totally foreign to you, don't worry just yet—they are a beloved part of the study that grow you in ways you may have never considered before. After the weekly reading on the text, there will be a separate section on that week's discipline. Even though it is at the end of the week, feel free to read and practice it at any point.

Now, let me explain why we have included them. We recognize that the Bible, as the word of God himself, is our supreme authority. If we are to know God, we must know his word—and as Christians, it is our responsibility (and our privilege) to do so. We also recognize that we do not simply *read* the Bible without

allowing it to dwell in us and change our lives. We read the Bible *and we also* converse back to God in prayer, we seek him in the daily tasks of life, we work on reflecting his character better in our lives. And sometimes we do these things through deliberate practices—what we call *spiritual disciplines*. We seek to know God through a proper study of his word, and with that biblical knowledge, we continue to seek him throughout our daily activities.

If you finish all of the readings and the spiritual disciplines for the week, then read and reread the letters of John as many times as you can! You simply cannot read them too many times. God teaches us something new every time we open his word.

The last thing I would like to mention about this study is the importance of not doing it *alone*. Find someone to do it with you. Talk about what God is teaching you. Ask each other if you are memorizing the verses. Encourage each other to keep up with the reading. Weekly video messages are available on YouTube under the channel called “Christ Bible Church Peoria.” Watch the videos together each week and pray for each other. We all know how hard it is to stick with something when we have no accountability or encouragement, so find someone to partner with. You won’t regret it.

Ready to get started? Let’s do it.

# Week 1



**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**1 JOHN 1**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF THE WEEK:**

**FASTING**

**MEMORY VERSE OF THE WEEK:**

**1 JOHN 1:5**

**THIS IS THE MESSAGE WE HAVE HEARD  
FROM HIM AND PROCLAIM TO YOU,  
THAT GOD IS LIGHT, AND IN HIM IS NO  
DARKNESS AT ALL.**

# Day 1

## READING THE LETTERS OF JOHN

### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Start today by reading this call to meditation by the great 11<sup>th</sup> century English theologian, Anselm, and spend a few minutes seeking God in prayer before you continue.

*Come now, little man,  
turn aside for a while from  
your daily employment,  
escape for a moment from  
the tumult of your thoughts.  
Put aside your weighty cares,  
let your burdensome distractions wait,  
free yourself a while for God  
and rest a while in him.  
Enter the inner chamber of your soul,  
shut out everything except God  
and that which can help you in seeking him,  
and when you have shut the door, seek him.  
Now, my whole heart, say to God,  
“I seek your face,  
Lord, it is your face I seek.”<sup>1</sup>*





5. If you were to summarize the main point of 1 John in one sentence, what would it be? And for 2 John? And 3 John?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Today is a big day—the start of a new Bible study! And no matter how long we think the study will last, inevitably the time always flies by. *So let's make the most of the next few weeks.*

1. When this Bible study is finished, what do you want to have accomplished? What do you want to be able to say about your spiritual growth over the next few weeks?

2. Stop right now and spend a few minutes identifying and praying over your spiritual goals. Write down your top three goals below.

○

○

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3. What have been some struggles or hindrances to your spiritual growth that you have experienced in previous Bible studies? Are there any changes you want to make to prevent them from happening again?



Pray over these changes that you want to make.

- Pray that God would teach you and grow you over the next few weeks.
- Pray that he would overwhelm your heart with love for him and his word.
- Pray that he would help you to be diligent in studying and seeking him.

*Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart,  
which no unworthy affection may drag downwards;  
give me an unconquered heart,  
which no tribulation can wear out;  
give me an upright heart,  
which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside.  
Bestow on me also, O Lord my God,  
understanding to know you,  
diligence to seek you,  
wisdom to find you,  
and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.<sup>2</sup>*

Thomas Aquinas

# Day 2

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS OF JOHN

### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Start your Bible reading today with Psalm 1:1–2. Pray that God’s word would be your delight and that you would meditate on it day and night. Pray that he would teach you through your reading today and help you to focus your mind entirely on him.

*Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Psalm 1:1–2



It is obvious that the author of these letters heard Jesus preach and knew him intimately. He was an eyewitness not only to Jesus' ministry, but also to his resurrection. Beyond this, the letters bear a striking resemblance to the Gospel of John, which leaves only two possibilities: either the author was deeply influenced by that book, or he was the author of that book.

Outside of the biblical text itself, the early church was unanimous in ascribing 1 John to the apostle John, and no other author was ever suggested. The same is not true for 2 and 3 John, but this is probably because they were so brief and had limited circulation. The author obviously describes himself as "the elder" in these letters, which led some in the early church to believe that the apostle wrote 1 John and "the elder" wrote 2 and 3 John. But given the clear similarities in language and themes between all three letters, it is better to understand these two authors as the same person. Beyond this, aside from "the elder" hypothesis, no one has ever attributed the two letters to anyone other than the apostle John.<sup>3</sup>

With this evidence in mind, we can say with confidence that the apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation, also wrote 1, 2, and 3 John.

## **DATE AND PLACE**

We have strong evidence from the early church that John spent his later years in Ephesus. In fact, one major church father, Irenaeus, recorded that this is where John wrote his Gospel and where he remained permanently until the time of the Roman emperor Trajan (AD 98). This would mean John died sometime toward the end of the first century and completed his writings around AD 85–100.<sup>4</sup> Whether the Gospel or the letters came first, we do not know.

## **PURPOSE**

Discovering the purpose of 1 John is an easy—because he simply tells us his purposes throughout the letter! Read these verses and write down the reasons that he gives:

1:4

2:1

2:26

5:13

We do not know exactly who John is writing to, but he makes it clear that it is a group of believers inundated by false teachings. At least some people have left the church (2:19), and others are in danger of the consequences of false doctrine. He warns them about these false teachers and encourages them to remain faithful to the true gospel of Christ and to abide in him.

So what exactly were these false teachings? Primarily, they had to do with the person of Christ. It seems that John was dealing two main heresies: (1) some false teachers denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, while still claiming to have God the Father, and (2) some denied that Jesus came in the flesh. Look at the verses where John refutes these teachings:

- “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also” (2:22–23).
- “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (4:2–3).
- “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God” (4:15).
- “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him... Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (5:1, 5).

While John does not identify who these false teachers were, we do have some educated guesses. We know that there was a group of ex-Jews who denied that Jesus was the Messiah—the true Christ and Savior. On the other hand, there was a group of pagans who denied that he was human.<sup>5</sup> They argued that he only *seemed* to be human (the view known as docetism, from the Greek word for

*seem, dokein*). Similarly, an understanding of the world known as Gnosticism was forming at this time. This view believed that all things physical were inherently evil while all things spiritual were essentially good. Therefore, Jesus could not have been a human because the human body is inherently evil. They taught that the spirit of the Christ may have descended upon the human Jesus (from his baptism to his crucifixion), but the human Jesus is not to be confused with the Christ. Obviously, this meant they rejected Jesus as the Christ (the *God-man*) and his atoning death.

John's theology throughout his letters presents a balanced understanding that refutes these heresies. Jesus was both fully God (the *Christ*) and fully man. Denying either of these aspects denies Christ, and denying Christ means denying the Father.

## THEMES

Since the purpose of 1 John is to refute false teachings about Christ, the primary theme of the letter is teaching right doctrine about Christ. (We would call this *Christology*—the study of Christ.) Look at just some of the things that John affirms:

- Jesus is the Christ (2:22, 5:1).
- Jesus came in the flesh (4:2).
- Jesus is the Son of God (4:15, 5:5).
- Jesus is God (5:20).
- Jesus is eternal life (1:2, 5:20).
- Jesus takes away our sin (1:7, 2:1, 2:2, 4:10).

This is the most prominent theme that we see in the letter. But as John teaches Christology, he also teaches several important implications along the way. Having right doctrine about Christ and believing in him means:

- we love others (2:10, 3:10, 3:23, 4:8).
- we do not continue to sin (2:1, 3:4, 3:6, 3:9).
- we are assured that we are truly children of God (5:1, 10, 13).

## **STRUCTURE**

Flip through 1 John again, looking closely at how he organizes his themes and where he switches topics. What is the structure of the letter? How would you organize its contents?



Whatever structure you see in the letter, there is a good chance that you will find support from some biblical scholar. There have been countless proposals of how to divide and organize the contents of 1 John. Since it famously lacks many of the features of typical Greek letters (like the greeting, thanksgiving, and closing), it is difficult to classify into a genre and agree upon the structure. One helpful way to organize the text has been offered by J. C. Thomas:

- A. 1:1–4—Prologue—Eternal Life
  - B. 1:5–2:2—Making Him a Liar (Walking)
    - C. 2:3–17—New Commandment
      - D. 2:18–27—Antichrists
        - E. 2:18–3:10—Confidence—Do Not Sin
          - F. 3:11–18—Love One Another
            - E'. 3:19–24—Confidence—Keep the Commands
              - D'. 4:1–6—Antichrists
                - C'. 4:7–5:5—God's Love and Ours
                  - B'. 5:6–12—Making Him a Liar (Testimony)
                    - A'. 5:13–21—Conclusion—Eternal Life<sup>6</sup>

A more simplistic approach would be to divide the book into halves based on John's two statements about God: God is light (1:5) and God is love (4:7). P. Berge organizes it like this:

- A. The word of life 1:1–4
  - B. God is light 1:5–4:6
    - B'. God is love 4:7–5:5
      - A'. The witness of faith 5:6–21<sup>7</sup>

Though oversimplified, this approach helps us to reflect on John's statements about the character of God. As we look at chapter 1

this week, we will spend a great deal of time considering what it means that God is light.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

1. If someone were to ask you what 1 John is about, what would you tell them?

2. Today we read the whole book of 1 John again. What verse(s) did you need to hear the most today? Write down the verse below and what God showed you through it.

3. Before we end today, praise God for his word and for teaching you through it. Ask him to help you remember and reflect upon it today.

*Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
unite my heart to fear your name.  
I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,  
and I will glorify your name forever.*

Psalm 86:11–12

# Day 3

## INTRODUCTION TO THE APOSTLE JOHN

### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare your heart today by opening to Psalm 119 and reading verses 10–16. After you read it, read it again slowly and pray over every verse. Feel free to write down any notes or verses that stood out to you below.

## **TODAY ' S PASSAGE**

Our reading for today is going to be a little different. Instead of starting in 1 John, we are going to look at other passages in the New Testament that help us to understand who John is. Let's spend some time reading them to see how they inform our understanding of 1, 2, and 3 John. The stories may be familiar, but looking at them from this perspective might be a first.

3. Look up Mark 1:19–20, 15:40, 16:1, and Acts 12:1–2. What do these verses teach us about his family?

4. For this exercise, look up the passages below and write down the event and its significance for John. There are several passages listed, so it will take some time—but trust me when I say it is worth it!

Passage

Event

Significance

Mark 5:35–43

Mark 9:2–8

Mark 9:38

Luke 9:51–56

Mark 10:35–45

Luke 22:7–13

John 13:21–26

Mark 14:32–42

Matthew 26:56

John 19:26–27

John 20:2–9





Yesterday, we talked about dividing 1 John into halves based on John's statements that God is light and God is love. As we close today, think the fact that God is light.

Think, too, about the passages about John that we just read.

*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

Matthew 17:1–8

Here is a disciple who witnessed the transfiguration.

Here is a disciple who watched Jesus' face shine like the sun.

Here is a disciple who was overshadowed by a bright cloud from God.

*And John says that God is light.*

That kind of gives you a different perspective when it is coming from someone who saw the glory of God, doesn't it?

*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

Before you get back to the busyness of life, spend a few minutes praying to God—the *light*.

- Pray that he would give you clarity and understanding as you begin to study 1 John.
- Pray that he would help you to see any areas of darkness in your life.
- Pray that he would open your eyes to see how he is light as you meditate on this verse today.

*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

# Day 4

1 JOHN 1:1-4

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you read your Bible today, spend a few minutes fixing your heart on Christ.

- ❖ Pray that he would speak to you through his word and give you a clear understanding of the text.
- ❖ Pray that he would remove every distraction and help you to focus exclusively on him.
- ❖ Pray that he would be near to you and help you to do his will today.

(I know it is tempting to skip this step or let our minds wander during it—*I have been guilty of this lately*—but it is *so fundamental* to our devotional times. Consider writing down your prayer or saying it out loud to help yourself stay focused.)

## **TODAY ' S PASSAGE**

- ❖ When you have finished praying, read slowly through 1 John 1:1–4. Pay close attention to each word and how each clause fits together.
  
- 1. Part of good Bible reading is asking good questions of the text. What questions are you left with after reading verses 1–4?

2. The NIV capitalizes the “Word of life” in verse 1, but the ESV does not. Why? What is the “word of life”?

### **THE PREFACE TO 1 JOHN (VERSES 1–4)**

The first four verses of 1 John are known as the preface, and they comprise a very unusual opening. Did you notice anything missing there? For this book to be written to a specific group of believers, we would expect there to be some kind of greeting! But John omits the greeting completely and gets straight to his message. All business, no frills. There is only one other letter in the New Testament to do this—the book of Hebrews.

*This should tell us something about his letter.* The fact that John completely bypasses a greeting and immediately starts discussing the gospel is huge. It tells us, first, of the overwhelming significance of the gospel above all else. But second, it tells us that there were some *major* misunderstandings about Christ among his readers that he is seeking to correct.

So he jumps right in. In place of the traditional greeting, John opens with four clauses: (1) that which was from the beginning, (2) which we have heard, (3) which we have seen with our eyes, and (4) which we looked upon and have touched with our hands. Not only is there a clear progression of time in these clauses, but you

can also see a progression from what is most abstract to what is most tangible about the divine revelation.<sup>8</sup> And the fact that John stacks these clauses at the beginning—*without even including the main subject and verb of the sentence until later!*—puts great emphasis on these statements. *Why would John do that?*

We have to recognize that he is making a point here. He is reaffirming to his readers the fact that *the gospel has not changed*. It is the same message that was from the beginning. It was the same message that they heard. It was the same message that they saw and looked upon and touched. *The gospel has never changed*.

And that is exactly what the preface of 1 John is all about. The whole point of these opening verses is the proclamation and the nature of the gospel.

With this in mind, let's look at each of these verses individually.

## **VERSE 1**

3. Before we jump into verse 1, read John 1:1–5. What similarities do you see between the opening of John and the opening of 1 John? What differences are there?

The opening of 1 John bears unmistakable similarities to the opening of the Gospel of John. There, John opens with, “In the beginning was the Word.” Here, he opens with, “That which was from the beginning... concerning the Word of life.” This should leave us with some questions about verse 1. What does he mean by “the beginning”? What does he mean by “the word”? Do both have the same meaning here in 1 John as they do in the Gospel of John?

Let’s answer these questions by going through each clause in this verse.

The first clause is: “That which was from the beginning.” Now obviously, the “beginning” refers to all sorts of things in the Bible. It could refer to the creation of the world (like in Genesis 1:1), the beginning of someone’s existence (like Satan in 1 John 3:8), or the “beginning” of eternity (if there was such a thing). And here in 1 John 1:1, it refers to Christ’s eternal life and existence before earth. John confirms this in verse 2, when he describes Christ as “the eternal life.”

The second clause we have is: “which we have heard.” Instinctively, we understand this to mean the gospel that Christ preached on earth. While that is certainly part of it, it is much more comprehensive than that. *The message of Christ did not begin with his ministry on earth.* Of course, in our day, it is all too common to see people “unhitch” Christ from the Old Testament. *But everything in the Old Testament points to Christ himself.* We cannot fully understand the New Testament without a firm foundation in the Old Testament. So when John describes what he and his readers had heard, he is referring to the gospel message that the law and the prophets had proclaimed for centuries. It is a message that God had been unveiling since the creation of the



world, which culminated in the person and preaching of Christ. *That* is the message which they had heard.

The Jews also “heard” this message, but they did not understand. In the same way, they “saw with their own eyes,” but they did not believe. Hearing and seeing went beyond visions of the bodily Christ. They were not merely physical acts; they were spiritual acts enabled by God alone.

Lastly, we have our final clause: “which we have looked upon and touched with our hands.” Undoubtedly, this reminds us of the words of the risen Lord in Luke 24:39: “*See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*” Indeed, John uses this same word for *touch* in both passages. It expresses a great deal of intimacy and gentleness—which is not surprising coming from the disciple who leaned back upon Jesus’ chest (John 13:25). But beyond that, John’s words here echo and confirm the testimony of the resurrected Christ.

Even in the very first verse, we see that John is combatting false doctrine about Christ—false doctrine that had spread among *believers*. In fact, he mentions multiple times that there are people trying to deceive them (2:26, 3:7). He addresses a belief at that time that Jesus had not really come in the flesh (2:23, 4:2–3)—that he was not *truly* human and only *seemed* or *appeared* to be human (*docetism*). Similarly, others believed that if he was truly human, then he wasn’t *divine*—because all physical material was evil, so there is no way God could have been born into a human body (*Gnosticism*).

But everything that John says in this verse refutes these heresies! These four clauses at the very beginning of his letter point to one of the most fundamental truths about Jesus: he was both fully God

and fully human. These two facts are inseparable, and John weaves them together in this verse. He was both “from the beginning” (eternally God), and he was also heard, looked upon, and touched by his followers (human). Fully God and fully man. To deny any part of that is to deny all of Christ.

And now, with these four clauses complete, we can now turn to the last few words in verse 1: *concerning the word of life*. Our primary questions, of course, is what John means by “the word.” In the Gospel, it clearly refers to Jesus. He was with God and he was God. And here in 1 John, it could refer to Jesus again. This is how the NIV understands it, and why they capitalize it. But it is also possible that the “word” refers to the *message* of the gospel. This is how the ESV understands it, and why they do *not* capitalize it. (Think ahead to 2:7: “The old commandment is the *word*”—aka the *message*—“that you have heard.”) So the question comes down to whether John uses the “word” to refer to the *message* of Christ or the *person* of Christ, and both interpretations have considerable evidence.

To understand the Word as referring to Christ is perhaps more natural to us. We are already familiar with John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,”) and we instinctively associate “the Word” with “Christ.” Beyond this, in 1 John, we also see a string of physical, sensory descriptions—*heard, seen with our eyes, looked upon, touched with our hands*. Surely the *message* of the gospel is not something that can be seen with our eyes or touched with our hands; only the *person* of the gospel, the incarnate Christ, could be seen and touched.

But there is another way to understand this “word.” Christ is, of course, *the Word*. There is no denying that. But some believe the reference here is to the whole gospel message, not just to the

person of Christ. Look at what follows immediately after “the word of life”: *the life was made manifest*. It is the *life* (and not the *word*) that is said to be manifested; it is the *life* that is the focus in this section. What John is proclaiming here is this life, which was eternally with the Father (“from the beginning”) and which historically appeared to John and his readers (“was made manifest, and we have seen it”). Christ *is* this life, but the scope is larger than Christ’s short life on earth. It includes his eternal being and the whole of his gospel message.

4. Read verses 1–4 again. What do you think the “word” refers to?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Today is our first day looking at individual verses—though we didn't get very far. But rest assured! We will move faster as we go along.

And as you know, we will always spend a few minutes reflecting on our reading before we close. Let's answer a few questions before ending with prayer.

1. If someone were to ask you what the opening of 1 John is about, what would you tell them?

2. What is one biblical truth from our passage that you can meditate on today?

❖ Don't be too quick to rush back to the busyness of life. Close today by spending a few minutes in prayer to your God. Pray through the words of this old Puritan prayer.

My Father,

In a world of created changeable things,  
Christ and his Word alone remain unshaken.  
O to forsake all creatures,  
to rest as a stone on him the foundation,  
to abide in him, be borne up by him!  
For all my mercies come through Christ,

who has designed, purchased, promised,  
effected them.

How sweet it is to be near him, the Lamb,  
filled with holy affections!

When I sin against thee I cross thy will, love, life,  
and have no comforter, no creature, to go to.

My sin is not so much this or that particular evil,  
but my continual separation, disunion,  
distance from thee,  
and having a loose spirit towards thee.

But thou hast given me a present, Jesus thy Son,  
as Mediator between thyself and my soul,  
as middle-man who in a pit  
holds both him below and him above,  
for only he can span the chasm breached by sin,  
and satisfy divine justice.

May I always lay hold upon this Mediator,  
as a realized object of faith,  
and alone worthy by his love to bridge the gulf.

Let me know that he is dear to me by his Word;  
I am one with him by the Word on his part,  
and by faith on mine;

If I oppose the Word I oppose my Lord  
when he is most near;

If I receive the Word I receive my Lord  
wherein he is nigh.

O thou who hast the hearts of all men  
in thine hand,  
form my heart according to the Word,  
according to the image of thy Son,  
So shall Christ the Word, and his Word,  
be my strength and comfort.<sup>9</sup>

# Day 5

1 JOHN 1:1-4

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you read your Bible today, spend a few minutes fixing your heart on Christ. Thank him for the joy of his word, and ask him to increase your love for it.

*You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Psalm 16:11

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

❖ Read 1 John 1.

1. Instead of using “I” throughout this section, John uses “we.” Why might he do that? Who is “we”?

## VERSE 2

The first thing you might notice about verse 2 is that the entire sentence is roped off by dashes. Grammatically, this is known as a parenthesis, or an explanatory piece that interrupts the surrounding sentence. This should tell us something about the purpose of this verse. It does not necessarily continue the flow of thought in the surrounding verses, but it pauses that flow in order to offer a deeper explanation for those verses. It elaborates exactly what John means by *life* in verse 1.

And he mentions his primary point about the life first: *the life was made manifest*. Now, manifest might not be a word that we use often, but it simply means to show or reveal oneself, to be revealed, or to appear. Christ *revealed* himself in the flesh. Though he existed eternally with God before coming to earth, it was only through his incarnation that humans could ever see him. It was only because of his willing initiative to become human that we could be saved and come to know him personally. As humans, what we can know about God is only because he was pleased to reveal it to us.

And what is remarkable about this word—*to make manifest*—is the fact that it is used throughout the New Testament to describe Christ's incarnation in the flesh, Christ after his resurrection, and Christ who will appear again at the second coming. All three of these descriptions come together to craft a complete understanding of God's revelation to mankind. Christ became flesh, he died and rose again, and he will return one day in full glory.

We also see John repeating his affirmation that he *saw* the eternal life. In fact, notice the progression of the verbs he uses: we have seen, we testify, and we proclaim. These words essentially sum up the whole purpose of his letter. He is fighting doctrinal heresy that



Christ was not truly a man and he is urging his readers to remain firm in the true gospel. Christ *had* to have been human! They saw him, they heard him, they touched him. They testify to this as eyewitnesses and they proclaim it as truth. John's readers once knew it, but some have been swayed by deceivers. And he urges them to return to the truth.

Perhaps the most touching, personal aspect of this verse is found in the last words: the eternal life was made manifest *to us*. At the beginning of the verse, John simply says that the life was made manifest. In other words, the physical appearance of Jesus was evident to all. But at the end of the verse, John says that it was made manifest *to us*. In other words, not all who were with Jesus perceived who he was. Just look at the Jews! They *heard*, but they did not *understand*. They *saw*, but they did not *believe*. But John says that the eternal life was made manifest *to us*. So what makes us any different from the Jews? If they rejected it, why did we accept it? Was it our own logic that caused us to understand his divinity and call upon him for salvation? Was it our own spiritual insight that caused us to understand the depth of our depravity and run to Christ in repentance of our sins?

*Not. At. All.*

For believers, God has opened our eyes to see Jesus for who he is—*the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, God in flesh*. In our natural human state, we cannot understand the gospel and believe it in full faith. It is only through God working in our hearts that we can believe and are saved. John describes this over and over again in his Gospel. He speaks of God *drawing* us to Christ and God *giving* us to Christ. In John 6:44 he says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Similarly, just before then in 6:37, he says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

And here in 1 John, he says that the eternal life was made manifest—to us.

*Could there ever be a more precious truth than the fact that Christ has opened our eyes to see him and has turned our hearts to know and love him?*

May we never take that for granted. May we spend every day thanking God for saving us. May we never take our eyes off Christ and lose sight of the grace that he has given us.

### **VERSE 3**

John then opens verse 3 with the same words that he used previously—*that which we have seen and heard*—which indicates that he is picking up his previous train of thought from verse 1. But now, finally in the third verse, we have the main subject and verb that govern everything we have read so far: *we proclaim*.

Now obviously John waited this long to introduce this subject and verb for a reason. He fronted this section with the clauses in verse 1 and the parenthesis in verse 2 to emphasize them. He was highlighting the facts that (1) Jesus was eternal and that (2) Jesus was also a real human whom they saw and touched. But if we rearrange John's words to make it easier to read, we would have something like this: "We proclaim to you, concerning the word of life, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, so that you too may have fellowship with us and so that our joy may be complete."

The main verb of everything we just read is *proclaim*. *We proclaim to you*. We cannot overlook the significance of this one word. The life of an apostle, the life of *any believer*, is always aimed at the

proclamation of the gospel. That is a defining characteristic of a Christian.

Which gets you thinking...

*When was the last time I proclaimed the gospel?*

*When was the last time I talked to someone about Jesus?*

*When was the last time I prayed for opportunities to share about him?*

*How often do I pray for the salvation of the unbelievers in my life?*

I once heard a pastor preach that “the gospel gives you permission not to tell someone about Jesus until they ask.” There are so many things wrong with this statement, it is hard to know where to start. But here in our verses, even at the very beginning of this book, we see that one of the most fundamental characteristics of believers is that they *testify* and they *proclaim* the gospel. (Whether someone asks or not.)

Of course, in this context, John is saying that he testifies and proclaims the gospel *as an apostle*. But the responsibility is no different for any other believer. And we have evidence for it in this verse. Right after John says that he testifies and proclaims the word, he gives the reason *why*—the *purpose* of the proclamation—with the words “so that” (words always indicate to us that a purpose is coming). And here, the purpose of the proclamation is “so that you too may have fellowship with us.” John’s point is that the proclamation of the gospel results in fellowship with one another.

How do we bring others into Christian fellowship with us? *We proclaim the gospel.*

Now we should be careful to point out that there is a distinction between fellowship and salvation. John is saying that the purpose of the proclamation of the gospel is *fellowship*, not salvation. But properly understood, fellowship is the meaning of salvation in its widest sense. Reconciliation with God and adoption into his people means having fellowship with him and his church. As John Stott puts it:

Just as the Son, who is *the eternal life*, was eternally with the Father (verse 2), so he purposes that we should have fellowship with them and with each other. “Fellowship” is a specifically Christian word and denotes that common participation in the grace of God, the salvation of Christ, and the indwelling of the Spirit which is the spiritual birthright of all believers. It is our common possession of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which makes us one.<sup>10</sup>

This is why John ends this verse, quite naturally, with assertion that their fellowship is not only with each other, but indeed with the Father and the Son.

#### **VERSE 4**

In this last verse of the preface of 1 John, he gives us one of the reasons for his letter: *we are writing these things so that your joy may be complete*. Two questions should come to mind when we read this verse. First, if John is the only one writing this letter, why does he say “we”? Second, why would writing these things complete their joy?

First things first. It might seem strange to us that John uses “we” throughout this section instead of “I.” Just who exactly is this

“we”? He might be referring to the Christian community as a whole (like in 3:11 when he says, “we should love one another”). Or he might be using it as a way of saying that he writes on behalf of all of the apostles (like in 4:6 when he says, “Whoever knows God listens to us”). In all likelihood, he does both here. The apostles themselves are equally under the commands of Christ, so John may use “we” to speak of himself as part of the church body. At the same time, he also uses “we” to reinforce the fact that he and the rest of the apostles witnessed Christ’s resurrection and they proclaim it to the world. He speaks with full authority—as an apostle, on behalf of the apostles.

And now onto the second question. John says that he writes these things so that their joy may be complete. At first glance, it might seem selfish that his purpose is to complete his own joy, but this is a misunderstanding of his role as an apostle and of the true meaning of fellowship. John knows that his own joy could never be complete if believers are in danger of being deceived and seduced away from Christ. His joy comes from knowing that believers are walking in the light and in full fellowship with Christ and with others.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, John Calvin, the famous 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer, says that John is reminding us of where the faithful ought to fix their affections. After all, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21). So then, whoever “really perceives what fellowship with God is, will be satisfied with it alone, and will no more burn with desires for other things.”<sup>12</sup>

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

John Calvin also remarked on these verses:

*He shows, first, that life has been exhibited to us in Christ; which, as it is an incomparable good, ought to rouse and inflame all our powers with a marvelous desire for it, and with the love of it. It is said, indeed, in a few and plain words, that life is manifested; but if we consider how miserable and horrible a condition death is, and also what is the kingdom and the glory of immortality, we shall perceive that there is something here more magnificent than what can be expressed in any words.<sup>13</sup>*

When was the last time you stopped to reflect on this *incomparable good*, which *ought to rouse and inflame all our powers with a marvelous desire for it and with the love of it*?

All too often we get lost in the comfortable routine of a mediocre spiritual life.

We fail to reflect on the miracle it is that we are saved. We let our daily troubles distract us from the hope of our eternal home in heaven, and we fail to take the time to recognize God's goodness in our lives.

John wrote these words "so that our joy may be complete."

*Is your joy complete?*

Our joy is a direct result of our reflection on God's *incomparable good* toward us.

1. So how are you going to reflect on God's goodness today?

A few years ago, one of my friends was told by her mentor to always keep a list of things that she is grateful to God for. That really convicted me. It was a hard season of life, and I knew the only way for me to keep my perspective was to recognize and thank God for all his blessings in my life.

And that is still true for me today. I like to write my prayer requests on the right side of my journal, and I keep the left side for things that I thank God for.

2. Do you keep some kind of "thankful" list? If not, how will you start one today?

True joy is a direct result of our reflection on God’s incomparable good toward us. And one direct result of true joy is sharing it with others.

Like we talked about today, a defining feature of Christians is that they proclaim the gospel—not because we are forced to, but because we can’t help it! When we are truly joyful about something, we simply can’t help but tell others about it.

3. So ask yourself today, *who do I need to share the gospel with?*

If you don’t have an answer to this question, pray to God and ask him to bring someone to mind. Write down their name above, commit to praying for them every day for the rest of the study, and go share the gospel with them.

Before you head back to the busyness of life, pray that God would help you see his incomparable goodness toward you. Pray that God would give you joy today. Pray that he would help you share that joy with others.

*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Ephesians 3:20–21



# Day 6

1 JOHN 1:5–10

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*O Lord, heavenly Father, in whom is the fullness of light and wisdom, enlighten our minds by your Holy Spirit, and give us grace to receive your Word with reverence and humility, without which no one can understand your truth. For Christ's sake, Amen.<sup>14</sup>*

John Calvin

Before you begin your study today, pray that God would enlighten your mind by the Holy Spirit and give you grace to receive his word with reverence and humility.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

❖ When you are done praying, read 1 John 1:5–10.

1. Look up these verses below. What does each passage teach us about the fact that God is light?

1 Timothy 6:16

1 Peter 2:9

Matthew 17:1–8

Ps 119:105, 130

Isaiah 42:6–7

2 Corinthians 4:6

## VERSE 5

Over the last couple of days, we have talked about how John highlights his eyewitness testimony and his authority as an apostle in the first four verses. Here, he continues this with his statement that his message is directly from Christ. He and the rest of the apostles heard him and saw him, and now proclaim his message to these believers.

Then John defines the content of this message: *God is light*. Just as it is the nature of light to shine, so also it is the nature of God to shine and reveal himself. This revelation is one of “perfect purity and unutterable majesty. We are to think of God as a personal being, infinite in all his perfections, transcendent, ‘the high and lofty one... he who lives forever, whose name is holy’ (Isa 57:15), *yet who desires to be known and has revealed himself.*”<sup>15</sup>

Our God desires to be known and has revealed himself! That is *absolutely astonishing*. Because our God is “perfect purity and unutterable majesty.” And we are the exact opposite. And yet God has revealed himself to us anyway.

*What an amazing God we have.*

Make no mistake—God does not *need* anything. He did not need to reveal himself and he does not need us in heaven with him. But instead, he *desires* to be known. He already knows us perfectly, but he desires that we would know *him!*

He desires that *you* would know him.

When you come to God in prayer, when you come to him in your Bible reading, *do you believe that God desires you to know him?* Or do you often have this lurking suspicion that you are merely a nuisance to him?

My friend and I have been talking about this lately. We read Psalm 84 together and have been dwelling on the truths of verse 11:

- *The Lord God is a sun and a shield.*
- *The Lord bestows favor and honor.*
- *The Lord does not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly.*

The fact that God has revealed himself to you means that you are *anything but a nuisance* to him. You are not a burden. You are not an inconvenience. Our God desires you to know him. He desires to shine upon you and protect you; he desires to bestow favor and honor upon you; he desires to give you good thing after good thing after good thing.

And when you start to feel like God views you as a burden, remind yourself that *he is light*. He has made himself known to you because *he desires you to know him*.

And beyond his self-revelation to us, there are *so many* different aspects of what it means that God is light. In a physical sense, light embodies glory and splendor. It makes life and work possible. In an

intellectual sense, light embodies truth and revelation. In a moral sense, light embodies righteousness and holiness. All of these things are true about God, too.

And here's the thing about truth—it always has consequences. There are moral implications that come with understanding (which is why my one-year-old can get away with things that my five-year-old can't). And the truth about God's character is no different. It is not enough just to *know*; we must also *do*. So we cannot simply say, "God is light." We must say, "God is light, *therefore we must walk in the light.*"

And this is exactly what John goes on to explain.

## VERSE 6

As he begins to explain the moral implications of God being light, he also presents arguments against the false teachers. He lays out three separate claims, each of which begins with "If we say..." Together, the three statements have a distinctly symmetrical form:

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, | we lie and do not practice the truth. |
|---|---------------------------------------|

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, | we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. |
|--|---|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, | we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. |
|---|--|

The parallelism between these statements is clear. All the statements in the left column correspond (if not are equal) to one

another, and same for the right column. The state of denying our sin always results in falsehood, lying, deception. It results in a disconnection with the source and light of our life, with Truth itself.

The word that John uses for *walking* in the darkness does not refer to an occasional sin. It is a word that actually means *to live*. It has to do with habits, with continual patterns of behavior, with lifestyles. So when he warns that you cannot walk in the darkness and have fellowship with God at the same time, he is not referring to believers who have occasional sin in their lives (which would be *all* believers, of course). He is referring to people who habitually *live* in the darkness, who continually and knowingly choose to sin. And the result of this kind of lifestyle, not surprisingly, is that “we deceive ourselves.” Sin begins to fundamentally change our way of thinking and we cannot see the truth anymore.

Someone was recently telling me about a situation they had at a church several years ago. Their longtime friends were continually sinning in a certain area, and when they talked to them about it, the friends completely denied that what they were doing was not wrong. They simply said that my friend was just being “self-righteous.” *This* is walking in darkness. This is convincing yourself that the wrong you are doing is not actually sin. This is lying to yourself that you are still in fellowship with God.

Look closely at the specific argument that John presents in verse 6. The lie does not have to do with walking in darkness; the lie is that they *have fellowship with God* while walking in the darkness.

It’s funny, sometimes it seems like not much has changed in 2,000 years. How many times have we encountered people who claim to have fellowship with God but see no need to go to Jesus for repentance and forgiveness? There is no fellowship with God

without first coming to Christ. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Whoever claims otherwise lies and does not practice the truth.

## VERSE 7

But, praise be to God, there is an alternative to walking in darkness. Sandwiched in between these somber statements about sin and deception and darkness, John includes hopeful promises about those who walk in the light.

And the fact that he places these promises of light in between the statements of darkness is not a coincidence. *There is hope yet for those who are walking in the darkness.* There is hope yet that they may turn from darkness and walk in the light.

And for those that do, there are tremendous promises:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, | we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. |
|--|---|

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, | he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. |
|--------------------------------------|--|

And just like we saw with the statements about darkness, the statements about light in the left column correspond to each other just as the statements about Jesus’ forgiveness in the right column correspond to each other.

And like we said about walking in darkness, *walking* in the light means *living* in the light. Since God is light, walking in the light means living in and with him. It means confessing our sin. It means obeying his commands. And the results of living with God are simply magnificent. *We have fellowship with one another. We are forgiven of our sins. We are cleansed from all unrighteousness.*

Since John just said in verse 6 that those who walk in darkness do not have fellowship with God, we might expect him in verse 7 to say that those who walk in the light *do* have fellowship with God. But John says that those who walk in the light have fellowship *with one another*. That is not to say that those who walk in the light do not have fellowship with God, but John emphasizes that walking in the light results in fellowship with other

**THERE IS NO REAL  
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD  
WHICH IS NOT EXPRESSED  
IN FELLOWSHIP WITH  
OTHER BELIEVERS.**

believers. He is making a very important point— *“There is no real fellowship with God which is not expressed in fellowship with other believers.”*<sup>16</sup>

Not only do we have fellowship with one another when we walk in the light, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. And what is unique about this word for cleansing is that it is closely connected with preparation for divine service and divine fellowship. After all, ritual cleansing was the condition required to participate in the temple and approach the presence of God under the old covenant. So Christ’s blood cleanses our souls and allows us to enter into service for him and fellowship with his people.<sup>17</sup> And beyond that, notice how John specifically uses the present tense here. He does not say that the blood of Jesus *will* cleanse us or the blood of Jesus *has* cleansed us. He specifically says the blood of Jesus *cleanses* us from all sin—which is huge, because it indicates an ongoing, continuous process. Yes, Jesus did forgive us

of our sins when he first saved us (our *justification*). But we know that we still make mistakes and we continually need forgiveness (our *sanctification*). And that is a *process*. In this process of walking in the light, we become more and more like the Light. As Westscott put it, “God is the light absolutely and unutterably; man moves in the light from stage to stage as he advances to the fullness of his growth, and under the action of the light he is himself transfigured.”<sup>18</sup>

## VERSE 8

The second claim of the false teachers that John refutes is the idea that they have no sin. It is a strange thing to talk about “having” sin, but this is a phrase John uses in his Gospel, too (9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11). In each case, it means being guilty of sin. In other words, they were probably not claiming to be free of a sinful human nature; they were claiming to be free of committing sins at that time (in the sense that they had not sinned since God had saved and cleansed them).

Once again, it is funny how little has changed in the last 2,000 years. Gary Burge, a Bible professor at Wheaton College, once lived in an orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Chicago. He often found himself talking about theology over the fence with his neighbors. One time, a woman told him that Jesus’ sacrifice was completely unnecessary because fulfilling the Old Testament laws—all 613 of them—was possible. (After all, her family had done it before.)<sup>19</sup>

*The world is full of people who see no problem with themselves or their actions.*

That’s exactly what sin does. Sin, by nature, is deceptive. It blinds us to the truth about God and the truth about our sin. That’s why John says that if we claim to have no sin *we deceive ourselves*.





And look at what these promises are: *God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* What we should notice about this verse is not just *what* John promises, but *why* he promises it. He grounds his promises directly in the character of God. In other words, he does not just give us these promises to accept blindly; he gives us the most credible, unshakable foundation upon which to trust that we are forgiven of our sins and cleansed from all unrighteousness.

*God is faithful. God is just.*

To waver on these promises to torment ourselves. Satan is bound to remind us of our sins and our failures, and if we do not remember and trust in these promises, then we are destined to despair. This is why John Calvin says about these verses:

It is of great moment to be fully persuaded, that when we have sinned, there is a reconciliation with God ready and prepared for us: we shall otherwise carry always a hell within us. Few, indeed, consider how miserable and wretched is a doubting conscience; but the truth is, that hell reigns where there is no peace with God. The more, then, it becomes us to receive with the whole heart this promise which offers free pardon to all who confess their sins.<sup>21</sup>

This is why we must know our Bibles and be in them constantly. This is why we must memorize Scripture. Reminding ourselves of God's promises is a daily battle.

When I read Calvin's quote, I can't help but think of the words to "Before the Throne of God Above":

*When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within*

*Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin  
Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free  
For God the Just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me.*

What a wonderful truth and reminder that is! When you are done with your devotional time, be sure to listen to this song. Think about the truth that you read in 1 John today, and remind yourself of the forgiveness and righteousness that is yours because of Christ.

#### **VERSE 10**

And now we arrive at John's third and final claim against the false teachers: "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." It might seem strange at first that denying sin would make God a liar, but God has made it clear throughout scripture that every human being is sinful (Gen 3:1–19, Rom 5:12–21). Scripture also makes it clear that God has revealed himself to mankind (Rom 1:18–21), so rejecting him and his truth is equivalent to calling him a liar (which is something that you don't really want to call God).

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Everything in our passage today hinges on John's statement that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Think about that for a minute. *God is light and in him is no darkness at all.*

We often think of meditation as an Eastern, empty-your-mind, New Age kind of exercise. But frankly, those are twisted counterfeits of biblical meditation. In fact, the Bible constantly *commands* us to meditate on Scripture. And this is not some mystical exercise or a way to free your mind from thoughts; on the contrary, it should be very specific and very thought-provoking! Meditating is like the mental act of chewing. We fill our mind with the rich word of God and then we turn it over again and again. We do not want to simply read our Bible; we want to  *dwell*  on it and let it dwell  *in us* .

My friend and I have been reading through Psalm 119 in Hebrew. There is one thing that has struck me over and over again. One of the words that David uses for  *meditate*  does not simply mean to meditate, but to meditate  *with thanksgiving and praise*  (Ps 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148).<sup>22</sup> In other words, meditation is not passive; it is  *active* . Contemplating God's word and pondering it deeply is a deliberate, active exercise. And doing this naturally leads to thanksgiving and praise to God. It is absolutely impossible to dwell on the truths of Scripture—to consider them thoughtfully and take them to heart—without being overwhelmed by who God is and what he has done for us.

So meditate on this verse today. Memorize it, sure, but don't  *only*  memorize it.  *Meditate*  on it today. Meditate on it with praise and thanksgiving.

*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

# Spiritual Discipline

## FASTING

Congratulations—you made it to the end of week 1! Honestly, that’s a feat. Well done.

This week’s spiritual discipline is fasting. While the Bible does not command us to fast, we recognize its enormous value in our lives, and we recognize that regular fasting often has profound impacts on those who practice it.

There is also a very important reason why fasting is our first discipline. I want us to have as much time as possible to practice it during our study—and *fasting requires planning*. There are plenty of days when we will not be able to fast simply because of work or family commitments. There are days when we have obligations that will require our full energy and mental capacity. It takes planning to choose days that will be appropriate for fasting. So we might as well get a head start on it!

Let’s look at some examples of fasting in the New Testament, then talk about some helpful guidelines, and finally close with a few reflection questions.

### FASTING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

First of all, we should start by defining fasting: fasting is the self-denial of ordinary necessities for the sake of seeking God in prayer. The physical reminder of our emptiness reminds us that Jesus alone can satisfy.

Jesus began his ministry with a forty-day fast (Matt 4:1–4). In Acts 13:1–3, the church leaders in Antioch were fasting and worshipping the Lord when they the Holy Spirit spoke to them.

Then after more fasting and prayer, they obeyed the Holy Spirit’s

**YOU CAN PRAY WITHOUT  
FASTING, BUT YOU CANNOT  
FAST WITHOUT PRAYING.**

instructions. Similarly, in Acts 14:23, church leaders appointed elders in every church and committed them to the Lord with prayer and fasting.

(Notice the connection between fasting and prayer here. Fasting goes

hand in hand with prayer; you can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying.)

Fasting should be practiced to worship God, to seek his will, and to receive his grace and strength to remain faithful. But we should point out that fasting is *not* a magical way to manipulate God. (Nor is it a spiritual way to lose weight.) Instead, the purpose of fasting is to create time to focus exclusively on God in a way that goes beyond our usual habits of prayer and worship.

Jesus also warns about fasting for God and not for people. In Matthew 6:16–18, he says:

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

*Fasting should never be done for any reason other than God alone.*

## **FASTING GUIDELINES**

Things to consider before fasting:

- If you are unable to fast because of medical reasons, consider fasting from some other habit or comfort.
- If God is prompting you to fast, do not ignore it.
- Start small and work your way up. Begin by skipping one meal and spending that time with God. Then try skipping two meals by beginning your fast after dinner one day and continuing it until dinner the next day.
- Be sure to drink plenty of water when fasting.
- Break your fast gently with a small meal.

Things to do during a fast:

- Praise God! Praise him through prayer, songs, and Bible reading. Select a passage about his goodness or faithfulness, like Psalm 103.
- Think deeply about what it means that Christ is the bread of life (John 6:25–59).
- Be mindful of God prompting you to pray for certain people or situations.
- Bring your desires before him. Ask him to give you discernment to know if they are according to his will.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. First of all, select a time for fasting in the next few days. When, and for how long, will you fast?

2. How often would you like to fast? How can you make it a regular discipline in your life?

3. Is God prompting you to fast in order to pray more fervently for anyone or anything in your life?

After you fast, come back and reflect on your experience.

1. What did you learn from the practice?



2. Is there anything you would do differently next time?

3. When do you plan to fast next? Is this something you and your husband or a close friend would like to do together?

# Week 2

**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**1 JOHN 2**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

**SABBATH**

**MEMORY VERSE**

**1 JOHN 2:2**

**HE IS THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR  
SINS, AND NOT FOR OURS ONLY BUT  
ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE  
WORLD.**

# Day 1

1 JOHN 2:1-6

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Thy Word is full of promises,  
flowers of sweet fragrance,  
fruit of refreshing flavor,  
when culled by faith.*

*May I be made rich in its riches,  
be strong in its power,  
be happy in its joy,  
abide in its sweetness,  
feast on its preciousness,  
draw vigor from its manna.*

*Lord, increase my faith.<sup>23</sup>*

A Puritan Prayer

- ❖ As we start a new day, pray that God would increase your faith. Pray that he would open your eyes to see the promises in his Word.



3. What observations do you have about this passage?

4. What does it mean that Christ is our advocate?

John is the only one who records this word (“advocate”) in the New Testament. He uses it four times in his Gospel, and only once in 1 John. Look up the other uses in John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7.

5. How is the word used differently in the Gospel than it is here in 1 John?

6. Look up “Paraclete” in a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. (If you don’t have one, don’t worry. There are some great ones online, like this one: [biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe.](http://biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/)) What does this word mean?

## VERSE 1

One of the main points of John's letter is summed up right here: *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

We should point out a few things about this verse. First, John obviously has a tender and loving relationship with these readers since he calls them his "little children." It also speaks to his role of authority over them as an apostle and a teacher. Second, think back to verse 4. There he says, "We are writing," but here he switches to, "I am writing." His style changes from a general apostolic message to a deeply personal and specific address to this group of believers. Third, when he states that his purpose is "so that you may not sin," he is clearly refuting the claims of the false teachers (and their followers) that they do not sin in 1:8 and 1:10.

Given the fact that he is recognizing that all people—even believers—still have some sin in their lives, it seems only appropriate that he reaffirms the solution to this sin: Jesus Christ the righteous, our advocate with the Father.

We should take a minute to discuss exactly what John means here (or perhaps, what he does *not* mean here). John is not saying that every time we (as believers) sin, we need an advocate to justify us before God. We do not need that because we were justified once and for all when God saved us. What John is saying is that as a child of God, we need forgiveness from the Father when we sin. We need to restore our relationship with him and we need help to grow in our obedience not to sin. But perhaps what is most remarkable about this is the fact that John "represents it as the act of a Savior still living (Heb 7:25) and in a living relation with his people. His work for them continues as real as during his earthly life (Lk 22:32, 23:34, John 17:24)."<sup>24</sup> Our Savior is *alive* and *working* for our good,



even today. Just because he is in heaven with the Father does not mean he is inactive. On the contrary, “he always lives to make intercession” for those who draw near to God through him (Heb 7:25).

This is exactly why John calls him our advocate! The Greek word, *parakletos*, or “Paraclete,” literally means “one who appears in another’s behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper.”<sup>25</sup> That is exactly what Jesus does for us. He appears on our behalf, advocating for our forgiveness and our restoration when we sin.

And what is interesting about this word, as you have already seen, is that Jesus uses it in the Gospel of John to describe the Holy Spirit. The only time it is used outside of the Gospel of John is right here—where it is used to describe Jesus. So if Jesus only uses this word to refer to the Holy Spirit, why does John use it here to refer to Jesus?

Well, for starters, notice how Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *another* Helper in John 14:16. This is the same word that we have in 2:1, *parakletos* (which means “paraclete” or “helper” or “advocate”, etc.). The implication is clear—there is more than one helper, more than one advocate. But they advocate in different ways. The Holy Spirit advocates the gospel of Christ before an evil world, while Christ advocates for the forgiveness of believers before God.

## **VERSE 2**

John says that Jesus is the “propitiation” for our sins. We also see this word in a few other places: Romans 3:23–26, Hebrews 2:17, and 1 John 4:10.

7. Look up these verses. Based on them (and their surrounding contexts), how would you define propitiation?

Coming out of 1 John, let's take a quick detour for a minute. (Bear with me here.) Growing up, I went to a Christian elementary school. It is one of the things that I am most grateful for about my childhood. Even today, I can see how it gave me a Christian worldview and built the foundation for my faith.

One thing I am... less grateful for... is the fact that I was only allowed to use the KJV. As a 5-year-old. Now as you can imagine, kids have a lot of questions about the Bible to begin with. But reading it with language that was nearly 400 years old *certainly did not help*. It only multiplied the questions.

Don't get me wrong, the KJV brought the word of God to English speakers for hundreds of years. Beyond this, its artistry and literary style are unparalleled—something I deeply appreciate today. The problem was that I didn't understand many of its words as a child. It was almost like a foreign language.

And this brings up a question that is just as much a part of Bible translation today as ever: how do you translate the literal words of the Bible while still using words that are understandable for your readers?

Well, there is a balance to it. If your readers do not understand your translation, you need to make it easier to read. But at the same time, there are certain words and ideas in the Bible that

simply cannot be broken down any further without losing their full meaning.

Propitiation is one of them.

So if you were annoyed today when you read this outdated, unfamiliar word, that's ok. You're right—it's not a word that we often use today. And honestly, I'm not sure I ever heard this word before seminary. But instead of trying to find a different way to translate its meaning, we should add this new word to our vocabulary.

So let's define propitiation. Propitiation is "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath to the end and in so doing changes God's wrath toward us into favor."<sup>26</sup> As you can see, there are two aspects to this definition: (1) a propitiation not only bears the full weight of God's wrath, but (2) in doing so, it turns his wrath towards us into favor. Let's say that again. A propitiation (1) bears the wrath of God, and (2) turns his wrath to favor.

When Jesus died on the cross, he bore, by himself, the entirety of God's wrath against sin. Some scholars, outside of the evangelical tradition, reject this idea, believing that a loving God would never be wrathful toward the children that he created. But the Bible consistently affirms that the holiness and justice of God requires that sin must be paid for. In order for him to be holy and just, he must also despise sin and be wrathful toward it. (In fact, we would simply define his wrath as the fact that *God intensely hates all sin.*)

Now, this is not the same as human wrath. It is never arbitrary or unpredictable or impulsive. On the contrary, the wrath of God is fully controlled and unchanging. Paul describes this in Romans 9:22–24:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Yes, he intensely hates sin and rightfully punishes sin, but there is another side to God's wrath. He made another way for us, *simply out of his own goodness!* He did not destine all of mankind to bear the weight of his wrath against their sin, nor did he leave us helpless to bear the punishment for our sin on our own. He would have been right to do so, since we deserve to pay the penalty for our sin. But because he loves us so much, he put forward a propitiation to satisfy the punishment for our sin and bear his full wrath in our place. The fact that Christ is our propitiation not only shows God's wrath, but it also shows *his intense love for his children*. He was not willing to allow us to rightfully bear our own punishment. He made another way, so that we may be free from sin and have fellowship with him.

And notice that John says that Christ is the *propitiation*, not the *propitiator*. Think about what that means for a second. A propitiator might put forward some other sacrifice, but Christ sacrificed *himself*.

*Christ himself is our propitiatory sacrifice.*

And John also says that Christ sacrificed himself not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. Which brings up an interesting thought. If Christ is the propitiation *for the whole world*, doesn't that mean that he bore God's wrath *for the whole world*, and in doing so, has turned God's wrath into favor *for the whole*

*world*? That would mean that everyone’s penalty for sin has been paid and that God now looks upon everyone with favor.

But we know this is contrary to Scripture! (Not to mention common sense.) After all, Jesus himself said, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt 7:13–14). He also said, “Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:45–46).

Jesus makes it clear that *few* people will follow the road to life and the rest will go away to eternal punishment as the penalty for their sin. So it is hard to believe that John means Christ paid for all sin, for all people, for all time. It seems better to understand John as saying that Christ’s propitiation is universally offered for the sins of the whole world and effective to those who receive it.

### **VERSES 3–4**

And now, at verse 3, we have a turning point. John moves from the solution to sin (Christ, our propitiation) to the signs that someone has this solution.

8. Spend a few minutes analyzing the structure of verses 3–6. How many times does he mention “know”? How many times does he mention “keep”? What is “known” or “kept” in each case?

9. What does it mean to “know” God?

10. What does it mean that “the love of God is perfected” in those who keep his word?

Throughout his letter, John uses two different verbs for “to know.” The one he uses here refers to becoming familiar with something or someone by experience. It is knowledge that involves a personal relationship, not knowledge that involves immediate or self-evident facts. In other words, when John talks about knowing God here, he means “to be in vital fellowship with him, to love him, to fulfill that relation toward him for which we are born. And conversely to be known by God, to be the object of his knowledge, is to be in harmony with him.”<sup>27</sup>

And what is the key characteristic that John gives for those who know God? They keep his commands! John uses this word three different times in three consecutive verses:

- We have come to know him if we *keep* his commands (v. 3).
- We do not know him if we do not *keep* his commands (v. 4).
- Whoever *keeps* his commands, the love of God is perfected in him (v. 5).

And what's remarkable about this word is that it does not just mean a casual or a passive or a one-time obedience. This word specifically means *to persist* in obedience. Meaning, it requires effort. It requires diligence. It requires a great deal of perseverance.

*But, oh, is it worth it.*

Scripture promises great rewards to those who “persist in obedience” to God’s commands. Look up these verses below and write out the promise that each one gives. (The English word might be different, but the underlying Greek word is the same in every verse—the same one that we have here in 2:3–5.)

Matthew 28:20 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

John 14:21 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

John 15:10 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 3:22 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 3:24 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



It can be easy to grow weary in our obedience to God in the midst of this sinful world. We keep God's commands in ways that get us ridiculed and excluded. We keep God's commands in ways that other people will never see or thank us for. We keep God's commands in ways that even our family may not understand. But if you ever start to grow weary in keeping God's commands—in *persisting in obedience*—do not forget that your Father in heaven sees your faithfulness. He sees your daily sacrifices, and he promises *tremendous* rewards to you.

He is always with you. He loves you. He gives you whatever you ask. He abides in you.

*What an amazing God we serve.*

*Blessed be the Lord,  
who daily bears us up;  
God is our salvation.*

Psalm 68:19

## **VERSES 5–6**

And now, speaking of this wonderful God we have, we turn to his God. Before we can discuss what John means by it being perfected, we must first understand what he means by “love of God.” Sounds obvious, right? I mean, it's the love of God. But it could actually be understood a few different ways. The most likely options would be: (1) God's love for believers, or (2) believers' love for God.

So how should we understand it? Well, given the focus on believers—their fellowship, their sin, their obedience—the second option is probably what John means here.

So when he says “the love of God is perfected,” what he means is that *our love for God* is perfected (or made complete) when we

keep his commands. It is “perfected” in the sense that there is “a continuous growth, a vital development, an advance to maturity.”<sup>28</sup> Essentially, what John is saying is that true love for God is always expressed in obedience to his commands. This is why Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word” (John 14:15, 21, 23). Evidence of our love for God is *always* displayed in our obedience to him.

**TRUE LOVE FOR GOD  
IS ALWAYS EXPRESSED  
IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS  
COMMANDS.**



3. How did you show your love for God through your obedience?

When we reflect on the difficult times in our faith, it is easy to only remember the pain and the suffering. It is easy to forget the ways that we obeyed and how God grew our faith during those times. But the promises we looked up today remind us that our obedience *matters*. God sees it, God uses it, and God blesses us tremendously through it.

He blesses us with his presence.

He blesses us with his love.

He blesses us by giving us what we ask.

He blesses us by abiding in us.

4. What promise did you need to hear the most today? Why?

- ❖ Before we close today, turn to Psalm 23. Spend a few minutes praying through it, and praise God for his many promises to us. Feel free to write down your prayer or thoughts below.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.*

- ❖ Be sure to memorize 1 John 2:2.

*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for  
the sins of the whole world.*

# Day 2

1 JOHN 2:7-14

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Open my eyes, that I may behold  
wondrous things out of your law.*

Psalm 119:18

- ❖ Prepare your heart for time in God's word today by spending a few minutes praying and reflecting on the verse above. Read it to yourself several times. Feel free to write it down or journal a prayer in the space below.

## TODAY ' S PASSAGE

❖ Then read our section for today: 2:7–2:14.

1. Write down whatever observations you have while reading.



2. What similarities does this passage have to what we have already read in 1:1–2:6?

3. What questions do you have about this passage?

## VERSES 7–8

John calls his readers his “little children” in 2:1, but here he calls them “beloved”—the first of *six times* he will call them that. *Can you feel the affection yet?* Yes, John is correcting heresy here, but his admonition flows directly out of his love and concern for these believers. It is all the more appropriate that in urging them to love one another, he emphasizes the fact that *he loves them deeply*.<sup>29</sup>

John then says that he is not writing a new commandment, but one that they have had from the beginning. So what commandment is that, exactly? Well, he obviously does not specify this, but from the context we can assume he means Jesus’ command in John 13:34.

4. Look that verse up and write it down below.

But then he turns around and says that, *on the other hand*, it is a new commandment. If you didn’t write down any questions that you had about the passage, let me be the first to propose a few. First of all, how is this a new commandment? Second, what does it mean that it is “true in him and in you”? And third, what on earth does it have to do with the darkness passing away and the light

already shining? (If you were lost trying to follow John’s argument in verse 8, you weren’t alone.)

So how do we make sense of all of it? Well, it seems that John is calling this commandment “new” in the same sense that Jesus calls it new in John 13:34. Obviously, the idea of loving others is nothing new. The Law commanded it in Leviticus 19:18, saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But Jesus certainly loved in a way that had never been done before. He was the first to love others perfectly and to fulfill the whole law. He extended one’s “neighbor” to all people, regardless of social class or race (like in the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37), and he extended the quality of love from simply not taking vengeance or bearing a grudge (Lev 19:18) to sacrificing yourself to the point of death (Phil 2:3–8). In all of these ways, Jesus’ commandment to love one another was new.

And this old/new commandment “is true in him and in you.” The word for “true” here does not refer to something merely factual; it has the nuance of something that is genuine, authentic, or real. So the commandment is *genuine* in Christ and in John’s readers; it is *authentic* in Christ and in his readers. It communicates a sense that his readers are actively living and expressing this command already in their lives. This is why the NLT paraphrases it by saying, “Jesus lived the truth of this commandment, and you also are living it.” There may be some heresy floating around this community and some people undoubtedly left the church to follow the false teachings (2:19), but John affirms that his readers are genuine believers and that they prove it by their conduct.

And finally, coming to the end of the verse, we have our last clause to discuss. The grammar here is very difficult, which you can clearly see by the diversity of translations among English versions. But the ESV (like the NASB and NKJV) provides the best understanding of

this unusual syntax. The last clause does not refer to the commandment being “true in Christ and in you,” but to the beginning of the verse (“At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you”). In other words, the reason that John writes a new commandment is “because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” He is underscoring the fact that Christ’s death and resurrection established a whole new age. The darkness is passing away because Christ defeated death; the light is already shining because Christ rose again. This is why he is writing a new commandment—because Christ changed everything when he appeared! He completely transformed the commandment to love others because he did it perfectly, and in doing so, instated a new age.

## **VERSES 9–11**

The general principle that John gave in verses 3–6 now becomes a specific principle in verses 9–11. Sandwiched in between two statements where John refutes the false claims of the defectors, he clarifies what it really means to follow Christ’s commandments and walk as he walked.

And if you were with us for our last studies, you might remember talking about chiasms (which are simply structures that follow a repeating pattern). We see a small one here, following an ABA pattern, with John emphasizing that whoever loves his brother abides in the light:

- A. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.
  - B. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
- A.’ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Surprisingly, this is the first time that John has mentioned love so far in his letter. (Yet he will go on to do so *twenty-seven more times*. Think that's a big theme of his?) But the point of these three verses is clear: hate is to darkness as love is to light. Those who love their brothers abide in the light; those who don't love their brothers don't abide in the light.

And isn't it funny how loving people we like is never a problem? Loving people is only difficult when we don't like them.

I saw a meme floating around the internet that really made an impact on me. It is a picture of a small staircase that leads to the front doors of two different houses. The right half of the stairs is covered in snow, while the left half has been perfectly shoveled. The caption says, "Don't let yourself become the person on the left."

Maybe you've seen this picture too. The point is pretty shocking. *Who would go through the effort of deliberately shoveling only half of this small stoop?* It probably took more effort to carefully leave half of the snow there than it would have taken to just shovel the whole step.

But the problem is... we can all relate. Maybe you haven't been that brazen about it. (Or, I don't know, maybe you have.) But we have all done something that petty and spiteful.

Loving people we like is never a problem. Loving people we *don't* like is the issue. And John makes it clear that if we are going to abide in the light, *we are going to love others*.

## **VERSES 12–14**

Now after John spends all this time countering the claims of the false teachers and talking about the difference between the



As we know, John is combatting heresy that had found its way into the church—and this is the key to understanding verses 12–14. John deliberately (though abruptly) includes these verses for the sake of encouraging these believers. He does not want to cause them to doubt their faith or give them the impression that he thinks they are in the darkness. No, on the contrary, John’s purpose is as much to assure the believers of their genuine faith as it is to disprove the false claims of the defectors.

Take a minute to look at the structure of these verses. Obviously, we have three main groups of people (children, fathers, young men), each of which receives their own encouragement twice over. Looking at both instances where he addresses them, write down the reasons John gives for writing to each of the groups.

I write to you, dear children, because:

(v. 12)

(v. 13)

I write to you, fathers, because:

(v. 13)

(v. 14)

I write to you, young men, because:

(v. 13)

(v. 14)

You also probably noticed that John calls them “dear children,” just like he did back in 2:1. We know this communicates John’s affection for the believers, but beyond that, it also communicates different levels of spiritual maturity. John is dividing his readers into groups, not based on their physical age, but based their spiritual “age.” The children are newborns in Christ, still growing and learning in their faith. The young men are strong believers, experienced and victorious in spiritual battles. The fathers are pillars of the church, well-seasoned and wise in their years. In other words, John addresses *everyone* in the church (as he does throughout his letter).

And though his second messages for the children and for the young men change slightly in verse 14, they are no doubt similar. We should not see them as two separate messages, but as continuations of the same message, repeated for emphasis.





Honestly, reaching out to our neighbors is something that we struggle with. There are a few neighborhood kids that we know. They play outside and ride their bikes together, and they always come over to say hi when they see us in the driveway. But we often don't make an effort to talk to our other neighbors or get to know them. This is something that Randy and I talk about regularly. And we have set some goals for ourselves. (These might sound too easy or basic to some of you—and I hope they do, because that means you are further along in your goals! —but we are taking baby steps here and planning manageable goals.) Some of them include:

- Inviting all of them over for dinner once a year.
- Checking in with Jo and Jen (two different neighbors) by text once a month.
- Walking over to say hi once a month when I see them outside.
- Inviting them to church occasionally.

3. What are some of your goals to love your neighbors better?

4. Have you talked to your family about these goals? How are they included in them?

5. How will you remind yourself to work on them over the next few weeks?

As we know, our neighbors are not the only people who are hard to love. Actually, we probably have a lot of people in our lives that are hard for us to love. Who do you find yourself getting most frustrated with these days? Whether it's a friend, co-worker, family member, or fellow church member, write down the name (or names) of someone that you are having a hard time loving.

6. How is God calling you to love them better? How do *you* need to change in order to love them more genuinely?

7. What will you do this week to communicate your love to them?

- ❖ Whatever your goals are for both your neighbors and those who are hard to love, pray over them. Pray for the people and pray for yourself. Ask God to give you wisdom to know what to do and diligence to carry it out.

# Day 3

1 JOHN 2:15-27

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and put on the armor of light,  
now in the time of this immortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us  
in great humility;  
so that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in glorious majesty  
to judge both the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal,  
through him who is alive and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
now and ever,  
Amen.<sup>30</sup>*

Thomas Cranmer

- ❖ Before opening your Bible today, pray that God would give you wisdom to understand it and discernment to apply it. Pray that he would remove any distractions and help you focus your mind on him.

## READ THE TEXT

❖ Then read 1 John 1–3.

1. As you read the passage, write down any observations from 2:15–27 below.

2. What questions do you have after reading it?

## VERSES 15–17

3. When it comes to these three verses, what would you say is the main theme? Circle the word that is repeated most often in this section.

In the previous section (verses 12–14), John laid out the privileges of believers—their forgiveness of sins, their union with the Father, their victory over evil. And now, in this section, John addresses their behavior and commands them not to love the world.

You might remember another very famous verse of John’s where he mentions the world... *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son*. But how can it be that God loved the world, and yet John commands us *not* to love the world? Well, John makes it clear in these verses that he means “the world” in a different sense. He is referring to is the world which is lost in sin, which is wholly depraved and hostile toward God. It is a world full of “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life.” He declares love for this world and love for the Father are mutually exclusive. They are as opposite as light and darkness, or love and hatred. Those who succumb to such pleasures and treasures *do not have the love of the Father in them*.

What an interesting contrast this is to verse 5! There John said that the love of God is perfected in those who keep his word, but here he says that the love of the Father is not in those who love the world. In both verses, we see a similar use of the word love. We already talked about how “love of God” in verse 5 refers to a believer’s love for God, and we see the same thing again here in verse 15. Love for the Father is not in those who love the world.



This is exactly what Jesus says in Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”

But for those who do not love the world and who do the will of God, John affirms that they abide forever. Obviously, this contrasts the fact that earthly things are temporal while things done for God are eternal, but beyond that, it speaks of our eternal life as believers. Jesus frequently taught that those who believe in him—or “keep his word” or “eat his flesh” (John 6:51, 58; 8:51)—will live forever.

4. What are some “desires of the flesh” and “desires of the eyes and pride of life” that you struggle with?

5. How do you fight these worldly temptations?

One of the best ways we can fight worldly temptation is by following John's example here—we remind ourselves that this world is fleeting but doing God's will is eternal. When our minds are set on heaven, we lose sight of our earthly worries and temptations.

*How can you actively remind yourself of that today? How can you develop a heavenly mindset?*

Later today, listen to the hymn "The Sands of Time Are Sinking." Consider reading a book about heaven, too. (Like *Heaven: A World of Love* by Jonathan Edwards—which is conveniently only 50 pages long.)

## **VERSES 18–27**

With John's two quick digressions over, he now returns to warning the believers about false teachings. Now, we have generally been looking at one verse at a time in our study so far, but here we are going to change things up a bit. We are going to look at this whole segment and tackle some of the main questions it brings up. Like, for instance...

1. What does John mean by "antichrist"?
2. What does it mean that "they went out from us" and "were not of us"?
3. What does it mean to be "anointed by the Holy One"?

## ANTICHRISTS

Let's get started with the antichrists, shall we? After all, what could be more fun than talking about antichrists? (Ok, I could think of a few things...) But what is fascinating about this word is that it is only found in the letters of John (1 Jn 2:18, 2:22, 4:3, and 2 Jn 7). Though we see its concept in other places, John is the only one to use this term. As you can clearly see, it is composed of the prefix "anti" and the name "Christ." The prefix here means "against" (not "in place of"), so we can understand these antichrists as being *against Christ*. They are not pretending to be Christ or to replace him or to usurp his role somehow; on the contrary, they have received the truth yet they deny Jesus as the Messiah and they teach false doctrine about him. (If John wanted to describe "false Christs," he could have called them *pseudochristos*, which is the same word that Jesus used to describe false Christs in Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22.)

Elsewhere in the Bible, a concept similar to an antichrist is mentioned. Paul speaks of the "man of lawlessness" that will appear before Christ returns.

- ❖ Turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:1–11 and read about this "man of lawlessness" before going on.

In this passage, Paul clearly says that before Christ returns there will be rebellion and the man of lawlessness will be revealed. He is "the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

But then Paul goes on to say that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work." In other words, he seems to communicate both a specific *person of lawlessness*, who has yet to come, and a *spirit of lawlessness*, which is already here. Thus, the *spirit* of lawlessness is

at work in many different “antichrists,” while there is still a singular man of lawlessness (or “Antichrist”) who will come and cause unparalleled persecution. So when John says that “many antichrists have come” (2:18), he means that they are precursors or forerunners to *the* Antichrist who will appear before the second coming of Christ.

### **“THEY WERE NOT OF US”**

And then we get to verse 19, which is a bit of a mouthful. John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” What may seem insignificant on the surface actually communicates an important doctrine. This verse teaches what we call *the perseverance of the saints*. (We might think of “saints” in the Catholic sense as someone famous for their incredible faith and deeds, but the Bible regularly uses that term to describe all believers. So when we say “saints” here, we simply mean believers.)

What this means—what this verse teaches—is that all those who are genuine believers will be kept by God’s power and persevere in their faith until the end of their lives. Or, to say it from the opposite perspective, all those who persevere in faith until the end of their lives are genuine believers.<sup>31</sup> Obviously, we know that genuine believers may go through difficult periods when they may not attend church regularly or show signs of faith, but for genuine believers this period is always temporary. There are others, however, who may appear to be believers, but ultimately reveal their faith to be unauthentic by leaving the church permanently.

John also teaches this doctrine in his Gospel. Look up these verses and write them out below.

John 6:39–40

John 10:27–29

Like we mentioned, we know that some people who leave the church have shown external signs of conversion. We might think, beyond a doubt, that they are genuine believers. And when they do fall away from the faith, we are left wondering how a dedicated believer could lose their salvation.

But the fact that they left the church shows that they were never true believers to begin with. The Bible warns us that this may happen. Paul says that “false brothers [were] secretly brought in” (Gal 2:4) and that servants of Satan “disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:15). Jesus also says,

Not every one who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “*I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.*”

Only God knows who true believers are, but we can be sure that they will be kept by his power and will persevere in their faith until the end of their lives.

## **ANOINTING FROM THE HOLY ONE**

There are two main questions that we need to answer when it comes to the anointing of the Holy One. First, what does John mean by anointing? And second, who is the Holy One? Before we discuss these questions, think through the issues below.

1. The word for “anointing” (*chrisma*) is only used here in the entire New Testament (once in 2:20 and twice in 2:27). Write down everything that we can learn from these verses about this anointing.

2. Who is the “Holy One” in verse 20? Look up Mark 1:24, John 6:69, John 14:16, and 2 Corinthians 1:21–22 to help you decide.

Even though this word for anointing is only found here, we can still gather a lot of information about it. In verse 27, John says that they *received* the anointing, meaning that the gift was given at a specific point in time. We also know that they still *have* this anointing (v. 20) and it *abides* in them (v. 27). And most obviously, this anointing was given to them by the Holy One. (Specifically, the Holy One is the *source* of the anointing.)

From the Septuagint, which is the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, we know that *chrisma* refers not to the act of anointing but to the substance with which it was performed (i.e., oil). When Christ came, however, he was not anointed with *oil* but

with the *Holy Spirit* (Lk 4:18, Acts 4:27, 10:38). The same is true for us as believers. After all, similar to what we just read, Paul says, “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and *who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee*” (2 Cor 1:21–22).

So with the anointing referring to the Holy Spirit, we have two choices left for who the Holy One is: either Christ or God the Father. Frankly, the verses that we looked at above could be used to support either position. But what seems to sway our decision toward Christ is the fact that he is described as the one who sends the Holy Spirit. John 14:16 says, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.” We see the same idea in John 16:7. It seems only fitting, then, that Christ (“the Holy One”) is the source of the anointing (the Holy Spirit) that we have as believers.

Notice that John immediately goes from reminding them of their anointing from Christ (in other words, the fact that they have the Holy Spirit within them) to telling them that they know all things. There’s a connection here between having the Spirit and having knowledge. Think about what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*” (John 14:26). So as believers, we can have confidence and peace knowing that the Spirit dwells within us and guides us. May we learn to trust in him and listen to his leading more every day.

This is especially relevant to John’s audience, given the heresy from the false teachers. John says that these believers already know the gospel and they have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, so there is no need for anyone to come along and suddenly teach them a new gospel! This is exactly what John affirms again after he



reminds them of their anointing in verse 27: “But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and *you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.*” This is certainly a fitting reminder for these believers, given the turmoil in their church.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Our passage today may have seemed a little somber. The world passing away, antichrists coming, defectors leaving the church—these verses are *grim*, to say the least.

But in the midst of this heavy passage, John has woven in promises of hope for believers. He gives us assurances like:

*Whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

*But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it.*

*If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.*

1. Do promises like these play a role in your daily life? Or do you tend to forget about them after reading your Bible?

2. How did you feel after writing down the passages from John (6:39–40 and 10:27–29)? What did God teach you from those verses?

3. What did you need to hear most today out of God's word?  
Why?

- ❖ Whatever you just wrote down, be sure to remind yourself of that today. We do not read the Bible and then forget about it; we actively dwell on it throughout the day.
- ❖ Close today by thanking God for what he taught you and by praying this simple verse:

*Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;  
and give me life in your ways.*

Psalm 119:37

# Spiritual Discipline

## SABBATH

This week, we are going to practice the *Sabbath*.

Rest. What a beautiful thing, right?

When was the last time you and your family actually spent a day resting? When was the last time you had a day without running errands or doing chores around the house? When was the last time you had a day where you actually felt refreshed and invigorated? When was the last time you simply enjoyed the presence of the things around you—your husband, your kids, your home—without being distracted by getting other things done?

This is exactly what today's spiritual discipline is about. Today we are going to focus on establishing regular periods of rest, and one of the best ways to do that is by practicing the Sabbath.

There are a few things we should talk about when it comes to the Sabbath. First, we should address the question of whether or not we are still obligated to observe the Sabbath as Christians. Second, we should address the purpose and goals of the Sabbath. And lastly, we should make a plan for how you will prepare to rest on the Sabbath.

### **ARE WE OBLIGATED TO OBSERVE THE SABBATH?**

We know that the Sabbath was created as the fourth commandment. Exodus 20:8–10 says,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Sabbath was instituted for the Israelites to have a day of rest from their regular work during the rest of the week. It was also a time when they would draw near to God in worship—a day which he “blessed.”

We also know that the ten commandments are part of the covenant God made with Moses and the Israelites in the Old Testament (the *Mosaic* covenant). Some people believe that we are still obligated to follow the commandment of the Sabbath today, but Scripture teaches that the Mosaic covenant has ended and we are now under a new covenant. This is why when Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper he says, “This cup that is poured out for you is the *new covenant* in my blood” (Luke 22:20). Romans 10:4 also says, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

But even though we are no longer under the law, we do see nine of the ten commandments restated in the New Testament. Can you guess which one is not restated? Yep, it’s the Sabbath. Now, there is a long history of Christians keeping the Sabbath, but I do not believe that this command is under the new covenant. In fact, not only is the Sabbath *not* commanded in the New Testament, but it is also explicitly stated that Christians no longer observe the Sabbath. This is why Paul says in Colossians 2:16:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a *Sabbath*.

Christians were free to make up their own mind about how they wanted to treat the Sabbath (or Sundays for us today) because there were no longer any binding requirements about the Sabbath.

### **PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH**

Obviously, we are familiar with the whole purpose of the Sabbath. As humans, we *need* rest. This is why God demonstrated it for us—even though he didn't need it—when he rested on the seventh day after creating the universe. Jesus also taught that we should have regular periods of rest. Mark 6:30–32 says,

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and *rest a while*.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

And most famously, Jesus said,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The Sabbath is God's gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is a time for us to have communion with him, both corporately and individually. It is a time for *being* present, in the midst of a life of *doing*. It is a time for us to recognize our limits and prevent

ourselves from getting burned out. It is a time for us to recognize that we are not ruled by a clock or a to-do list, but by our God who created us.

Though Scripture teaches us that it is good to work, it also teaches us that it is good to rest regularly. In fact, *not* resting regularly could be a sign of spiritual problems. As Bruce Waltke, an Old Testament scholar, said, “A person who feels inclined to work seven days a week should examine what god he or she worships.” For many of us, working seven days a week probably doesn’t refer to an office job. But working seven days a week might mean doing the laundry, cleaning the house, going grocery shopping, cooking a large dinner, etc.

**A PERSON WHO FEELS INCLINED TO  
WORK SEVEN DAYS A WEEK SHOULD  
EXAMINE WHAT GOD SHE WORSHIPS.**

## **HOW TO PRACTICE THE SABBATH**

So how should we practice the Sabbath? We should include:

- setting aside time for intimacy with God and others you love
- restful activities like walks, naps, reading, picnics, family time, games, intimacy with your husband
- not creating a to-do list for Sunday
- letting go of things on Sundays that stress you out
- planning difficult conversations for other days whenever possible
- doing as much on Saturday as possible: making meals ahead of time or planning easy meals to make on Sundays, picking out Sunday clothes, etc.
- preparing your heart for worship on Sunday morning (praying over this Saturday night and when you wake up Sunday, praying as a family in the car on the way to church, etc.)







- ❖ Write down your personal goals for a restful Sabbath next Sunday. Be sure to share this with your Bible study partners.

# Week 3

**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**1 JOHN 3**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

**RETREAT**

**MEMORY VERSES**

**1 JOHN 3:1 AND 16**

**SEE WHAT KIND OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN TO US, THAT  
WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD; AND SO WE ARE.**

**BY THIS WE KNOW LOVE, THAT HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US,  
AND WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR THE BROTHERS.**

# Day 1

1 JOHN 2:28-3:10

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore I will remain with you, of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give.<sup>32</sup>*

Martin Luther

- ❖ Pray that God would fill you with his word today and strengthen your faith. Pray that he would make your love warm and fervent. Pray that he would help you to abide in Christ.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

❖ Read 1 John 1–3.

1. How would you organize the structure of chapter 3? (Where do you see division breaks? What are the main topics of each section?)





## VERSES 28–29

These final verses of chapter 2 are transitional, serving to conclude the previous section and introduce the coming section. We have seen “abide” plenty of times in this chapter, and just as John commanded the believers to abide in Christ in verse 27, he repeats that command again in verse 28. But in verse 29, he introduces a new theme: being born of God. This is the first of nine times that he uses this description in 1 John (and he uses it twice in his Gospel too). In the Gospel, he focuses on how someone is born of God (John 1:12–13; 3:3–8), but in 1 John, he focuses on the fruitful evidence of someone born of God.

4. Look up all of the instances where John mentions being born of God. What characteristics does he give them in each verse?

2:29

3:9

4:7

5:1

5:4

5:18

5. In what ways do you see these characteristics in your own life? (It's easy to not want to answer this question out of humility, but we should recognize and praise God for the ways that he has grown us and helped us become more like Christ.)

Sometimes we can look at verses like this and be overwhelmed by all the things we should be as Christians. Practicing righteousness and not continuing to sin is a tall order. It is easy just to see the ways that we are falling short. All of the ways that we do not pray enough or read our Bibles enough. All of the ways we judge others or get angry with them or criticize them in our heads.

But what I love about these verses is how John characterizes believers as being *born of God*. That literally means that we have become the *children of God* and he has become our *Father*. We are *his*. Whatever our shortcomings may be, he loves us and does not give up on his. He makes us more like him every day. *And we should fall on our knees in praise every day for this.*

## VERSE 1

John continues this theme into the next chapter. He opens verse 1 with “see” (or “behold”), which is in the form of a command. In other words, he is specifically drawing attention to this point and calling his readers to focus on it carefully. And though we do not see it in English, the command is plural. (*Y’all* instead of a singular *you*.) Now I know this might sound completely insignificant, but this is not the normal use of the command. The normal way is to give the command in the singular—and we see that constantly throughout the New Testament. But John does something different here. Brooke Foss Westcott, a nineteenth-century theologian and editor of *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, remarks on this unusual plural form:

The use of the plural is remarkable, and elsewhere it is used only of something actually visible. The image at the close of the last chapter (*born of him*) seems to fill St. John’s vision, and, as he pauses to dwell upon it himself, he incites his readers to contemplate the same truth.<sup>33</sup>

And with this image of being born of God fresh on our minds, John then ends his statement with the simplest clause, only two words in the Greek: *and we are*. It is such a blunt affirmation of such a life-changing truth! The abruptness should startle us and cause us to dwell upon the magnitude of John's statement. *See how glorious a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are!*

This verse really got to me this week. In the middle of John's warning about false teachings, in the middle of his rich and heavy doctrine, he stops for a moment and encourages them with this simple but profound truth: *See how glorious a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*

What a remarkable thing it is to be a child of God! There's no doubt about it. We are his children. He is our Father. He lavishes his unconditional love on us in a way that only a father can—our perfect heavenly Father. Most of our English translations say, "See how great" or "See what kind," but there is a specific nuance here—"see how *glorious* a love." It is not just a great love. It is not just some kind of love. It is a *glorious love* that the Father has lavished on us.

So when you start to doubt that God really cares for you, when you start to wonder if you are really his child, *think about this verse*. Say it to yourself over and over again. Meditate on this truth from Scripture. *God has loved you with such a glorious love that he has made you his own child.*

And right after John affirms that we are children of God, he says this is the reason why the world does not know us. The world does not know us *because* we are children of God. Lest John's readers ever be taken by surprise that the world does not understand or

accept them, he assures them that the world does not know them because it did not know Jesus.

And that's a really good reminder.

Because even though I know it, I still get hurt and surprised by it. I still get hurt when we are not invited to events or trips. I still get upset and confused when my family members have views that I cannot begin to understand. I am still bothered sometimes when we are teased for being different.

But far from being hurt or upset, we should expect that the world will not understand us. It is a sad truth, because it speaks to their spiritual blindness. But we rest in the love of our Father and the assurance that we are children of God. Our relationship with him is the most important thing in our lives, and it determines everything we do. And John assures us here that *God has loved us with such a glorious love, that we are his children*. All is right with him. We are his. And we have peace in this truth.

### **VERSES 2-3**

Were you reminded of any of John's previous verses when you read verse 2? He opened the letter by saying, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, *which we have seen with our eyes...*" He already said that they have seen him, but here he says that when Christ returns they "will see him as he is." So if they already saw him on earth, why does he say that they will see him as he is? Didn't they already see him as he is?

There is one big difference in Jesus between his resurrection and his second coming: his exaltation. When Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrection, God "highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9). And he was not

just exalted, but exalted at *the right hand of God* (Acts 2:33, Heb 1:3), which shows that his work of redemption was completed and that he now has all authority over the universe. Paul describes this in Ephesians 1:20–23, when he says that God

*raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

It is this Christ that the believers will see as he is. They witnessed Christ, even the resurrected Christ, but no one has seen him fully exalted in all his glory at the right hand of God. *This* is how we will see him one day. And this is how John encourages these believers. It is precisely because we will see him in all his glory and become like him that we should strive for a life of a purity—that we should strive to *purify ourselves*.

Have you wondered why John brings up Christ’s second coming right here? I didn’t think much of it at first. But the more I read the passage, the more I wondered why he brings it up at all. It has nothing to do with the antichrists in the section before, and it has nothing to do with sinning in the section after. But John specifically includes it here.

And he does so to encourage his readers. They are children of God, and that has *huge* significance. The world may not understand them now, but there will be a day when the believers become like Christ and see him exalted in all his glory. And this thought should deeply spur their hearts toward purity in Christ. Calvin says, “Though we have not Christ now present before our eyes, yet if we

hope in him, it cannot be but that this hope will excite and stimulate us to follow purity, for it leads us straight to Christ, whom we know to be a perfect pattern of purity.”<sup>34</sup>

If there is ever a weariness in us because the world does not understand us, if there is ever resentment or sorrow that we are excluded or ridiculed—sometimes even from those whom we most love—let us always remember that *we are children of God*. He knows us. He created us. He understands us. And best of all, we will one day stand before our triune God, having become like Christ and seeing him in his full glory. If we have this hope, if we have genuinely taken this truth to heart, then we are left with nothing less than deep joy and fervor in following Christ and striving for purity, just as he is pure.

## VERSES 4–10

Shifting away from Christ’s second coming, John now turns to the reasons for Christ’s first coming: to deal with sin. He repeats the argument twice, with different emphases each time. John Stott provides a helpful way to organize the structure of these verses:

|   | Verses 4–7  | Verses 8–10  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>The introductory phrase:</b>           | <i>Everyone who makes a practice of sinning</i> (4) | <i>Whoever makes a practice of sinning</i> (8)                       |
| <b>The theme:</b>                         | <i>Sin is lawlessness</i> (4)                       | <i>Sinners are of the devil</i> (8)                                  |
| <b>The purpose of Christ’s appearing:</b> | <i>He appeared in order to take away sins</i> (5)   | <i>The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil</i> (8) |

**The logical conclusion:**

*No one who abides in him keeps on sinning (6)*

*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning (9) <sup>35</sup>*

What John makes clear in this section is that sin is incompatible with Christ. Just look at the two logical conclusions that Stott identifies. Those who are born of God, who abide in him, do not keep sinning. There is no sin in him, so if we live in him, we obviously cannot carry on sinning.

Think back to the beginning of John's letter. In 1:6 he says, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." Right after this in 1:8 he says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." By all accounts, John was dealing with individuals who were indifferent to their sin. They believed that what they were doing was not wrong, and that they could still maintain their relationship with God while continually sinning.

But John constantly refutes this thinking! It is impossible to know Christ and abide in him while continuing to sin. Children of God practice righteousness; children of the devil practice sinfulness. It is as simple as that.

6. I hope you found John Stott's chart as helpful as I did. One thing I noticed, though, is that he does not address verses 7 or 10. How would you say those verses fit into the structure of the argument?



7. How does John define sin in this section?

8. Look up Matthew 23:27–28, Romans 6:19, Hebrews 1:9, and 2 Corinthians 6:14. What is lawlessness? What is it contrasted with in every passage?

Colin Kruse offers a helpful explanation of lawlessness:

When the author of 1 John says that ‘sin is lawlessness’ he does not mean that sin is the violation of the Mosaic law, but rather that sin constitutes opposition to and rebellion against God, like the opposition and rebellion of Satan. If this is the case, then the author is really saying that those who claim to have seen God and know him, yet persist in sin, certainly do not know God, and are in fact in league with Satan. So the point the author wants to make in the passage is clear enough, and this is all summed up in 3:10: “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”<sup>36</sup>

Lawlessness is the opposite of righteousness. It is to be “in league with Satan.” The lawless do not do what is right, nor do they love their brothers.

There is one last stone to unturn before we move on. We should discuss what John means by “making a practice of sinning” (ESV). This phrase (and frankly this whole passage) has led to widespread debate. Is John implying that believers no longer sin? Or they simply do not make a *practice* of sinning?

Part of the problem is that the text does not literally say *make a practice*. The text literally says, “everyone who *practices sin*” or “no one born of God *practices sin*.” It is helpful to read the NASB here since it follows the Greek a little more closely:

- 4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.
- 5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.
- 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.
- 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;
- 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.
- 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.
- 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

One common interpretation of this passage is that the word John uses for “practice” throughout this section (vv. 4, 7, 8, 9, 10) indicates “a continual practice of sin... In other words, it is a willful, habitual action.”<sup>37</sup> Since John already affirmed that believers still occasionally sin— “If we say we have no sin” (1:8), “If we confess our sins” (1:9), “But if anyone does sin” (2:1)—he is not implying here that believers *never* sin. Instead, he is saying that believers do not *continually* sin. They do not form habits or practices of sinning in their lives.

When I was reading through the passage, I really struggled to accept this interpretation. I did not see anything that indicates a habit or continual behavior. On the contrary, the specific meaning of the word for sinful “practice” in verses 4, 8, and 9 is to “do, commit, be guilty of sins and vices.”<sup>38</sup> In verses 7 and 10, the meaning for the righteous practices is to “do, practice virtues.”<sup>39</sup> And beyond this, John uses the present tense throughout this whole passage. Some see this as a sign that John means a continuous, habitual practice of sinning, but the exact same argument could be made for the present tense indicating one-time or non-repeating occurrences.

I found an especially helpful explanation in one of the books I am reading on 1, 2, and 3 John. Martin Culy wrote a handbook on the Greek text of these letters, and he explains the passage like this:

Read within the context of the rest of the letter, it is clear that the writer does not necessarily expect a sinless life for those who “remain in him.” He made it clear in 2:1 that sin *may* occur in the believer’s life. His ethical standards, both here and elsewhere in the letter, however, are incredibly high. It is important, then, not to water down his statement by pressing the present tense to a focus on continual or habitual sin, as though the writer were claiming that true

Christians may sin as long as it is not continual or habitual. The tense simply portrays the sin as a process without regard to the event's frequency of recurrence—a process that should have no place in the life of one who “remains in him.”<sup>40</sup>

9. Which interpretation do you think best explains the text? How can John be intolerant of sin here and yet in previous passages affirm that believers still sin?

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Today was a long day. There is so much that we could talk about in this passage. But after all that we have gone over today, take a minute to rest.

1. What was the most important thing that God taught you through his word today?

- ❖ As you go throughout your day today, meditate on 3:1 today. That will, of course, mean that you will have to memorize it first. But don't just memorize it—*meditate on it*. Think about it as you are going about your daily tasks. Think about it what it means that the Father has given us his glorious love. Think about what it means that we are children of God. Be in continual prayer with God today as you think about these truths.

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us,  
that we should be called children of God;  
and so we are.*

- ❖ Listen to “Love of the Father” by CityAlight today.
- ❖ Close by praying through Psalm 103:8–14.

*The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.  
As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.  
For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust.*

# Day 2

1 JOHN 3:11–18

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

- ❖ Before we start in 1 John today, read Psalm 104:1–2. Read through it slowly a few times, praising God and meditating on his majesty.
- ❖ Then pray that God would teach you through his word and give you wisdom to understand it more deeply.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

- ❖ Let's slow down a little bit today. Start by reading chapter 3 carefully.
  - ❖ Then reread verses 11–24, looking closely at John's argument and the main themes of the passage.
1. First, what questions do you have after reading 3:11–24?



2. Now looking closely at verses 11–24. How would divide this section into smaller units? How is this section connected with verses 1–10?

3. John says “we know” four times in this passage. Write down what we know in each instance.

v. 14:

v. 16:

v. 19:

v. 24:

4. Do you struggle to believe any of the truths that you wrote down above? Why?

## VERSE 11

This verse probably sounds familiar to us. It begins in almost the exact same way as 1:5 did: “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” John’s emphasis there was on light, but here it is on love. Like we have mentioned, some people see these two verses as dividing the letter into two halves. The theme of the first half, 1:5–3:10, is that God is light (and therefore we should walk accordingly), while the theme of the second half, 3:11–5:12, is that God is love (and therefore we should walk accordingly).

## VERSES 12–15

The first time I read these verses, I was confused when I saw Cain’s name. I thought I must have read it wrong. But nope. That’s what John wrote. And I had to ask myself, *why would John bring up Cain here?* It seems completely out of place. Maybe you felt the same way, so think through these questions.

5. Why do you think John talks about Cain here? What does it have to do with the verses before it? How does it relate John’s argument in the rest of chapter 3?

6. Maybe you also noticed how Abel’s name is missing from the text. I had a couple questions about this. First, obviously, *why doesn’t John mention him by name?* Second, John tells us not to be like Cain, who was of the evil one; *why doesn’t he likewise tell us, “Be like Abel, who was of God”?*

The story of Cain and Abel is found in Genesis 4—and *that is significant*. Genesis 1 and 2 tell the story of creation. Genesis 3 tells the story of the fall. And Genesis 4 tells the story of the first death. Only four chapters into the Bible, we already have a murder. And, *as the very first murder*, Cain is a prototype. He stands as the archetype for evil throughout history. He represents sin, selfishness, envy, revenge, jealousy, hatred. In essence, he represents *the world*. He represents everything that John opposes in 2:15–17: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world... For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”*

This is the dichotomy that John has been building from the beginning of his letter. Light versus darkness. Loving the world versus loving the Father. The antichrists versus those who abide in Christ. Lawlessness versus righteousness. And now? Death versus life. Hate versus love.

By bringing up Cain, John furthers this dichotomy. Hate is equivalent to murder, and murderers do not have Christ abiding in them. On the contrary, hate is a sure sign of spiritual death. Love is a sure sign of spiritual life. This is why John says that we have passed from death to life—*because we love one another*.

But while we are in life and love, the rest of the world remains in death and hatred. And this is why John mentions Cain. Cain represents the world in all its evil and hatred, which is fully incompatible with those who abide in Christ and love others. And in making this point, John gives us an important reminder: *do not be surprised that the world hates you*. Jesus said the same thing in John 15:18: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

In a world that is hostile towards us and entices us to be hostile in response, we need this reminder. We need to be reminded that it hated Jesus first. We need to be reminded to remain steadfast and not allow the world to shift our focus away from Christ toward their hostility. Calvin says that we are told of Abel’s righteousness so “that we may learn to endure patiently when the world hates us gratuitously, without any just provocation.”<sup>41</sup>

**LEARN TO ENDURE  
PATIENTLY WHEN  
THE WORLD HATES  
US GRATUITOUSLY,  
WITHOUT ANY JUST  
PROVOCATION.**

7. In what ways do you experience the world hating you for your beliefs?

8. When do you find yourself surprised, angry, or hurt that the world acts like this?

9. In what ways do you respond to the world's hatred by being hostile back?

10. What can you do during these times to keep your eyes focused on Christ and not on the hatred of the world?

## VERSE 16

And here we arrive at some of my favorite words in this whole book. They cut right to the heart.

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.*

And do you remember the way this chapter started? *See how glorious of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And we are.*

Let there be no doubt in your mind that God loves and cherishes you deeply.

If you ever start to question that, read these verses to yourself. Memorize them. Meditate on them. Repeat them over and over again. This is the greatest truth we will ever know. Our God loves us and has made that known to us. *What more could we ever want in life?*

And with this great gift—*the greatest gift*—John presents an obligation. Because Christ laid down his life for us, we also should lay down our lives for other believers. And while he does not pose this as an outright command, it is close. The verb implies an obligation. Most of our English translations bring it out as *ought*, but we could also translate it as *must*. Perhaps the best sense of the word is found somewhere in between the *ought* and the *must*.

11. We have already seen John use this word once before, and in addition to using it here, he uses it a third time in chapter 4. Look up these verses and write down what we ought to do in each one:

2:6



3:16

4:11

Every time I read this verse, I am reminded of Philippians 2. If you were with us last fall for our study on Philippians (or if you don't live under a rock and you are simply familiar with it), you probably thought of this passage too. In Philippians 2:3–8, Paul says,

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

This is the example that Christ set for us. This is the King that we follow—the one who became the lowest servant of all. And because we abide in him, because the Spirit dwells in us, we are likewise able to serve others and lay down our lives for them.

Sometimes we get so used to using Christian language—used to speaking in abstract or hypothetical terms—that we do not think of the real, concrete situations in our lives.

12. In what ways are you “laying down your life” for others right now?

13. In what ways do you hesitate to lay down your life? How is God calling you to change that?

You know, earlier I asked why John does not mention Abel by name. He gives the negative instruction, “We should *not* be like Cain,” but he never gives the corresponding positive instruction, “We *should* be like Abel.” For a while, I wondered why he did this. I mean, why leave out the other half of the equation?

Then I realized, *he didn't leave it out*. But the other half of the equation is not Abel; it is *Christ*. John is not encouraging us to be like Abel (righteous though he was). John is encouraging us to be like *Christ*. *That* is our ultimate example. While Cain hated, Christ loved. While Cain was evil, Christ was righteous. While Cain took life, Christ gave life.

Cain may have been the prototype for evil, but Christ forever defeated evil.

As I'm writing this, I'm sitting in Black Rock Coffee trying not to bawl my eyes out in front of everyone. This passage is just wrecking me. Sometimes you're just hit with an overwhelming sense of God's providence and his power and his sacrificial love. And I can't stop tearing up as I think about how wonderful our God is and how powerful his Scripture is. Because right before the story of Cain, I mean *just a few verses* before Cain, we have the protoevangelium. A big word, I know. But what it means in Greek is the first (*proto*) gospel (*euangelion*). Right after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, God curses the serpent, and in this curse, he promises that her seed will one day defeat him (Gen 3:15). *This is the first message of the gospel*.

And what it shows is that from the very beginning, God had a plan. From the very beginning, God promised his Son. From the very beginning, God ordained that he would not abandon us to our sin and evil.

*Before Cain was even born, before the first murder was ever committed, God promised that his Son would lay down his life for us.*

Think about that for a minute.

Think about how Scripture was written over the course of thousands of years, and yet every word was ordained by God before the foundation of the world. Though he unraveled it slowly in human terms, it was foreordained from all eternity.

*That is the kind God we have.* The God who loves us so deeply that he gave his Son for us. The God who knows all things and promised us a Savior at the very first sin. The God who had a plan from the very beginning and has never once wavered in it.

*Do you realize the magnitude of the God we serve?*

If you aren't tearing up right now, then maybe I'm not a very good writer. *Because our God is absolutely overwhelming.*

Before Cain ever became the prototype for evil, God promised to defeat evil.

*“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*

John 15:13

## **VERSES 17–18**

Then, once again, John shows that there are implications that come with understanding. If we know love through the example of Christ, if we *truly* understand his sacrifice, then there is only one possible outcome: we love others. And we love them not just in word, but in deed.

For the last few weeks, there has been a homeless man and his dog standing by the offramp on 59<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Beardsley. I don't know what it is about him, but he has really captured my heart. Maybe it is because he has such a tender smile and looks so grateful whenever he receives a gift. I kept telling Hadley that we should make a bag of food for him and get a bag of dog food for his dog. But of course, I kept forgetting to actually do this. Every time we would drive by him, we would talk about how we should make him a bag when we get home. And every time we got home, we would get distracted and forget.

After weeks of this, I finally remembered to do it. Hadley absolutely loves packing—*anything and everything*—and loves helping people, so she was beyond excited for this. We packed sandwiches, fresh fruit, and granola bars into our bag, and we grabbed a half-frozen gallon of water that we were sure he would love in the Phoenix heat. (And of course, we made a separate bag with dog food.) We couldn't wait to give it to him! Finally, we had actually remembered to put everything in the car.

But when we passed his corner, he wasn't there.

Hadley kept asking if he had died. (Because what other possibility could there be?)

After a few days, we saw him again back on his corner. And after packing the food up again, and driving to the corner again, he was gone—again. We saw him on and off a few times after that, but he was never regularly on his corner like he used to be. And we never got the bags of food to him. For weeks I kept thinking to myself, "*If only I had made a better effort when we first saw him.*" I let weeks go by constantly saying, "Oh, we should help him!" but never actually doing anything about it.

Now, I know this homeless man's life is not dependent on our little bag of food and our water jug. But I am still mad at myself for missing an opportunity to obey God's command to meet needs when you see them. And what's worse, I missed an opportunity to teach my 5-year-old about serving God's people.

As Christians, we should be people who meet the needs of others.

And that is exactly what John is talking about here.

The word that he uses is *bios*, meaning "life"—not in the sense of *being* alive, but in the resources needed to *maintain* life. He is literally referring to the means of subsistence—food, clothes, medicine, shelter, jobs, transportation, etc.

And what's funny about this word is that we have seen it before, but in a totally different context. John uses it in 2:16 when he says, "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of *life*—is not from the Father but is from the world." John opposes loving worldly possessions or taking pride in them. Instead, he commands us to use them to help other people. In other words, material possessions in themselves are not "bad" or wrong; it is *loving* them and taking *pride* in them that he condemns. But material possessions in the hands of a generous Christian can change the world.

Just as Jesus gave up his life for us, so also we should give up our lives for others. And this includes giving up material possessions when we see someone in need and we know that we are able to meet that need.

14. What needs have you seen over the last few weeks?

15. Were you able to meet those needs? Has God been calling you to meet those needs, but you haven't gotten around to it yet?

16. In what ways can you take your children, your family, or your friends alongside you to meet the needs of others?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

- ❖ Today was a long day. But hopefully a good one. If you have never memorized verse 16, do that right now.

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us,  
and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*

- ❖ Then close by praying through this old Puritan prayer.

*Thou God of my end,*

*Thou hast given me a fixed disposition*

*to go forth and spend my life for thee;*

*If it be thy will let me proceed in it;*

*if not, then revoke my intentions.*

*All I want in life is such circumstances*

*as may best enable me to serve thee in the world;*

*To this end I leave all my concerns in thy hand,*

*but let me not be discouraged,*

*for this hinders my spiritual fervency;*

*Enable me to undertake some task for thee,*

*for this refreshes and animates my soul,*

*so that I could endure all hardships and labours,*

*and willingly suffer for thy name.*

*But, O what a death it is to strive and labour,*

*to be always in a hurry and yet do nothing!*

*Alas, time flies and I am of little use.*

*O that I could be a flame of fire in thy service,*

*always burning out in one continual blaze.*

*Fit me for singular usefulness in this world.*

*Fit me to exult in distresses of every kind*

*if they but promote the advancement*

*of thy kingdom.*

*Fit me to quit all hopes of the world's friendship,*

*and give me a deeper sense of my sinfulness.*



*Fit me to accept as just desert from thee  
any trial that may befall me.  
Fit me to be totally resigned to the denial  
of pleasures I desire,  
and to be content to spend my time with thee.  
Fit me to pray with a sense of the joy  
of divine communion,  
to find all times happy seasons to my soul,  
to see my own nothingness,  
and wonder that I am allowed to serve thee.  
Fit me to enter the blessed world  
where no unclean thing is,  
and to know thee with me always.<sup>42</sup>*

- ❖ As you go about your day, listen to a song about God's sovereignty, like the classic hymn "Behold Our God" or the newer song "Only a Holy God" by CityAlight.
- ❖ Be sure to memorize 1 John 3:16.

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought  
to lay down our lives for the brothers.*

# Day 3

1 JOHN 3:19–24

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes;  
and I will keep it to the end.*

*Give me understanding, that I may keep your law  
and observe it with my whole heart.*

*Lead me in the path of your commandments,  
for I delight in it.*

*Incline my heart to your testimonies,  
and not to selfish gain!*

*Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;  
and give me life in your ways.*

*Confirm to your servant your promise,  
that you may be feared.*

*Turn away the reproach that I dread,  
for your rules are good.*

*Behold, I long for your precepts;  
in your righteousness give me life!*

Psalm 119:33–40

- ❖ Begin today by praying through the psalm above before turning to 1 John. Focus your thoughts on God and give him your full attention.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

- ❖ Read chapter 3.



## VERSE 19

We have talked a lot about how John refutes false teachings throughout this letter. That is clearly the main purpose of writing to these believers. They had been inundated with false doctrine—even some false believers—but John carefully and clearly disproves their heresy.

The other side of correcting false doctrine is affirming right doctrine (as we have seen him do constantly so far). And part of affirming right doctrine is assuring genuine believers of their salvation. Just think back to the affirmations he gives in chapter two:

*I am writing to you, little children,  
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.  
I am writing to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I am writing to you, young men,  
because you have overcome the evil one.*

As John corrects doctrine, he also assures the believers of their salvation. That is exactly what we see here. And the word he uses to describe their assurance means to set at ease or at rest *through convincing someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended*.<sup>43</sup> It is not only that John is putting their minds at rest; he also wants them to be convinced beyond a doubt that they are saved and that nothing will change that. He wants them to believe that so strongly that they *live* differently because of it—that they *act* differently because of it.

I think often that is probably easier said than done. Satan knows how to plant seeds of doubt and make us question our faith. He knows how easily we depend on our feelings, and we *feel* like God is distant from us or is angry with us or has abandoned us.

3. Do you ever struggle with doubts of your salvation? What do you think causes these doubts?

4. How do you fight against these doubts? What verses have you memorized (or need to memorize) to use during those times?

*(Later today, listen to "Christ Is Mine Forevermore" by CityAlight.)*

## VERSES 20–21

Verse 20 is a bit of a challenge. The Greek is a little unusual and could be understood in several different ways:

1. “Because if our heart condemns us, we know that God is greater than our heart.”
2. “Whenever our heart condemns us,” we continue to have confidence in him. In this reading, we could still distinguish two possibilities: (1) “We convince our heart before him whenever our heart condemns us, *because* God is greater,” or (2) “We convince our heart before him whenever our heart condemns us, *that* God is greater.”
3. “We convince our heart before him, that if our heart condemns us, that God is greater than our heart.”<sup>44</sup>

There is no way to decide conclusively between these options. But regardless of the strange grammar, we can still make sense of the meaning—especially in light of the surrounding context of love. While some see these verses as a full digression from the theme of love before and after them, we could equally take the opposite approach: John’s talk of love both before and after these verses helps us to understand what he means in verses 19–22.

So instead of interpreting “God is greater than our heart and knows everything” to mean that he is greater in condemnation and no one can stand against him as the righteous Judge, it seems better to understand the passage as assurance to believers that they have nothing to fear before God. In his sovereignty and omniscience, God is also love. And for believers, even though our hearts may torment us at times, we are covered in his mercy and righteousness and we have been forgiven of all sin. The fact that we love others and have fellowship with God is proof of our salvation.

So these verses can be understood as saying:

*The sense within us of a sincere love of the brethren, which is the sign of God's presence with us, will enable us to hold back the accusations of our conscience, whatever they may be, because God, who gives us the love, and so blesses us with his fellowship, is greater than our heart; and he, having perfect knowledge, forgives all on which the heart sadly dwells.<sup>45</sup>*

As genuine believers, when we read these verses, we should not view God's sovereignty and omniscience as a terrifying prospect. No, on the contrary, for us God's sovereignty and omniscience should console our hearts and dispel any doubts that lurk in our minds.

### **VERSES 22-24**

This interpretation flows seamlessly with John's next verses. *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.* John is clearly concerned with assuring the believers that they abide in God!

And what is remarkable about this assurance is the conclusion that John draws from it: *whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.* It is such a hard verse to believe, but John assures us that we receive whatever we ask for because we keep his commands.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Randy is my tech nerd. (Like, he builds his own computers kind of nerd.) He has terrible handwriting, and he always jokes that we don't need to write anymore because we have keyboards.

But teasing aside, we know there's something beneficial about writing by hand. We may not do it very often these days, but there is still something special about it. Look up the passages below and spend a few minutes writing them down by hand.

Matthew 7:7-11



Matthew 21:22

John 15:16

1 John 5:14–15

*What are you asking God to do right now?*

If I'm being honest, I often waste opportunities because I do not ask God to work powerfully in my life and in the lives of those around me. I want to grow in my walk with Christ, I want to understand the Bible more deeply, I want to become more gracious and loving, I want God to save my siblings—*but how often do I actually ask for these things?*

God promises that when we ask according to his will, he grants our requests. But I often waste these opportunities because I do not ask.

*What are you asking God to do right now?*

Do you believe that he will truly save your friends and your family if you ask him to? Do you believe that he can work miraculously in people who are hostile toward him, so you can actually have a productive conversation about faith? Do you believe that God can work powerfully in your marriage and heal wounds that you have been carrying for years?

*What are you asking God to do right now?*

- ❖ Maybe you had some answers to that last question. Or maybe you are wondering what God wants you to be asking for. Either way, stop right now and pray that God would bring to your mind the things that he wants you to be asking for.
- ❖ How are you going to remind yourself to be more diligent in asking for these things? Do you need to set reminders on your phone throughout the day? Do you need to schedule some days to fast? Do you need to ask a friend to be a prayer partner with you?

- ❖ Finish your study today by praising God for his goodness toward us. Pray through this Puritan prayer.

*When thou commandest me to pray for pardon, peace,  
brokenness,*

*it is because thou wilt give me the thing promised,  
for thy glory, as well as for my good.*

*Help me not only to desire small things*

*but with holy boldness to desire great things*

*for thy people, for myself,*

*that they and I might live to show thy glory.<sup>46</sup>*

# Spiritual Discipline

## RETREAT

For our discipline this week, we are going to practice *retreat*. Ok, now I know what you're thinking—I don't have time for that! But rest assured, we are not talking about a weekend getaway here. We are simply talking about the practice of making regular time in your life for God alone.

To *retreat* with God means to remove ourselves from the busyness and noise of life into a restful time of silence and solitude with him. It gives us an opportunity to talk to God and listen to him without the possibility of being interrupted by, *I don't know*, your kids, husband, laundry, work schedule, etc. Getting out of the house can also help get our minds away from the concerns of daily life and focus on God alone.

Think through some of these questions:

- What do you long for in your relationship with God?
- What makes it difficult for you to retreat with him?
- What do you normally do in your regular prayer? How would a retreat allow you to pray in a different way?
- Where does your mind tend to go when you pray?

### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- Where do you feel the closest to God? A dark, quiet place? In nature? Watching a sunrise or sunset? Find a place where you won't be interrupted. Think about going for a walk, to a park, to the lake, etc.

- Plan for as long as you are able. Maybe that will mean half a day. Maybe that will half an hour. Try for whatever is most realistic for you.
- Take your Bible and your journal if you want, but don't worry about "doing" anything. Simply focus on spending time with God.
- Meditate on these verses when you go.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.*

Psalm 23:1–3

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

Psalm 46:10

*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

Mark 1:35

*And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.*

Matthew 14:23

# Week 4



**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**1 JOHN 4**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE  
CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER**

**MEMORY VERSE**

**1 JOHN 4:10**

**IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE  
HAVE LOVED GOD BUT THAT HE  
LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE  
THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS.**

# Day 1

1 JOHN 4:1–6

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*O Lord our God, grant us grace  
to desire you with our whole heart,  
that so desiring we may seek and find you,  
and so finding you, may love you,  
and loving you, may hate those sins  
from which you have redeemed us.<sup>47</sup>*

Anselm

A few days ago, my prayer partner asked that I would pray for God to give her joy and excitement to read his word. I think that is a request we can all relate to at times—and perhaps especially now at the half-way point in our study. We never want our Bible reading to become tedious, but we want to study it with the joy and fervor that it deserves.

- ❖ Pray that God would fill you with a love for his word and enthusiasm to study it.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

- ❖ Read our text for today: 1 John 4:1–6.
- ❖ Much of it probably sounds familiar because this passage is closely connected with 2:18–25. Read that section again with 4:1–6 in mind.

1. What similarities exist between the two passages (words, phrases, themes, etc.)? What do you think is the greatest difference between them?

2. Think about the bigger picture of 1 John for a minute. How does 1 John 4:1–6 fit into John’s overall message and structure? How is it related to the verses immediately before and after it?

3. We have mentioned this before, but it is worth saying again. Part of good Bible reading is asking good questions about the text (and then finding answers to those questions). What questions do you have about 1 John 4:1–6?

## VERSES 1–3

Thinking of the big picture here, we know that John is writing to a group of believers who have been inundated with false teachers and false doctrine. It makes perfect sense that he encourages them to test the spirits instead of believing all of them. The word that he uses for *test* here means to make a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness.<sup>48</sup> What this means is that there is an obligation on the part of the believers to determine when a teacher is following the gospel and when they are not. In reality, we know that people do not always do this. I'm sure you and I both know people who readily accept messages just because they come from "Christian" teachers. (Maybe we have been these people ourselves before.) But being a Christian means *always* making a critical examination of teachers to make sure their message is from God.

John's reason for this is simple: many false prophets have gone into the world. Think about that for a minute. This was not some hypothetical or precautionary warning. This was a factual statement. False prophets *really* had gone out into the world. And if we think these false prophets had gone out to deceive unbelievers only, we must think again. John already stated in chapter 2 that many antichrists were part of the congregation before they left (and so revealed themselves not to be genuine believers). And Jesus also warned that false prophets were out to attack believers. In Matthew 7:15 he says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Both inside and outside the church, false prophets are out to attack believers. We *have* to be aware of this, and critically examine the teachers we listen to—not for the sake of being hypercritical or nit-picky, but because the Bible commands us to use our discernment.



If you do not have any standards yet, let me suggest a few. First, obviously, make sure their teaching is biblical. That implies that we must *know* the Bible, but also that the teaching must be saturated in the word. None of us have the time for shallow Bible teaching. Second, examine the qualifications of the teacher. What kind of training do they have that makes them qualified to teach on that subject? Have they been around long enough to be vetted by other quality teachers? Third, ask your pastor. It is always helpful to get suggestions (and perhaps warnings) from them. Fourth, *don't fall into the trap of only listening to a few people*. Diversify your influences. Expose yourself to other views. Make sure they are reliable teachers first, but challenge yourself to consider other perspectives.

These suggestions do not guarantee that every Christian influence will be entirely trustworthy, but they certainly the place to start.

When we look back at our passage, we should notice that John only gives one criterion for determining when a spirit is from God: *when they confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh*. In other words, they confess that he was fully and truly human. And the word that John uses for “confess” is more than simply acknowledging something in public. It means professing allegiance to Christ; it means claiming that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh and praising him as such.

John already said almost as much back in chapter 2. Think back to verses 22–23 where he says, “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.” In these verses, John teaches that those who are from God (the Father) confess that Jesus is also God (the Messiah, the Christ). Combining these two passages together, we have the most fundamental doctrine



about Christ—he is both fully God and fully human. Denying either is to deny Christ.

This is exactly what we talked about in the very first verses of chapter 1. At the time when John was writing this letter, some people believed that Jesus only *appeared* to be human (known as Docetism, from the Greek work *dokein*, which means “to seem”). John clearly combats this heresy by *repeatedly* affirming that Christ came in the flesh, and of course, that he was truly God as well. The two must go together.

And from the first century, from the very days of Jesus himself, people have been denying one (or both) of these truths. In fact, many people have claimed to follow Jesus while simultaneously denying either his humanity or his divinity. It happened in the first century and we better believe it is still happening now.

7. Can you think of any religions that claim to believe in Jesus and yet deny his humanity or his divinity?

*This is why John commands us to examine the spirits.* Blind acceptance of a message just because it comes from someone who claims to follow Jesus often leads to heresy. We *have* to be more discerning than that.

#### **VERSE 4**

Pause for a minute and read this verse again. We are probably well-familiar with it, which means that sometimes we can gloss over its nuances.

8. What exactly have we overcome?

9. What does it mean that God is “greater”?

Ok, I know I can be too critical at times. But I still think we have lost some of John’s tender and reassuring tone in our English translations of this verse. The fact that he does not transition smoothly with any conjunctions, plus the fact that he starts with an emphatic *you* in the Greek, impresses the intimacy and seriousness of his message here. It is almost like he is holding the face of a child with his hands, tenderly assuring them that Christ has overcome the world and they have Christ dwelling within them.

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, for *greater* is he who is in you than he who is in the world.”

What a verse to meditate on.

It takes us right back to Jesus’ words at the Last Supper with his disciples. In John 16:33 he says, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

What do we have to fear if Christ has conquered all? The only thing left to fear is Christ. And for those who believe in him, we do not fear his wrath and judgment; we only fear him with the holy awe of children who adore him.

We do not fear the false prophets that have gone into the world. We do not fear their false messages or the anxiety or panic or self-righteousness that they instill. We keep our eyes focused on Christ, and we remember that he has conquered *all*.

Calvin says of this verse,

Whatever contests we may have with the world and the flesh, a certain victory is to follow. Hard and fierce conflicts indeed await us, and some continually succeed others; but as by Christ’s power we fight and are furnished with God’s weapons, we even by fighting and striving become conquerors. As to the main subject of this passage, it is a great consolation, that with whatever wiles Satan may assail us, we shall stand through the power of God...

Therefore the Apostle reminds us that we become strong, not by our own power, but by that of God. He hence concludes, that we can no more be conquered than God

himself, who has armed us with his own power to the end of the world.<sup>49</sup>

If that does not warm your heart, I'm not sure what will. John's words here are powerfully reassuring. They tenderly quell any fear in our hearts. It is promises like these that we must remind ourselves of daily, since daily the world tells us the opposite.

## **VERSES 5-6**

We should pause to clarify that the "them" and "they" in these verses (and the previous verse) are the false prophets from verse 1. Throughout this whole passage, John presents a sharp contrast between them and believers. "They" and "us" are at complete odds. Why? Because of our *origin*. They are from the world, but *we are from God*.

And John reminds us that because they are from the world, the false prophets speak like the world and the world listens to them. We should never be surprised by this. John Stott says, "The world recognizes its own people and listens to their message, which originates in its own circle and reflects its own perspectives. This explains their popularity."<sup>50</sup> In their worldly minds, the worldly messages of the false prophets make sense. They simply circulate and reaffirm their own messages.

Believers, however, are from God. And through his Spirit, we can discern what is truth and what is error. John says, "Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us." Jesus said nearly the same thing in John 8:47: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

And while the message makes sense, the question we should ask ourselves here is what John means by "we" and "us" in this verse.

When he says, “We are from God,” we know that he refers to all believers because he affirms as much in verse 4 (“You are from God, little children”). And likely, the “us” also refers to all believers. Believers listen to other believers—not because we are authoritative or perfectly reliable, but because we recognize the Spirit of God in one another. We know that “people will gravitate to and have an affinity for that confession and teaching with which they are like-minded. Therefore one who affirms the world’s message is from the world, and, likewise, one who affirms the message that Christ came in the flesh is of God.”<sup>51</sup>

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

John mentions God 8 times and the world 6 times in this passage. His purpose in these verses is obviously to contrast these two opposites. As a summary, look through the passage again and write down what it teaches about those who are from God and those who are from the world.

From God

From the world

1. In what ways do you find yourself listening to the world?

2. How can you turn your ears to hear God instead during those times?

- ❖ Close today by praying that God would give you wisdom and discernment when it comes to the Christian teachers we follow in our lives. Pray that he would help you to listen to him and teachers from him instead of the world.

*Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing,  
to love what is worth loving,  
to praise what delights you most,  
to value what is precious in your sight,  
to hate what is offensive to you.*

*Do not let me judge by what I see,  
nor pass sentence according to what I hear,  
but to judge rightly between things that differ,  
and above all to search out and to do what pleases you,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>52</sup>*

Thomas a Kempis



# Day 2

1 JOHN 4:7-12

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

John 15:8-11

- ❖ Pray that God would give you wisdom as you read his word today. Pray that he would grow your understanding of his love and what it means to abide in him.

## TODAY ' S PASSAGE

- ❖ Read 4:7–21. Underline or mark every time John mentions love.
1. Write down the reasons that John gives throughout the passage for why we ought to love.

2. What does propitiation mean in verse 10? Where is the other time John mentions propitiation in 1 John?

3. What reason does John give for Christ becoming our propitiation?

4. John has three major sections on love: 2:7–11, 3:11–18, and here in 4:7–21. Look back at the passages in chapter 2 and 3 again. What similarities do you see between his messages on love? What differences or developments do you see?

## VERSES 7–8

It is easy to see the repetition of “love” in these verses. But in Greek, the opening statement is even more striking. You have probably heard of the word *agapē* before, and here we see it duplicated.

*Beloved, let us love. Agapētoij, agapomen.*

John’s emphasis is unmistakable. *Christians are to love one another.* And he immediately gives the reason why: love is from God. When he discusses love in chapter 2, it is in relation to the light. *Whoever loves his brother abides in the light* (2:10). In chapter 3, it is in relation to life and death. *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers* (3:14). But here in chapter 4, his discussion of love is founded on the very character of God. Love is *from God* (v. 7) and *God is love* (vv. 8, 16). He is the source and the spring of all love.

Of course, there are many people today who take this statement to mean that God accepts all people and all sin—because after all, he is *love*. But we know this is not true, and here is why. There are other statements throughout the Bible about what God is. He is spirit (John 4:24), he is light (1 John 1:5), he is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29), he is wrathful against all ungodliness (Rom 1:18), etc. And all of the assertions about God’s character are true at all times. In other words, God is not sometimes spirit or sometimes light; he is *always* both spirit *and* light. And the same is true with God being love. He is not *only* love, but he is love and wrath. He is both of these things at the same time. So we know that while he is love, he also intensely hates sin. Another way to say that would be to say that *love* intensely hates sin.

We also acknowledge that loving is not one of his many activities, but rather, his whole being. Being love itself, all of his activities are

done in love. When God saves, he saves in love. When God forgives, he forgives in love. And when God *judges*, he judges in love. John Stott explains, “If his judging is in love, his loving is also in justice. He who is love is light and fire as well. Far from condoning sin, his love has found a way to expose it (because he is light) and to consume it (because he is fire) without destroying the sinner, but rather saving him.”<sup>53</sup> So when we read that God is love, we know that it does not mean God lovingly condones all sin and evil; it means that God lovingly judges sin and God lovingly saves from sin.

Today, the world would say that whatever someone *feels* is best, is what is best for them. The Bible, on the other hand, constantly affirms that following God’s commandments are what is best for us. *God’s will* is what is best for us. And today, one of the most important messages that I want to communicate to you is that *God knows what is best for you because he loves you best.*

Let me say that again. *God knows what is best for you because he loves you best.*

When you are pouring your heart out to God, wondering why your kid is having so much trouble with school or friends or following him, wondering why your husband’s job is on the line or why his boss is so hostile toward his faith, wondering when your parents or your siblings or your friends are ever going to turn to Christ and leave their sin, remember that these things are not happening in your life by accident. You are experiencing them for a reason. It is not that his love has failed. It is not that he has stopped loving you. It is because he knows what is best for you and loves you dearly.

I know some of us need that reminder today. Because some of us are dealing with situations that really hurt. And we wonder why God would allow us to go through them. But the Bible teaches us

that God is love. And that means that he loves us. That means that he loves *you*. That means that he cares for every ounce of fear or anxiety or pain that is in your heart. And it means that he knows what is best for you. *God knows what is best for you because he loves you best.*

On the other hand, there is another message that some of us might need to hear today. John's message about God being love comes with a warning: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." If you feel a twinge of guilt when you read this verse, it might be time to own up to some of the attitudes in your heart.

Is there someone in your life who is driving you crazy right now? Maybe (just a hypothetical situation here) someone who keeps asking you to do things that they could be doing themselves? Someone whose obnoxious statements you keep replaying in your head? Someone you have to see soon even though you absolutely dread spending time with them?

*Spoiler: if you have any of these attitudes in your heart, you are not loving those people.*

I really struggled with this yesterday. Someone kept asking me to do something that they could have finished themselves in less time than it took to ask me. And all day long, I kept thinking of all the times when they have done this in the past and how helpless they are and how much they impose on others. And eventually—in my humility and patience—I finally cried out to God to change my heart and to help me love this person.

And let me tell you, *God is good*. Thank God that he does not leave us in our sin and our shame.

If there is someone whose comments you keep replaying in your head, whose presence you dread to be around, it is time to recognize that and ask God to help you love them.

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*

## **VERSES 9–10**

While verses 7 and 8 describe the essence of God’s character (“love is from God” and “God is love”), verses 9 and 10 reveal how God’s love has been manifested to us. In other words, John now explains what he means when he says that God is love.

Try a little activity with me here. These two verses reflect parallel structures, so let’s take a minute to identify them. For each verse:

- Put a box around “In this.”
- Underline what immediately follows “In this” (until the comma).
- Circle the first “that” that comes after the comma.

What do you see?

In both verses, John explains how God has shown his love for us—the first in how he revealed his love and the second in the essence of his love. Both verses depict how Christ died for us. Though they do not mention death or the cross, it is clear that this is what John has in mind. The only way we live is through Christ’s propitiatory death.

Both verses also describe how God sent Christ to the world. The first focuses on the incarnation and our need for spiritual life. The second focuses on the atonement and our need for Christ to die. In both verses, our true nature is revealed— *“Our act was to sin. God’s was to love and send.”*<sup>54</sup>



In verse 10, John gives a negative statement (“not that we loved God”) before the positive statement (“but that he loved us”) to emphasize that man, in his original sinful nature, does not and cannot love God. It is only after God renews and regenerates our hearts that we are able to love him in response. This is exactly what John goes on to say in verse 19: “We love because he first loved us.” It is only *because* he first loved us that we are able to love him back.

One of my favorite songs illustrates this biblical truth so well. It says, “If you had not loved me first, I would refuse you still.” I think it captures John’s point perfectly. Love is that God sent Christ to die for us in our sin, not that we loved God back after he transformed our hearts and resurrected our dead spiritual lives. Like Paul says in Romans 5:8, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

## **VERSES 11–12**

Some see John’s personal address to the believers here, *Beloved*, as an indication of a new paragraph. Others see the language of loving one another in verse 7 and 12 as the opening and closing of a paragraph. Wherever you decide to divide it, we see John coming full circle after his exhortation to love one another in verse 7. It is because God loved us in these ways (sending his Son, vv. 9–10) that we ought to love one another.

The language here probably reminds us of 3:16, where John says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” Like we talked about then, John says we *ought* to love one another. While this is not an outright command, there is an obligation, a sense of duty, that believers are called to. We could just as accurately translate this verse as, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also *must* love one another.” This only makes sense. If God is love, and God loved us

so much to send his Son, and in our new nature we reflect the nature of God, then of course we will love others like God does. It is a sure sign of our faith.

Though we cannot see God, we can see him reflected in our character. And that is exactly what John is highlighting here. The reason he does not give an outright command is because he is more focused on the evidence of our genuine faith than our obligation to love. Loving one another is proof that the unseen God lives in us.

And what's more, John adds that if we love one another, *his love is perfected in us*. The idea of anything being perfected in our imperfect human lives is hard to accept, but this is the natural conclusion of the passage. If God is love (vv. 7–8), and he loved us so much that he sent his Son (vv. 9–11), then this love is made complete when his people love one another (v. 12). John Stott says, “We are not to think of love only as constituting God’s eternal being and as historically manifested in the sending of his Son into the world. For God who is love and has loved still loves, and today his love is seen in and through our love.”<sup>55</sup> In this way, our love for God is perfected (or made complete) within us.

This is not the only time John talks about perfected love. In 2:5 he says, “But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.” He also mentions it in 4:17–18, where he says, “By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” So we see that perfected love is evident in our obedience (2:5), our love for others (4:12), and our confidence that we have nothing to fear on the day of judgment (4:17–18).



- ❖ Memorize 4:10. Find a way to practice it throughout the day.

*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

- ❖ Remember that song I mentioned earlier? It is “All I Have is Christ” by Sovereign Grace Music. Before you head back to your day, spend a minute praying through these lyrics. Listen to the song now and throughout the day if you can.

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ  
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

I once was lost in darkest night  
Yet thought I knew the way  
The sin that promised joy and life  
Had led me to the grave  
I had no hope that You would own  
A rebel to Your will  
And if You had not loved me first  
I would refuse You still

But as I ran my hell-bound race  
Indifferent to the cost  
You looked upon my helpless state  
And led me to the cross  
And I beheld God's love displayed  
You suffered in my place  
You bore the wrath reserved for me  
Now all I know is grace, hallelujah

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ  
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ  
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

Now, Lord, I would be Yours alone  
And live so all might see  
The strength to follow Your commands  
Could never come from me  
O Father, use my ransomed life  
In any way You choose  
O Father, use my ransomed life  
In any way You choose  
And let my song forever be  
My only boast is You

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ  
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

# Day 3

1 JOHN 4:13–21

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.*

1 Peter 1:22–23

- ❖ Pray that God would teach you through “the living and abiding word of God” today. Pray that he would help you focus your heart on him and remove any distracting thoughts.

## TODAY’S PASSAGE

- ❖ Read 1 John 4:7–21. Underline every time John says “abide” (or perhaps “live” or “dwell” in your translation).
1. Based on today’s reading, what does it mean to “abide” in God?

2. What do you think is John's purpose in writing this particular section? What is he trying to communicate here to the believers receiving his letter?





5. Read verses 13–21 again, looking critically at each word. What questions do you have about the text?

### VERSE 13

What did you think when you read this verse? John encourages his readers to know that they abide in God because of the Spirit he has given them. But.... how? How does the Spirit help us know that we abide in him? Is it merely his presence that comforts us and creates a sense of assurance within us? Or does the Spirit work in other way to give us a sense of assurance, like helping us to love others and therefore know we abide in God (v. 12) or teaching us the truth that Christ has come as our Savior (vv. 2, 6)?

Obviously, John does not answer the *how* in verse 13. But luckily for us, he discusses the role of the Spirit elsewhere in his letter. Look up the passages below and write down what the Spirit does in each one. (Remember from our discussion in chapter 2 that our “anointing” refers to the Holy Spirit.)

2:26–27

3:6

5:6–8

Each of these passages shows that the role of the Spirit that John has in mind is teaching and testifying to the truth about Christ. (To be clear, we know that the Spirit has functions other than testifying about truth of Christ, but this is the function that John seems to highlight most in his letter.) So when we read in 4:13, “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit,” we can understand John as saying that the Spirit gives us assurance *because* it testifies to the truth of Christ.

In other words, “because the Spirit teaches believers about the love of God expressed in the sending of the Son to be the Savior of the world (4:14), and because they believe that teaching, they may be assured that they dwell in God and God in them.”<sup>56</sup> This is exactly what Paul gets at in Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

#### **VERSE 14**

This verse should sound eerily familiar. John just said, “No one has ever seen God” in verse 12, and yet here he says, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son.” He deliberately repeats the word *seen* to make a point—and it almost makes you do a double take, doesn’t it? We have not seen *the Father*, but we have seen that *the Father sent his Son*. Invisible though he may be to us, we can still see him—and most importantly, *know him*—through his actions, and through the way he has revealed himself to us.

Notice, too, how this is the third time in chapter 4 that he has mentioned God sending his Son. Besides that, this verse is closely connected with the opening verses of 1 John, when he affirms the bodily incarnation of Christ and his physical testimony to it. What John is emphasizing here is the very core of the gospel: Jesus really was God, the Christ, in human form, who died as the Savior of the

world—and he and the other believers testify to it as eyewitnesses.

(Have we mentioned yet that John was fighting against heresy that had spread throughout this congregation?)

He is constantly affirming the core message of the gospel. And he is constantly affirming the believers of their genuine salvation. *This* is the heart of 1 John.

### **VERSE 15**

And John continues this gospel message into verse 15. There is nothing more foundational than the confession that Jesus is the Son of God. And, like we just talked about, John combines this affirmation of the gospel with an affirmation that the believers truly abide in God.

But it is not just that he affirms that the believers abide in God, he also affirms that *God abides in the believers*. He goes out of his way to repeat this truth by giving the inverse statement. This is the third time that he has done this (3:24, 4:12, 4:15).

6. Why do you think John bothers to include this detail three separate times?

## VERSE 16

One thing that struck me about this verse is that John says we have come to *believe* the love God has for us. That seems like a strange thing to talk about *believing* love. John has talked about coming to *know* love plenty of times—we know love because God sent his Son, we know love because we are called children of God, we know love because we know God and he is love, etc. But why does John say that we have come to *believe* love?

I have noticed that some translations have opted to say “we rely” on the love God has for us, but I don’t think this does justice to the text in two ways. First, the word that John uses for “believe” means, well, you guessed it, *to believe*. It means to consider something to be true and worthy of one’s trust—to be *fully convinced* of it.<sup>57</sup> And while belief implies a sense of reliance, what John is highlighting here is our full confidence and assurance in the love that God has for us. We have an unwavering conviction that God truly loves us—that he loves so much that he sent his own Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Second, John uses the perfect tense (*we have come to believe*), not the present tense (*we believe*, or “we rely”). This is significant because it indicates the development that has occurred in our faith. We started in a natural state of no knowledge or belief in God’s love. After God saved us, we understood and believed his love. But we didn’t stop there—we have continued to grow in our knowledge and our belief. It is a continual process. As Westcott says, “We have perceived the divine love. To a certain extent we have realized what it is, but we have not exhausted its meaning.”<sup>58</sup>

So when John says, “We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us,” it reminds us of the journey that has led us to our current faith. It reminds us of the sacred history we have with our God. It reminds us of the unwavering conviction and

assurance we have in his love for us. It reminds us that we are not forgotten or despised or abandoned by him. No, on the contrary, we are loved more than we know now, and every day we spend on this earth, we will continue to understand and believe in God's love for us more and more.

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:31–39

## **VERSE 17**

By now, we have seen John say “by this” (or “in this”) plenty of times. It is an easy phrase to gloss over, but we should take a moment to think through what it means. What exactly does “this” refer to?

Well, it could refer to the previous statements about the mutual abiding between God and the believer. This would be a natural reading of the passage. If God is love, and if we abide in him and

he in us, then love would indeed find its full expression and “perfection” in that mature love in the believers.

It could also refer to the final clause of the verse (“because as he is so also are we in this world”) and provide the reason for the perfected love.<sup>59</sup> It would mean that love is perfected in us “because as he is so also are we in this world.” But this begs the question... *what on earth does “as he is so also are we in this world” mean?* (Maybe I wasn’t the only one who thought that when reading this verse.) But what John is referring to is our likeness to Christ. Even though he has ascended into heaven, his disciples are still in the world and they reflect his character. Therefore, John is not saying that we have achieved his perfection, but that “we stand in relation to God the same way that Christ does, and in this way we are like him.”<sup>60</sup> So we have nothing to fear from the Judge, because we are counted with Christ’s righteousness—for God, the Just, is satisfied to look on him and *pardon me*. Understood in this way, love is perfected in us because we reflect the character of Christ in the world.

## VERSE 18

Maybe you felt like this verse was a little out of place. (I know I sure did.) This is the only time John mentions fear—and he mentions it *four times*, no less. The connection with the surrounding verses is not fear—obviously, since this is the only verse where he mentions it. The connection is love. And John’s point here is that fear and love are mutually exclusive. In fact, we may translate the verse as, “There is no fear in love,” but John is even more forceful than that. He emphasizes fear by opening with it: “Fear is not in love.”

Why is that important? Because children of God have nothing to fear! What is there to fear in life besides the judgment and punishment of God? And since believers “have confidence for the

day of judgment” (v. 17) because Christ is our propitiation (v. 10), we know there is no punishment for us. If fear has to do with punishment, and we have no punishment, then we have no fear. Instead, we have opposite of fear. We have the love of God.

That is the argument that John is making.

And it makes me cringe a little to read this verse, because I am confronted with how often love is not perfected in me. *Because I fear.* I fear that God is disappointed in me when I don’t spend time praying in the morning. I fear that he is judging me when I don’t read my Bible (or read it “sincerely” enough) that day. I fear that even though I have asked God’s forgiveness for how I was rude to a stranger at the grocery store or how I cut off a slow driver on the road, he is still upset with me and hasn’t quite let it go yet. I fear that I am way too lazy in my faith and there are a million more ways that I could be a better Christian.

And it sounds absolutely ridiculous to acknowledge these subconscious attitudes on paper. My head reads this and thinks, “*That’s absurd.*” But if I’m being honest, it’s often how I feel.

And I ask myself why. *Why do I fear? What do I have to fear?*

Fear stems from unbelief. Fear is like telling God, “*I don’t trust you to take care of this.*” Calvin says it like this, “It is owing to unbelief when any one fears ... for the love of God, really known, tranquillizes the heart.”<sup>61</sup> If we love God perfectly, we also trust him perfectly. We trust that he has truly forgiven us. We trust that we will stand before him one day fully confident that Christ has paid our debt. We trust that we are truly his children—and because of that, we have nothing left to fear.



We also know that we will never be *entirely* perfect in this life, but even

*though fear is not wholly shaken off, when we flee to God as to a quiet harbor, safe and free from all danger of shipwreck and of tempests, fear is really expelled, for it gives way to faith.*

*Then fear is not so expelled, in that it assails our minds, but it is so expelled that it does not torment us nor impede that peace which we obtain by faith.<sup>62</sup>*

## **VERSE 19**

When we read this verse, we should instantly be reminded of verse 10. John uses the exact same words in both verses: *he loved us*. While in verse 10 he uses them to describe the essence of God's love (that he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins), here he uses them to characterize believers (as ones who love) and to explain the reason for that characteristic (because he first loved us). Notice how there is no object of the verb. He does not say we love *him* or we love *God*. He simply says *we love*. He states this as a fact. Believers *love*. It's what we do.

And we only do it because he first loved us. Once again, John makes it clear that we are unable to love (or do any spiritual good for that matter) on our own. It is only because God loved us first that we are able to love in turn. His came first—and “*all true love is a response to his initiative.*”<sup>63</sup>

Our true nature is to fear. But our new nature is to love.

## **VERSES 20–21**

And after John gives this principle in verse 19, he then draws out two consequences of it in verses 20 and 21. The first is that no one can love God while hating his brother (v. 20). The second, similarly,

is that Christ has commanded that whoever loves God must also love his brother (v. 21).

This is the fifth and final time that John mentions hate in this letter. In four of the five times, he is talking about hating a brother. (I mean, the phrase almost sounds instinctive by now, doesn't it? I say "hate," you say "his brother.") Look at the ways that he uses it.

2:9      Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

2:11     But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

3:15     Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

4:20     If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

*Are you starting to get the way that John feels about hating a brother?*

He is constantly urging his readers to love. And he is constantly affirming that God is love, and love is from God, and those who genuinely love God will naturally love others.

*Is that setting in yet?*

Because if we are not careful, it becomes easy for us to say we love God but neglect to love our brothers and sisters. We might not outright *hate* them, but Satan is very skilled in planting seeds of

hatred in our hearts. We replay their words repeatedly in our minds and criticize everything they say. We dwell on all their shortcomings and all the ways that they have wronged us in the past. We tell others about their mistakes and weaknesses—maybe disguised as simply relaying facts or asking for prayer requests, but we intentionally share their mistakes nonetheless.

7. *In what ways do you harbor those seeds of hatred in your heart?*

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

John 15:12–17



3. What specifically are you going to pray for so that you may trust God more in these areas?

*Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;  
I will protect him, because he knows my name.  
When he calls to me, I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and honor him.  
With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation.*

Psalm 91:14–16

# Spiritual Discipline

## CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

Ten years ago, I had a friend from church who would often stop mid-conversation to pray for whatever we were talking about. Sometimes she would even pray for me in a voicemail if she knew I needed it that day. She just prayed whenever there was a need. She didn't wait until her quiet time. She didn't say, "I'll be praying for you." She simply stopped and prayed. And I admired that *tremendously*.

So today we will focus on practicing *conversational prayer*. Just as it sounds, this discipline means praying with others in the midst of our conversations—almost like carrying on our conversation together through prayer with God.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever said you will pray for someone and then forgot to actually do it?
2. Have you ever had someone stop in the middle of a conversation and pray for you? What was that like?



# Week 5



**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**1 JOHN 5**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

**TEACHABILITY**

**MEMORY VERSE**

**1 JOHN 5:14-15**

**AND THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT WE  
HAVE TOWARD HIM, THAT IF WE ASK  
ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL HE  
HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE  
HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE  
KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS THAT  
WE HAVE ASKED OF HIM.**

# Day 1

1 JOHN 5:1–5

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Oh how I love your law!  
It is my meditation all the day.*

Psalm 119:97

- ❖ Start your devotional time today by praying that God would increase your love for his law, and that he would help you meditate on it all the day long.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

- ❖ Read chapters 4 and 5 today.
1. How is 5:1–5 connected with the section before it?

2. Would you say that it is distinct from that section or a continuation of it? Why?

3. Being born of God is obviously a theme that John discusses throughout the letter. He uses that word ten times throughout six different verses. Look up these verses and write down what characteristics they give for those who have been born of God.

2:29

3:9

4:7

5:1

5:4

5:18

4. While these verses emphasize the characteristics or signs of someone who has been born of God, John uses this phrase in his Gospel to describe how someone becomes born of God (or born of the Spirit). Look up John 1:12–13 and 3:1–8. What do these two passages teach about being born of God?

5. What kind of questions or observations do you have about our passage for today?

## VERSE 1

I'll be honest, the Greek in this verse really tripped me up. John uses the verb for "beget" (or "being born of") three different times. Literally, he says, "All who believe that Jesus is the Christ have been begotten of God, and all who love the one who begets love the ones begotten of him." Kind of a mouthful, right? But the clumsiness of the verse serves a purpose. John keeps repeating being "born" of God to emphasize how (1) believing that Jesus is the Christ, (2) being born of God, and (3) loving those born of God are all one in the same.

Take your mind on a quick trip back to high school. (Sounds fun, I know.) What John is doing here is giving two syllogisms. And we all remember that a syllogism is a form of reasoning where a conclusion is drawn from two given principles. (Like, if A is C and B is A, then B is C.) Plummer draws out John's syllogisms like this:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God.  
Every child of God loves its Father.

Therefore everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ  
loves God.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ loves God.  
Everyone who loves God loves the children of God.

Therefore everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ  
loves the children of God.<sup>64</sup>

(Just to make this clear, in case John hasn't already, *believers love God and love others.*)

## VERSE 2

If we looked at this verse carefully, we should have raised a question. How is love for *others* demonstrated in loving *God* and keeping his commandments? Well, once again, John is arguing that

love for others is founded on love for God. (Seems like he may have mentioned that before.) In fact, we *just* talked about this in 4:18! *We love because he first loved us.* Loving God naturally means that we will love others.

And we also know that keeping his commands involves loving others. John just said this too in 4:21! *And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

So love for God and love for others cannot be divided. They are always interconnected. Love for God without love for others is not real love at all. And likewise, love for others without love for God is not real love—*for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God (4:7).*

### **VERSE 3**

To understand this verse, we need to discuss what “love of God” means. It seems pretty straightforward, but we have mentioned this issue before. “Love of God” could refer to God’s love for us or our love for God. In this context, it is clear that it must be the latter. Our love for God is demonstrated in the fact that we keep his commands.

I honestly can’t read this verse without thinking back to all of the different ways that David expresses his love for God through his obedience to his commandments. Just look at Psalm 119:47–48:

*For I find my delight in your commandments,  
which I love.  
I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I  
love,  
and I will meditate on your statutes.*

Beyond expressing his love for God’s commandments, David also shows that obedience is a lifestyle—a continual process. And this is exactly what John is getting at here too. The word that he uses for “keep” is the same one we discussed back in 2:3–5 (and the same one he uses in 3:22–24). It does not simply refer to “the keeping of the commandments of God, but rather a continuous and watchful endeavor to observe them.”<sup>65</sup> It means *to persist in obedience*.<sup>66</sup> It is a continuous habit, a way of life. It is the Christian walk.

But lest anyone misunderstand, John clarifies that Jesus’ commands *are not burdensome*.

Isn’t that such a heartwarming statement? This has to be one of my favorite verses in 1 John—especially since John has been almost all business so far. I mean, let’s not forget that he didn’t even include a greeting when he started the letter. He just got straight to work. And he goes after false teachings with a seriousness and an urgency that is felt throughout the letter.

But there are a few moments where the weight of those concerns seems to be lifted, where John uses such beautiful language to communicate the depths of God’s love for us. And I think he does that here. Without using the word for love, John expresses the way that God feels towards us. He expresses the tenderness and gentleness that he has for us.

*Our God knows how fragile we are.* He knows our weaknesses and our limitations. And he has given us commands that are not *burdensome*.

What a wonderful God we serve.

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle*



*and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Matthew 11:28–30

## **VERSES 4–5**

Look back at verses 3 and 4 again. Notice how both of them begin with “For.” Now, this is nearly impossible to see in most of our English translations, but in Greek, those are two different words. The one that John uses to begin verse 4 indicates the *reason* for what came before. This is important, because it means that verses 4 and 5 offer the explanation for *why* God’s commandments are not burdensome.

His commandments are not burdensome *because we have overcome the world*. It is not only that his commands are not overbearing, but also because we have the victory of Christ within us that enables us to keep his commands.

And at the risk of sounding over critical here, some of the Greek word play is lost in translation. (To be fair, this is not the translators’ fault; it’s English’s fault.) John uses the same word for “overcome” four times in these verses—three times in verse 4 alone.

And what’s interesting is that the word he uses is *nike*. Sound familiar? Yep, this is the Greek word for *victory*—and for the Greek goddess of victory. The problem is that in English we do not have a verbal form of “victory.” (That’s a real head-scratcher.) So we have to use other words to communicate the action of gaining a victory. Instead, we might say *to overcome* someone, *to vanquish* them.

Otherwise, an overly complicated (but very literal) translation of these verses might read, “Because all who have been born of God have gained victory over the world. And this is the victory which has gained victory over the world: our faith. Who is the victor over

the world if not the one who believes that Jesus is the son of God?”

Ok, I know what you're all thinking at this point. *I should not become a Bible translator.* Point taken. But this is the wordplay that we see in the Greek.

*Do you think John is trying to emphasize something here? We have victory over the world! And when John says “world,” he means the world which is lost in sin, which is wholly depraved and hostile toward God (like we discussed back in 2:15–17). As believers, we have overcome this sinful world. We have victory over it.*

Sometimes we let ourselves be overcome by anger or discouragement or anxiety at all the evil and insanity of the world. Sometimes it seems like all they have all the power and we can do nothing about it. Sometimes it seems like we have already lost the battle. *But do not let yourself believe the world's message that it has won.* The world has not won. *Christ* has won. *Christ* has victory over the world—and we also have victory through him! We cannot let ourselves be swayed by the message that we see in the world. We must remind ourselves of the truth through Scripture.

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Romans 8:37

I love the way John Calvin explains these verses:

This passage is remarkable: for though Satan continually repeats his dreadful and horrible onsets, yet the Spirit of God, declaring that we are beyond the reach of danger, removes fear, and animates us to fight with courage. And the past time is more emphatical than the present or the

future; for he says, *that has overcome*, in order that we might feel certain, as though the enemy had been already put to flight. It is, indeed, true, that our warfare continues through life, that our conflicts are daily, nay, that new and various battles are every moment on every side stirred up against us by the enemy; but as God does not arm us only for one day, and as faith is not that of one day, but is the perpetual work of the Holy Spirit, we are already partakers of victory, as though we had already conquered.

This confidence does not, however, introduce indifference, but renders us always anxiously intent on fighting. For the Lord thus bids his people to be certain... He declares that they have already overcome, in order that they may fight more courageously and more strenuously.<sup>67</sup>

This is the encouragement that John gives his readers. And just as they were conquerors over the false teachers and the evils they faced in their day, so also are we conquerors over the evil we face today.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

John says that God's commands are not burdensome.

1. What impact does this have on your daily life and activities?

Today we read Matthew 11:28–30:

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

2. What kind of burdens are on your mind today? What is weighing heavy on your heart?

Leave your worries with God. Pray that he would give you peace and help you to trust him more in these areas. Pray that he would help you to see how his commands are not burdensome and how we have victory over the troubles of the world.

*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

John 16:33

# Day 2

1 JOHN 5:6-12

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Forever, O LORD, your word  
is firmly fixed in the heavens.  
Your faithfulness endures to all generations;  
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.  
By your appointment they stand this day,  
for all things are your servants.  
If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.  
I will never forget your precepts,  
for by them you have given me life.

Psalm 119:89-93

- ❖ Praise God that his word is firmly fixed in the heavens forever. Pray that his law would be your delight. Pray that he would give you life today through his word.



3. What does John mean by “the water and the blood”?

### VERSE 6

Between verses 6 and 12, John uses the word *testimony* or *testify* no less than ten times. Obviously, this *testimony* is the main focus of this passage. And while John does not actually identify what that testimony is until verse 11, he does identify *who* testifies to it in verses 6–7.

He says that Jesus came by water and blood. This water and blood, along with the Spirit, are the ones who testify. At which point we ask ourselves... *What on earth does that mean?*

It seems likely that John and his readers were familiar with this phrase (“water and blood”), which is not so familiar to us today. So there are a few different ways to interpret it. But before we get to



those interpretations, let's point out some details in these verses that will help guide our understanding.

First, the opening word, "*This*," refers to the statement in verse 5 that Jesus is the Son of God. His full title at the end of verse 6 as "Jesus Christ" also emphasizes the truth of this statement and expresses his divine office.

Second, John refers to Jesus as "he who came." He uses the past tense to denote a completed action. In other words, he is referring to a specific, historic event in the life of Jesus. But beyond this, the sense of "he who came" also points to definite events through which Christ fulfilled his office on earth. That he came, and was shown to be the Christ, and did so by water and blood, indicates that the "water" and the "blood" somehow reveal the nature and fulfillment of his work.<sup>68</sup> So his coming by water and blood does not refer to any ordinary events—*as if there was such a thing in the life of Christ*—but to events that specifically fulfilled his mission and ministry on earth.

Third, John goes on to add that he came "not by the water only but by the water *and the blood*." So there was something about the blood that must have been disputed in order for John to emphasize its inclusion. Knowing that John wrote this letter to combat heresies about Christ—specifically heresies about him not being fully human or not being the Christ—it is possible that this emphasis on blood serves to confirm Christ's genuine humanity

Whatever our interpretations are, they must be guided by these details in the text. So, with these in mind, let's look at some interpretations. While there are several that have been proposed, there are two main views that have stood the test of time. And to understand them, we will need to first look up and read the passages below:

1. John 19:34–35
2. Matthew 3:16–17

The first passage has the most obvious connections with our verses in 1 John. (Perhaps you even thought of this passage when you read “water and blood.”) Not only does it mention blood, water, and testimony together, but it was even written by John. It also meets the requirement of referring to a major event in the fulfillment of Christ’s role on earth. There are, however, some problems with this view. First, our passage in 1 John says that Jesus *came* by water and blood, but how could Jesus have come by water and blood if the water and blood came out of him? Second, we can also see how the testimony is different in both passages. In the Gospel, it is John who testifies about the water and the blood, but in 1 John, it is the water and the blood that testify about Christ. Third, the blood is just as much a part of this passage as the water, so it fails to account for why John emphasizes the role of the blood here in 1 John.

The second passage seems to offer the best explanation and is followed by most scholars. Jesus’ baptism represents the beginning of his ministry, so to say that he “came by water” (in reference to his baptism) would make perfect sense. But as we know, John also specifies that it was not by water only, but also by blood. This reference we would take as his crucifixion, which of course, marks the end of his ministry. This serves to combat the false teachings about Jesus in two ways. First, the reference to blood (and therefore the crucifixion) reinforces the fact that Jesus was genuinely human. Second, it reinforces the fact that Jesus’ blood was more than just blood—it was the propitiation for our sins. This is the sense in which John uses “blood,” as he shows in the one other passage of 1 John where he mentions it. In 1:7, he says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

In this way, we can understand “the water and the blood” as referring to two of the most crucial acts of Jesus’ life and ministry. And of these two, it was the truth of the crucifixion that the false teachers denied, and therefore John was compelled to reaffirm.

Stop for a minute and think about this from his perspective. On the second day of our study, we looked up several passages in his Gospel to help us to understand the experiences that made him who he is. This is the John who witnessed Jesus’ face shine like the sun at his transfiguration. This was the John who was sent to prepare the upper room for the Last Supper. This was the John who leaned back on Jesus and asked which disciple would betray him. This was the John who watched that betrayal be fulfilled as Judas approached Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. This was the John who fled with all the disciples after Jesus was arrested. This was the John who stood watching as Jesus died on the cross. This was the John who outran Peter to the empty tomb.

There is no way that John is going to allow people to deny the truth about Jesus.

### **VERSES 7–9**

Once again, we have a verse that starts with “For.” That should tell us that this verse probably offers an explanation for what came before it. And that is exactly what we see here. The Spirit is true *for* —*because*—there are three that testify, and these three are in full agreement.

So why does this matter? Excellent question.

4. Look up Deuteronomy 17:6 and 1 Timothy 5:19, then write down how these verses help explain 1 John 5:7–9.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, three witnesses constitute a full and trustworthy testimony. The great irony is that those who testified against Jesus before the Council did not even agree (Mark 14:56–59), and yet they still put him to death! Their testimony was false and contradictory, but the people still accepted it. But the testimonies of the Spirit and the water and the blood are true and in full agreement. Their testimony is wholly trustworthy.

#### **VERSE 10**

And this testimony dwells within us as believers. Unbelievers can see this externally, but we experience it internally. Though we believed when we were saved, we have ongoing assurance, through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, that God has given us eternal life in his Son. There are times when we have

questions, and there are times when Satan tries to make us doubt, but the Spirit works in us to testify to the truth. God has saved us, and we have eternal life through his Son.

The other day after dinner, we read about Jesus' temptation for our Bible story. When we were finished, Randy asked Hadley what Jesus used against Satan's temptations. She had no idea. (Clearly the story made an impression.) We talked about what Scripture is and how we can use it when we are tempted to do wrong things.

And it is funny how teaching children ends up teaching us too. Sometimes we are the ones who need to be reminded of these truths. We are the ones who need to be reminded to use Scripture when we are tempted—even when that temptation is to doubt that we are children of God. Perhaps *especially* when that temptation is to doubt that we are children of God. *Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.* We can be assured of our salvation because we have the testimony of God within ourselves.

We have already talked about having verses memorized to use during those times of doubt, and we have also talked about how helpful it is to write things out by hand. Maybe you have already memorized verses for this, or maybe you still need to memorize some. Whatever your situation may be, look up these verses and write them out by hand below.

Romans 8:16

### VERSES 11–12

Throughout this section, John has been describing the testimony, and here he finally identifies what that testimony is: *that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

It is easy to think of eternal life as unending time (at least, that is what I was always taught). But what John means by “eternal life” is Christ himself—Christ *is* the eternal life. In 5:20, he says, “And we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. *He is the true God and eternal life.*” In 1:2 he says, “We proclaim to you *the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.*” Christ is eternal life; eternal life is Christ. So when the Spirit testifies that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son, the Spirit testifies that *we have Christ in us and we are children of God.*

Let there be no doubt in your mind—if you believe in Christ, *you are a child of God and he abides in you.*

Think about all the ways that John has assured his readers of this already!

*But you have been anointed by the Holy One (2:20).*

*But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you (2:27).*

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (3:1).*

*Beloved, we are God's children (3:2).*

*Little children, you are from God and have overcome them (4:4).*

*We are from God (4:6).*

*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit (4:13).*

*So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us (4:16).*

We are the children of God. Do not let Satan tell you otherwise.

When he starts to whisper lies in your head, bring out these verses. Listen to songs that repeat these biblical truths. Ask God to protect you, strengthen your faith, and meditate on what it means to be a child of God.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

1. How did God teach you through his word today? What impacted you the most and why?



2. Back in week 3, we talked about memorizing verses that assure us of our salvation. Have you done that yet? If so, write out the verse(s) below. If not, go choose a verse or two and write them out. Then make a plan for how you are going to memorize them (by song, Bible Memory app, etc.).

3. Before you close today, spend a few minutes praying that God would open your eyes to see all of the wonderful blessings that come from the fact that you are a child of God.

*Almighty God,*

*I am loved with everlasting love,  
clothed in eternal righteousness,  
my peace flowing like a river,  
my comforts many and large,  
my joy and triumph unutterable,  
my soul lively with a knowledge of salvation,  
my sense of justification unclouded.  
I have scarce anything to pray for;  
Jesus smiles upon my soul as a ray of heaven  
and my supplications are swallowed up in praise.  
How sweet is the glorious doctrine of election  
when based upon thy Word  
and wrought inwardly within the soul!  
I bless thee that thou wilt keep the sinner  
thou hast loved,  
and hast engaged that he will not forsake thee,  
else I would never get to heaven.  
I wrong the work of grace in my heart  
if I deny my new nature and my eternal life.  
If Jesus were not my righteousness and redemption,  
I would sink into nethermost hell  
by my misdoings, shortcomings, unbelief, unlove;  
If Jesus were not by the power of his Spirit  
my sanctification,  
there is no sin I should not commit.  
O when shall I have his mind!  
when shall I be conformed to his image?  
All the good things of life are less than nothing*

*when compared with his love,  
and with one glimpse of thy electing favor.  
All the treasures of a million worlds could not  
make me richer, happier, more contented,  
for his unsearchable riches are mine.  
One moment of communion with him, one view  
of his grace,  
is ineffable, inestimable.  
But O God, I could not long after thy presence  
if I did not know the sweetness of it;  
And such I could not know except by thy Spirit  
in my heart, nor love thee at all unless thou didst  
elect me, call me, adopt me, save me.  
I bless thee for the covenant of grace.<sup>69</sup>*

- ❖ Listen to “Saved My Soul” by CityAlight today, and praise God through the lyrics.

# Day 3

1 JOHN 5:13-21

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the LORD is clean,  
enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Psalm 19:7-11

- ❖ Pray that God would fill you with love for his word today. Pray that it would cause your heart to rejoice and enlighten your eyes.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

❖ Read 1 John 5:13–21.

1. What are your observations about this section? What do you notice about the style, argument, structure, etc., in these verses?

2. Look closely at 5:13. If John confirms that his readers are genuine believers, why does he still want to assure them of their eternal life?

3. What on earth is “sin that does not lead to death”?

## VERSE 13

When we were just beginning our study, we talked about John's purpose for the letter. We looked at all the instances where he gives a reason for his writing:

- 1:4 "And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."
- 2:1 "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."
- 2:26 "I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you."

But perhaps more than all of these, this verse presents the most significant reason for the book: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.*

We know this group of believers had deceivers who were spreading false doctrine among them. Although these people left the church (2:26), they had deeply shaken the faith of the true believers. And through the process of confirming the truths about Christ that the believers had originally known, John seeks to confirm that they truly have Christ—the eternal life, their advocate, and their propitiation.

And what is remarkable is that John affirms these people are true believers, *and yet he still reassures them of their salvation.* In other words, though they already had faith, there was still room for deeper faith. John Calvin wrote, "As there ought to be a daily progress in faith, so he says that he wrote to those who had already believed, so that they might believe more firmly and with greater certainty, and thus enjoy a fuller confidence as to eternal life."<sup>70</sup> That is precisely what the Christian life is—a process of ever-growing faith and trust in our God.

And it is because of this that we never stop learning about him. We commit our lives to the study and the meditation and the memorization of his word. Calvin goes on to say, “It therefore becomes us assiduously to attend to the duty of learning, that our faith may increase through the whole course of our life.”<sup>71</sup>

Most of you have heard of Wayne Grudem, who was one of our theology professors at Phoenix Seminary. Not only is he a well-known theologian and author, but he was also a translator on the oversight committee for the ESV. Out of all the books he has written (and there are *quite a few*), he has only written one commentary. He told us in class one day, quite seriously, that after he finished writing his commentary on 1 Peter, he felt like he was just starting to really understand it.

*This is the kind of humility and zeal we should have for studying the word of God.*

The Christian life is a never-ending process of growing and learning in our faith. There will be ups and downs, but through it all, we continue to increase in our faith and understanding.

4. It might seem like we just started our study, but the time always flies by. What are your plans for growing in your understanding of God’s word after Bible study is over?



## VERSES 14–15

John opens this verse with “and,” which is a good signal to us that he is adding on to what he just said. (To which you respond, *duh.*) But the significance of the “and” is that our eternal life is the basis for our confidence to ask God for anything. The fact that we *believe* in Christ means that we also *believe* that we can approach God with our requests.

This is not the first time John has said that God answers our prayers. In 3:22 he says, “And whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” The condition for answered prayer in that verse is whether our actions conform to his commands. In chapter 5, the condition for answered prayer is whether our prayer conforms to his will.

The problem, of course, is that we do not always know exactly what his will is. We know his general will through Scripture, but we may not know his specific will for our specific situations. This is where faith comes in. Faith trusts that God’s plan is best, and faith prays that his will be done no matter what our will may be. John Stott says,

Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will upon God, or for bending his will to ours, but the prescribed way of subordinating our will to his. It is by prayer that we seek God’s will, embrace it and align ourselves with it. Every true prayer is a variation of the theme “your will be done.”<sup>72</sup>

*Are your prayers characterized by asking for God’s will to be done?*

## VERSES 16–17

If anyone felt like John took an unannounced detour here, you are not alone. But there is a connection with the previous verses, and it lies in the word *ask*.

In verse 13, John gave us the guiding principle: we know we have eternal life. In verses 14–15, he makes a logical conclusion from this principle: we can ask God for anything according to his will. And now in verses 16–17, he gives us an example of what we should ask: if we see a believer sinning, we should pray for that person.

And to be specific, John uses the future tense here: *he will ask, and he will give him life*. It is not a command or even an exhortation to pray; instead, it is simply the given response of a genuine believer. Those who truly believe in God will inevitably pray for their brothers and sisters who are committing sins. And the given response of God is that he will give life.

Not every sin, however, should be prayed for. He does not forbid it, but he strongly discourages praying for “sin that leads to death.” So that leaves us to ask, *what on earth is this sin?*

Once again, we recognize that this was likely a phrase that John’s readers were familiar with. As modern readers, we do not have this familiarity, but we do have three ways to interpret the phrase.

1. *A specific sin*. In the Old Testament, sin was classified into lesser (unintentional) sins, which could be forgiven through sacrifice, and greater (deliberate) sins, for which the guilty person is cut off from the people. Numbers 15:27–31 says:

If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. And the priest shall make

atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven... But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.

This distinction was carried into the age of early Christianity by some of the church fathers.<sup>73</sup> The obvious problem, however, is that the New Testament never makes such a distinction. And because the New Testament never classifies sin in this way, we cannot understand John as referring to a specific sin.

2. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.* This sin, which the Pharisees committed (Matt 12:24, 32), was a deliberate rejection of what they knew to be true. They ascribed the works of the Spirit through Jesus as works of the devil. Jesus warned that “whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matt 12:32). Although this interpretation has no connection with the rest of 1 John, it certainly has biblical grounds in the Gospels.
3. *Apostasy.* Apostasy means a willful rejection of the gospel and a total abandonment of the faith. This would fit with the context of 1 John since we know that this community had people who were claiming to be believers, but who ultimately left the church and therefore revealed themselves to be unbelievers. Many people claim this interpretation contradicts John’s doctrine that genuine believers cannot lose their salvation (3:9, 5:18), but if we look closely at the text, John never says that these people are genuine believers (or “brothers”). He identifies the “brother” as committing a sin

which does not lead to death, but he does not identify anyone with the sin that leads to death. He simply states, “There is sin that leads to death.”

Which interpretation do you find most likely in the context? Why?

### **VERSES 18–21**

These next three verses, each of which begins with the same words, continue the theme of assurance from verse 13. Write down what “we know” in each verse.

v. 18

v. 19

v. 20

5. What is the significance of ending his letter by affirming each of these statements?

The continued talk about sin provides a smooth transition from the previous verses into these final verses. But beyond that, these verses serve as a summary of the main points of John's letter. He reaffirms that his readers that those born of God do not keep sinning (18), they are truly from God (19), and that Jesus is the Son of God (20).

Verse 18 once again reiterates that those who are born of God do not keep on sinning. How many different ways can John say this?

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin (2:1).*

*No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him (3:6).*

*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God (3:9).*

John has repeated this over and over again. We *know* that all who are born of God do not keep on sinning. The fact that he even describes them as being “born of God” indicates their new spiritual life and their departure from sin. Sin is incompatible with being born of God— “they may occasionally meet; they cannot live together in harmony.”<sup>74</sup>

But John also identifies a reason why they do not keep sinning: “he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” What an assurance it is to read that “the evil one does not touch” those who are born of God! The word for “touch” here means to touch specifically for the sake of injuring. Satan may tempt us, but he cannot touch us to the point of causing harm. And that is not the only blessing from God that we have in this verse. He not only protects us from the evil one, but he also enables us to not persist in sin.

And verse 19, once again, reminds us that we are truly children of God. We do not have to question our salvation, because John has reassured us over and over again. *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are* (3:1).

Verse 20 reaffirms the most important reason for the letter: that Jesus was fully God and fully man. That “the Son of God has come” is another way to say that Jesus was really a man and, at the same time, he was God the Son. We know that John wrote this letter to refute false teachings about Christ, and he closes it by reminding them once again of the truth about Christ. This is certainly a fitting conclusion for such an occasion.

The problem, however, is that he throws in one more comment after this statement about Christ. “Little children, keep yourselves

from idols.” What on earth does that have to do with anything we have talked about so far?

The connection I missed was that right before this, John says that Jesus is “the true God.” This, of course, stands in complete contrast to idols, which are physical representations of fake gods. Since John has not mentioned anything even related to idols in this letter, it seems best to understand “idol” as anything which would take God’s rightful place. This general understanding of an idol fits well with other instances in the New Testament (1 Thess. 1:9, Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5). It also fits well with the rest of John’s letter, given that the false teachers were claiming Jesus was not God. Whatever views they proposed in place of the truth certainly would have been idolatry, since they remove Jesus from his rightful place as God. So on first reading, “it may appear that John’s final address is somewhat anticlimactic, but in reality, it confirms a very important truth he has been establishing in this last section of the epistle and in the entire epistle itself: *Reject the false and embrace the real.*”<sup>75</sup>







Today we are going to close by reading these promises from Jesus. May they shape your prayers and drive you to ask God for bigger things according to his will.

*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

John 14:13–14

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

John 15:7

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

John 15:16

*Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

John 16:24

❖ Memorize 1 John 5:14–15.

*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

# Day 4

## READING 1 JOHN

### PREPARE YOUR HEART

*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

1 John 5:14–15

- ❖ Before you begin, praise God that he hears and answers your prayer. Whatever is on your heart today, pour yourself out to him. Feel free to write down your words below.

## **TODAY ' S PASSAGE**

- ❖ Over the last few weeks, we have examined the book of 1 John closely, going verse by verse. But we do not want lose sight of the forest by only looking at individual trees. Today, we will reread the book of 1 John, seeing how the individual verses fit into the book as a whole.
  
- ❖ When you are done reading 1 John, answer the questions below and spend some time reflecting on the book.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

1. What did you notice in 1 John today that you may have missed before?

2. What did God teach you through his word today? Write down the verses and their significance.

- ❖ How are you doing with your memory verses? Be sure to practice them today. Write them on index cards, recite them to yourself in the car, use a Bible memory verse app—do whatever works best for you to practice them.

1 John 1:5

1 John 2:2

1 John 3:1, 16

1 John 4:10

1 John 5:14-15

- ❖ Close today by thanking God for his word and for all that he has taught you over the last few weeks. Pray that he would continue to grow your faith, your understanding of him, and your diligence in prayer. Pray that he would bring to mind what we have learned in 1 John as you go about your week.

# Spiritual Discipline

## TEACHABILITY

That's right, our discipline for today is *teachability*. Sound strange? I thought so too, until I started reading about it and thought, *wow, I need to practice this.*

Practicing teachability means developing a spirit of humility that actively listens to God and those around you—even if they are not an authority or an expert.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Ask yourself...

1. Would people say you are someone who is willing to listen to other ideas?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Are you someone who is patient when other people share their perspective with you?





## **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

1. Start by praying that God would give you a teachable spirit. Pray that God would open your eyes throughout the week to see any ways that you feel the urge to correct, ignore, or talk over others.
2. Ask those closest to you how you come across. Do they say that you are someone who actively listens and is teachable? Do they say you tend to correct them? How do they feel about disagreeing with you?
3. When you have been hurt or angered because others did not listen to you or talked over you? Do you ever do that to others? In your conversations this week, be aware of when you feel compelled to give your opinion.

# Week 6

**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**2 JOHN**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

**PRAYER / READING PARTNER**

**MEMORY VERSE**

**2 JOHN 6**

**AND THIS IS LOVE, THAT WE WALK  
ACCORDING TO HIS COMMANDMENTS;  
THIS IS THE COMMANDMENT, JUST AS  
YOU HAVE HEARD FROM THE  
BEGINNING, SO THAT YOU SHOULD  
WALK IN IT.**

# Day 1

## 2 JOHN

### PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Who can tell what a day may bring forth? Cause me therefore, gracious God, to live every day as if it were to be my last, for I know not but that it may be such. Cause me to live now as I shall wish I had done when I come to die. O grant that I may not die with any guilt on my conscience, or any known sin unrepented of, but that I may be found in Christ, who is my only Savior and Redeemer.<sup>77</sup>*

Thomas a Kempis

### TODAY'S PASSAGE

Obviously, 2 and 3 John are extremely short books, so we are going to slow things down a bit. We will spend the first day of this week and the first day of next week examining the books as a whole and making as many discoveries as we can about them. Then we will spend some time reflecting on the past few weeks of the study and your spiritual goals from week 1.

- ❖ Before you read, stop to pray that God would help you understand the text and make connections across John's epistles. Pray that he would give you wisdom to understand how to apply John's words to your life today. Pray that he would give you a deep love and excitement for reading his Scripture.
- ❖ Read 2 John.

As with anything worthwhile, examining 2 John will take some time—so don't rush through these questions. Consider them thoughtfully and continue to pray that God speak to you through his word as you answer them.

1. Write down all of the words, phrases, or themes in 2 John that John also used in 1 John. Be sure to record the corresponding reference too.

Theme

1 John

2 John



2. What new topics did John bring up in 2 John that he did not in 1 John? What other differences do you see between the books?

3. Look closely at the structure of 2 John. Divide the verses into sections and write down the main theme or purpose of each section.





## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

In the spirit of slowing down a bit, let's stop to reflect on our study so far.

1. What verse (or verses) from 2 John made the biggest impact on you? Why?

2. Write down your spiritual goals from week 1. How are you doing with these goals? Do you need to make any changes in order to achieve them?

- ❖ Close today by praying this prayer from one of the greatest theologians in church history.

*Grant us, even us, O Lord, to know you, and love you and rejoice in you. And if we cannot do these perfectly in this life, let us, at least, advance to higher degrees every day, till we can come to do them in perfection. Let the knowledge of you increase in us here, that it may be full hereafter. Let the love of you grow every day more and more here, that it may be perfect hereafter; that our joy may be great in itself and full in you. We know, O God, that you are a God of truth. O make good your gracious promises to us, that our joy may be full. To your honor and glory, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God, world without end. Amen.*<sup>78</sup>

Augustine

# Day 2

2 JOHN 1-6

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

- ❖ Spend a few minutes meditating on Paul's passage above.
- ❖ Pray that God would fill you with his love and enable you to fervently love those around you. Pray that he would give you wisdom and understanding as you read his word today. Pray that he would bring to mind people you need to love better and that he would help you know how to show your love for them.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

- ❖ Read 2 John.
1. What does it mean to "love in truth"?

2. How would you define grace, mercy, and peace?

3. Why does John specify that the grace, mercy, and peace are “in truth and love”?

4. What other questions or observations do you have after reading the text?

## 2 JOHN

Well, what do you know, 2 John has a greeting! This letter follows the normal pattern of an epistle during the first century, which includes a greeting, a body, and a closing. Obviously, the book is extremely short—the second shortest in the New Testament. Some call it a “postcard” epistle. The purpose is to motivate the believers to action. He exhorts (or urges) them to love one another, walk according to his commands, and watch out for deceivers.

### VERSES 1–3

The greeting of a Greek letter in the first century had three parts: the name of the sender, the name of the recipient, and a salutation (words of greeting). We see all of these elements here.

The author identifies himself as “the elder.” In its most basic sense, this word refers to an older man, but in the New Testament, it was a word used for church officials. The Bible consistently gives the example of Christian churches being governed by groups of elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17, Tit 1:5). Elders were also called overseers, bishops, or least common of all, pastors. In addition to governing the church, elders also had the responsibility of teaching (1 Tim 3:2, 5:17, Tit 1:9). Since John was an old man by the time he was writing this letter, and because he was the last surviving apostle, this title of “elder” is especially fitting.

The recipient is “the elect lady.” While we might read this and first think of an important woman in the church, there are several ways to understand it. Some interpret it as:

- figurative language for the church—the bride of Christ and her children, the believers (Eph 5:25–27, Rev 19:7–8).
- a reference to the universal church.
- an individual, unnamed lady.



It seems that most scholars favor the view that it is a metaphor for a local church and her members. What the apostle expects in the belief and behavior of a lady and her children would be the same as what he expects of a local church and her members. Of course, whomever the “elect lady” and her children may be, our understanding and application of the letter does not change.

In his salutation, John introduces the themes of truth and love that we see throughout the letter. For a letter that is only thirteen verses long, it is significant that he mentions truth five times and love four times. In fact, he unites both of these when describes the believers as those whom he *loves in truth*. It is possible that this phrase is a reference to the heretics, who had not only profaned the truth, but who also showed themselves to be unloving in the turmoil they caused. The phrase also speaks to the fact that truth and love go hand in hand. For John, “Truth is the framework, the principle, that guides and gives genuine meaning to his expression of love. In the absence of truth, true love is not present.”<sup>79</sup>

John imparts grace, mercy, and peace to his readers. Grace and mercy are closely related, though grace refers specifically to God’s goodness towards us even though we deserve punishment. Mercy refers to God’s compassion towards those who are in distress. Peace, of course, refers to a state of well-being, of harmony and rest in all areas of life. Most significantly, John attributes all of these blessings as coming from the Father and the Son. Not only does that affirm that the Father and the Son are equal, but it also reminds us that every spiritual blessing comes from God. There is nothing we enjoy that is not a gift from him.

## **VERSES 4–6**

John starts the body of his letter with a warm word of encouragement about the children walking in the truth. We do not

know how he knew this, but it is clear that he had some kind of relationship with them.

In 1 John, he talked about walking in light or darkness, but now he talks about walking in truth. We mentioned then how “walking” was another way to say “living.” And here, these two themes—living and truth—unite to show that truth is both what we believe and how we live. Baptist preacher Vance Havner said, “What we live is what we believe.”<sup>80</sup> This is exactly what John means here when he says that the children are “walking in the truth.” Talking about our beliefs means nothing if we do not live them out; if we talk about them without living them, then it is evident that we never really believed them in the first place.

John then moves to the purpose of his letter: to ask that they love one another. The rest of the letter supports and further explains this request. It is remarkable, too, that John does not demand it, but *asks* it. Surely the weight of the statement is on par with a command, but John’s love and gentleness toward these believers is unmistakable.

And just like he did in 1 John, he reminds his readers that this is not a new command, but the command that they had from the beginning. In fact, this is the command that John received directly from Jesus. When they were in the upper room during the Last Supper, Jesus told Judas, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (John 13:27). After that, Judas left. And when he was gone, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). Jesus spent his last few hours before his betrayal—before his *crucifixion*—teaching and encouraging his disciples. And he commanded them to love one another. This is the command that John says was from the beginning. This is the command that

we still have today. In everything we do, we are to *love one another*.

And John explains exactly what that love is: *that we walk according to his commandments*. Like we talked about before, walking is another way to say living. Love means living out God's commands; Love means obeying his word. This should sound distinctly familiar to us. In 1 John 5:3 he said, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." If we truly love God, we demonstrate it by keeping his commands—and his commands are not difficult to keep.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

I don't think that we could ever emphasize enough John's command to love one another. Our love for God will always be evident in our obedience to his commands.

*"What we live is what we believe."*

1. How is your belief in God evident in the way you love others?



4. Who are the people you (perhaps unintentionally) forget or neglect to love? How can you be more intentional about loving them?

- ❖ As you close today, pray through this Puritan prayer. Ask God to help you love others and obey his commands.

*O God,*

*May I never be a blot or a blank in life,  
cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of,  
or make my liberty an occasion to the flesh.*

*May I by love serve others, and please my neighbor  
for his good to edification.*

*May I attend to what is ornamental as well as  
essential in religion, pursuing things that are  
lovely and of good report.*

*May I render my profession of the gospel  
not only impressive, but amiable and inviting.*

*May I hold forth the way of Jesus  
with my temper as well as my tongue,  
with my life as well as my lips.*

*May I say to all I meet,  
I am journeying towards the Lord's given place,  
come with me for your good.*

*May I be prepared for all the allotments  
of this short, changing, uncertain life, with  
a useful residence in it,  
a comfortable journey through it,  
a safe passage out of it.*

*May I be in character and conduct like  
the dew of heaven,  
the salt of the earth,  
the light of the world,  
the fullness of the fountain.*

*May I never  
be ashamed of Jesus or his words,  
be deterred from fulfilling a known duty*

*through fear,  
be discouraged from attempting it  
through weakness.  
May I see all things in a divine light so that they may  
inform my judgment  
and sanctify my heart.  
And by all the disciplines of thy providence,  
and all the ordinances of religion,  
may I be increasingly prepared for  
life's remaining duties,  
the solemnities of a dying hour,  
and the joys and services  
that lie beyond the grave.<sup>81</sup>*



# Day 3

2 JOHN 7-13

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.*

Romans 16:17

- ❖ Pray that God would help you understand and apply his word.
- ❖ Pray that he would help you recognize people in your life who divide and deceive.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

- ❖ This might come as a shock, but read 2 John today.
1. What is the “full reward” that John fears might be lost?

2. (Pop quiz.) What does antichrist mean?

3. What does John mean by everyone who “goes on ahead” in verse 9?

## VERSE 7

Yesterday, we talked about how John’s main “command” to love one another in verse 5 governs the rest of the letter. Verse 6 explains what this love is, verse 7 provides the foundation for John’s request in verse 5, and verses 8–11 give warning and instruction.

The opening *for* shows that we now have the reason why John reminds his readers to love one another. It is precisely because there are many deceivers in the world that they must love one another and walk in truth. We know that John explained this extensively in 1 John 2:18–27, and the danger is apparently still imminent.

John does not identify exactly who these deceivers were, except that they denied that Jesus came in the flesh. We know that docetism, which taught that Jesus only *appeared* to be human, was a heresy of the time. We also know that the seeds of Gnosticism, though not fully formed, were beginning to grow and would eventually teach that Jesus could not have been a man because all things physical were evil.

The antichrist, in this context, is once again shown not to be someone who attempts to replace Christ, but who is *antichristos*—against Christ. He is someone who actively opposes Christ and spreads false teachings about him.

## VERSE 8

John now calls his readers to be vigilant. With all the opposition to Christ in the world, believers cannot be complacent. They must remain on constant alert. The concern is that they may lose all that they worked for and not receive a full reward. Maybe this seemed

strange to you when you read it. Why is John concerned about losing what they worked for? Why does he care about a reward?

As you can imagine, there are different ways to interpret this verse. Let's look at two popular options.

The first is to view the loss of this reward in terms of the reward for Christian service. Support for this view is found in verses 10–11, where John discusses the behavior and faithful service of believers. This is also how Paul uses the word for “reward” (or “wages”) in 1 Corinthians 3:8: “He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.” John Stott explains it like this:

In this case John is not so much concerned lest his own work for them should prove vain (though *cf.* Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16), as that they should win and not lose the full reward of their Christian labor. The thought is not of their winning or losing their salvation (which is a free gift), but rather their reward for faithful service. The metaphor seems to be taken from the payment of labor, since *reward* (*misthos*) is a workman's wage (as in Matt 20:8, John 4:36, James 5:4).<sup>82</sup>

Another popular interpretation, which you might have gathered from the statement above, is to view this reward as salvation. Support for this view is found in the next verse, where John says, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” To be clear, John is not saying that someone can lose their salvation; what he is saying is that genuine Christians will abide in Christ and remain in the faith. There may be times of spiritual crisis, but true believers will not abandon the faith permanently. Daniel Akin explains this view like this:

It does seem clear that for John perseverance is the proof of possession. To stay with Christ gives the clearest evidence that one belongs to Christ. To cling to him and him alone is the surest and only path to receiving all that God has provided... Standing with him proves you truly belong to him. To turn aside and give an ear to false teaching can only result in loss. To walk away and not continue with Christ proves you never received him in the first place (v. 9).<sup>83</sup>

4. Read this passage again. How do you interpret verse 8?

## VERSE 9

To “go on ahead” is not a common phrase in the Bible. It means to move ahead or in front of something—*to go before, lead the way, precede*.<sup>84</sup> In this context, for someone to “go on ahead” means they have *gone too far*. They have left the bounds of truth. In other words, they *do not abide in the teaching of Christ*. And consequently, they do not have God.

Emphasizing the Father-Son relationship is a hallmark of John. This is the second time he has mentioned it in this short letter (v. 3), and the third time he has mentioned the Father. This union between them *does not change*. To deny or redefine it is to reject the entire gospel message. We receive both the Father and the Son, or we receive neither.

## VERSES 10–11

And now John gets to some practical instruction about Christian behavior. His prohibition on receiving someone who does not bring this teaching is stern. In fact, it is so stern that it has caused some people to reject this command—calling it *unloving*. (Though how anyone could read John’s writing and call him *unloving* is beyond me.)

That completely misses the point that John has been making! John just said that many deceivers have gone out into the world. They reject that Jesus came in the flesh and they are antichrists. Therefore, because of all these deceivers, believers must *watch themselves*. There is a chance they may lose all that they have worked for because of the cunningness of the deceivers.

We also must understand something about traveling during this time. The innkeepers of the day were notoriously corrupt. They often extorted their guests, and their inns were known to be dirty and flea-infested. In fact, their shady character was so infamous that it was noted in Roman laws.<sup>85</sup> Because of this, believers often open their homes to traveling believers—like traveling missionaries or teachers. But as you can imagine, opening your home could open you to abuse. How could you know that every believer was trustworthy?

It makes perfect sense that John would command the believers to protect themselves against false teachers—*especially if the*

*teachers may lead them out of the faith.* There is nothing “loving” about accepting a false teacher and enabling their heresy to spread because of your hospitality.

This is a particularly relevant message for us today. Christians have been so accused of being hypocritical and unloving that most of us have become docile. We are not willing to stand up for the truth out of fear of the backlash, out of fear of being called hateful.

But John tells believers, “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Christians are commanded to be discerning about teachers. We do not let just any influence in our homes or our lives; we examine them carefully against Scripture and reject any false teachings. To do otherwise would be to take part in their evil works.

### **VERSES 12–13**

John’s final verses here conclude the letter with love and affection. He writes to them the essentials; anything beyond that he desires to save for the intimacy of in-person fellowship. The expression “face to face” is literally “mouth to mouth” in the Greek. Grateful, though we are, for the more diplomatic English expression, we see the intimacy nonetheless. John’s commitment to these believers and his tender concern for them is certainly a model for all elders.

It is this fellowship that makes their joy complete. After all, “complete joy is the result of fellowship. The New Testament knows nothing of perfect joy outside fellowship with each other through fellowship with the Father and the Son.”<sup>86</sup>

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Sometimes our Christian influences are not necessarily *heretical*, but they can be *poor quality*. The books we read, the songs and sermons we listen to, can often be spiritual junk food. They are empty calories, not serving to nourish our faith at all.

1. Are there any Christian influences in your life that are spiritual junk food? What might be some better options that you could replace them with?



2. John mentioned abiding in the teaching of Christ. We know that our study is almost over; how are you planning to “abide in the teaching of Christ” when Bible study is finished?

- ❖ Close today by praying that God would direct your steps in your next study. Pray that he would bring to mind a partner to study with and help you to know what to study together.
- ❖ Pray that he would help you to fill your mind with quality Christian influences that teach soundly about him and his word.
  
- ❖ Memorize 2 John 6.

*And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.*

# Spiritual Discipline

## PRAYER/READING PARTNERS

We are almost at the end of our study, and that should get us thinking... What is your plan for studying the Bible after we are finished?

One of the most meaningful ways that we can study the Bible is through having a partner to do it with. I cannot emphasize enough how significant this is. Reading the Bible with a partner will challenge you and encourage you in ways that you may have never experienced before.

This practice involves meeting together regularly to pray, share prayer requests, share answered prayer, and discuss Bible passages that you are reading together.

### **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

1. Pray for a prayer/Bible-reading partner. Ask God to bring someone specific to mind.
2. Then ask them to be your prayer partner for the next few weeks. Give them a call today or head over to their house to ask them. (To start, maybe try committing to meeting once a week for 4–6 weeks.)
3. After you have found a partner, commit to praying every day for each other's prayer request, but also practice other forms of prayer that we may not do regularly. (Think about fasting, praying at fixed times together throughout the day, going on prayer walks, etc.)

4. Pick a book of the Bible that you will read together. If it is long, break it into sections that you will both read every day. Journal your observations and questions about the text for you to discuss when you meet together. If you want to, consider reading a commentary together alongside the Bible.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Colossians 3:16

# Week 7

**CHAPTER OF THE WEEK:**

**3 JOHN**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

**GRATITUDE**

**MEMORY VERSE**

**3 JOHN 13**

**BELOVED, DO NOT IMITATE EVIL BUT  
IMITATE GOOD. WHOEVER DOES GOOD IS  
FROM GOD; WHOEVER DOES EVIL HAS  
NOT SEEN GOD.**

# Day 1

3 JOHN

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Write your blessed Name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraved, that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from your love. Be to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation, a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble, and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers of this life.<sup>87</sup>*

Thomas a Kempis

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

Like we did with 2 John, we are going to spend our first day in 3 John analyzing it as a whole.

❖ Read 2 and 3 John.

1. Let's start by comparing the structures. Look through 3 John again and identify its structure below. Write down your 2 John structure from last week, too.

2 John

3 John



2. What words or phrases are used in both letters?

3. What differences do you see between the letters?

4. What is the main point of 3 John? Explain the purpose of letter and identify what verse you think illustrates it best.

5. Write down the names of the three men that are mentioned and what we know about them from the letter.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

When I was working full time before the kids were born, one of my co-workers and I used to have a saying: “If it’s not written down, it’s dead to me.” What a timeless truth.

(I’m full of wisdom over here, folks.)

But in all seriousness, we know that we forget things easily. Even when it comes to God. So as we near the end of our study, spend a few minutes journaling what God has taught you so far. Write down what verses are your favorite and why. Write down the ways that he has touched your heart and spoken to you through his word.

Make this a conversation point with someone this week. Ask them, “What have you been learning in your Bible reading these days?” Share with them what God has been teaching you. (Maybe pray that God would bring to mind a specific person who may need this conversation.)

1. *What have been your favorite verses? Why? Write them down below.*



2. *What has been the most important lesson that God has taught you through 1, 2, and 3 John?*

3. *What touched your heart the most about these books?*

❖ *Finish today by praising God for all the work he has done in your life over the past few weeks. Thank him for as many specific things as you can think of.*

# Day 2

3 JOHN 1-8

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

Colossians 1:9–10

❖ Before getting into your study today, spend a few minutes praying through the passage above and asking God to fill you with knowledge of him.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

❖ Read 3 John.

1. What does it mean that the brothers “testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth” (v. 3)?

2. Who were these “brothers”? What do we learn about them from the passage?



### 3 JOHN

Even though 2 John may have less verses, 3 John is shorter by word count—making it the shortest book in the New Testament. The two books are often called the “twin epistles,” given their obvious similarities. But we should point out that they are *fraternal* twins, not identical. There are still some differences between them.

What is interesting about 3 John is that it was written as a personal letter to Gaius. Because of this, we have a remarkable window into the life of a first-century church. They clearly had their own problems—as Diotrephes rejected John’s apostolic authority, spoke “wicked nonsense” against him, refused to welcome other believers, and kicked out anyone who did welcome them. But at the same time, we see the faithful service of loving believers. Gaius was walking in the truth and John rejoiced over this. Everyone spoke well of Demetrius, and his true faith was evident to all.

#### VERSE 1

John opens his letter with a greeting similar to that in 2 John. He identifies himself as the elder and Gaius as the recipient, and once again, he tells the recipient that he loves him “in truth.”

Gaius was a common name in the first century, and surprisingly, it is mentioned four other times in the New Testament. In Acts 20:4, “Gaius of Derbe” is listed among the group traveling with Paul. In Acts 19:29, another traveling companion of Paul’s is Gaius from Macedonia. Another Gaius is baptized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and is likely the same Gaius who hosted Paul in Acts 16:23. That leaves the Gaius in 3 John to be the fourth one mentioned in the New Testament. Given how common the name was, it seems unlikely that this Gaius is the same as any of the others. So we are left to learn about him exclusively from this letter.

## VERSES 2–4

This is the second time in two verses that John has called Gaius *beloved*. Certainly John’s affection toward him is evident. He also prays that “all may go well with” Gaius and that he may be in good health. Though this kind of wish was common in letters of the time, we recognize that because John’s wish is grounded in prayer, it is more than just a routine greeting.

John finishes this prayer by saying, “just as it goes well with your soul.” This phrase may sound strange at first, but John is confirming that Gaius is thriving spiritually. In other words, as John prays for Gaius to prosper, he also encourages Gaius by confirming that he is already prospering.

This is clear in the following verses. (We also know this because verse 3 begins with *for*—a good indicator that a reason for the previous statement is coming.) Gaius is walking in the truth, and the brothers testified to it. And what is a testimony other than a confirmation of what is seen and heard? Gaius’ faith and obedience was undoubtedly apparent to all.

And this provided John with the utmost joy. Gaius was *walking in the truth*. He was living it out. His beliefs determined his behavior. “*What we live is what we believe.*”<sup>88</sup> If our lifestyle does not express our beliefs, it is clear that we do not genuinely believe them.

## VERSES 5–6

And now we get to the body of the letter, which can be divided into three sections. Each section focuses on one man and his behavior: verse 5–8 on Gaius’ hospitality to traveling missionaries, verses 9–10 on Diotrephes’ wicked behavior, and verses 11–12 on Demetrius’ good testimony.

John once again calls Gaius “beloved” and praises him for all his efforts for the brothers. He did not even know them personally, but he welcomed them and took care of them all the same. The context indicates that Gaius must have housed and fed them at his own expense. Since they accepted nothing from the Gentiles, they must have received all of their support from faithful believers like Gaius. And these believers, in turn, testified before the church to Gaius’ love and service toward them.

Remember, too, that what makes Gaius’ efforts especially important here is the fact the innkeepers at the time were so corrupt. He was doing everything he could to host these traveling believers and protect them from the less-than-reputable innkeepers. And as he did this, he showed them brotherly love.

John then shifts from looking at the past to looking at the future: “You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.” The phrase “you will do well” is an expression for confirming that Gaius would act rightly to send them on their journey, while the word for “send” specifically refers to the provision of food, money, traveling arrangements, etc. John’s statement is both a gentle command for Gaius to continue his faithful service, and an encouragement not to be deterred in his hospitality by Diotrephes’ evil threats.

We should also note the timeline that these verses indicate. Gaius hosted the strangers, they testified to it before the church (seemingly John’s church, which is how he would have known about it), and then John encourages Gaius to send them in a way worthy of God. It appears that these believers came to Gaius, left on their journey (and encountered John’s church), and then went back to Gaius again. It is possible that they returned to him because Diotrephes and his terrorized community would not accept them.

## VERSES 7–8

Once again, we see a verse opening with *for*, a sign for us that we probably have a reason or an explanation coming. (Are you getting sick of me saying that yet?) The reason why it is right for Gaius to support them on their journey is because they went out for the *name*—a figure of speech for *Christ* (Acts 5:40–41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13; Phil 2:9). Curiously, this is the only mention of Christ in 3 John, and it is implicit at that.

What is clear in these verses is that the believers were traveling missionaries. That they “went out” is an indication that they were sent for this purpose. That it was “for the name” means it was for the gospel of Christ. That they accepted nothing from the Gentiles indicates they were preaching to unbelievers.

And John says that we ought to support missionaries like them. Though not an outright command, there is a sense of duty and obligation in this statement. There is an implication that believers would *want* to do this out of their love for others and faithfulness to Christ. John also includes our motivation for this service. We ought to support missionaries like these *in order that* we may become fellow workers with them in the truth. Though it is our duty, sharing in the work should also be a holy aspiration for any believer. What a privilege it is to participate in the work of the kingdom of God!

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”*

John calls Gaius his child, even though he was not. And John calls the believers in 1 John his children, even though they were not. But even so, John cared for the believers under his authority with the same affection and responsibility as a father.

Though we do not have apostolic authority like John did, we do have a responsibility to care for those around us. John’s concern for the believers throughout this letter should cause us to stop and ask ourselves, *whom has God entrusted me to care for? How am I actively caring for their spiritual health?*

For those of us with children in the home, this causes us to immediately think of them. But in addition to our children, we also have nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters, grandchildren. We have teenagers and young adults and new believers within the church. We have people who are spiritual “orphans,” without any believing family members to guide them.

*How are we actively caring for the spiritual development of these people?*

1. Write down the names of anyone whom God has entrusted you to care for and the ways that you are actively caring for their spiritual health.

2. Are there other people outside this list that need a mentor or a fellow encourager in their life? How can you support them? Pray that God would bring the right people to mind and help you know how to care for them spiritually.

Randy and I met when I was 15 years old and we were both youth leaders for the junior high ministry. We have been doing youth ministry together ever since. And one of the hardest things about working with students is that *they keep growing up*. They move on with their lives, and all too often, I fail to keep up with them. Now, I know I am not obligated to touch base with every student I have ever known, but sometimes I wonder if I could have helped continue their spiritual growth by checking in with them every now and then. I wonder if I missed opportunities to reinforce their growing faith at critical times.

3. Is there anyone in your past who could greatly benefit from a little bit of your time? How can you encourage them and support them in their faith?

❖ Pray that God would bring to mind the right people at the right time. Pray that he would open your eyes to see the ways you can care for the spiritual health of people you encounter this week.

# Day 3

3 JOHN 9–15

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Philippians 2:3–8

❖ Pray that God would prepare your heart today by filling you with love for him and love for others. Ask that he would teach you through his word and give you wisdom to apply it rightly to your life.

## TODAY'S PASSAGE

❖ Read 3 John today.

1. Jot down each of the charges that John brings against Diotrephes.



2. What motive could Diotrephes have for his actions?

3. How is John handling the Diotrephes situation?



## VERSES 9–10

Before John even introduces Diotrephes, he tells us that he has already written a letter to the church. Though we have no trace of this letter, it seems like it must have included instructions for showing hospitality to missionaries or traveling teachers. John mentions the letter to show Diotrephes' complete defiance. He not only rejects the ones with John, but also the authority of the apostle John! He is someone *who likes to put himself first*. (Not really the way you want to be identified throughout history in God's holy word).

The question that comes to mind when we read this is, *why? What motive could Diotrephes possibly have for rejecting the authority of an apostle?*

Part of the answer lies in the way John describes him. The word for "putting himself first" has the specific nuance of someone who wants to be the leader *for the sake of controlling* others.<sup>89</sup> (What a guy.) No one can tell him what to do; no one can disobey him. He is a man who thrives on power and authority. The problem, of course, is that *Christ is the authority*. Christ is the head of the church, and Diotrephes is trying to usurp that role by putting himself first.

I wish our Bibles had a cross-reference here to Colossians 1:18. There Paul says, "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." The word Paul uses for preeminent is *proteuon*. The word John uses here for Diotrephes is *philoproteuon*. Where Paul says Christ is the preeminent one, John says Diotrephes wants to make himself the preeminent one. Diotrephes is trying to claim Christ's supremacy for himself. The problem runs *much deeper* than turning away missionaries and kicking people out of the church.

John says that he will address this when he comes. The “if” does not mean that John is uncertain about whether he will come; it means John is uncertain about *when* he will come. So “whenever” John is able to come, he will address the issue then. This would most likely be in the form of publicly rebuking him (1 Tim 5:20), which ironically takes away the very things Diotrephes wants the most—authority and control.

John then details Diotrephes’ sinful behavior. He (1) was disparaging them with evil words (“utterances that make no sense”<sup>90</sup>), (2) refused to welcome the brothers, (3) forbid those who want to welcome the brothers from actually welcoming them, and (4) forced them out of the church. There seems to be a digression in his behavior. What began as putting himself first in his own head turned into putting himself first in action too—surely the unmistakable spiral of unrepented sin.

## **VERSES 11–12**

John now turns his attention back to Gaius by addressing him again as *beloved*. But even with this change in subject, our minds are still on Diotrephes when we read verse 11. *Beloved, do not imitate evil but good.* (In other words, *do not imitate Diotrephes, but continue imitating good, as you have been doing.*)

Just as John contrasted the examples of Gaius with Diotrephes, he now contrasts good with evil. And he does so, for the first time in his letter, with a command. *Do not imitate evil but good.* John is not saying that Gaius has not been imitating good—he just praised him for his faithful efforts—but his command encourages Gaius to keep doing what is good and not be dissuaded by the evil example of Diotrephes.

After all, *whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God*. These two statements obviously parallel one another. And because of that parallelism, we would expect John to say, “*whoever does evil is not from God,*” just like he said the opposite about those who do good. But instead, John says, “*whoever does evil has not seen God.*” By doing this, John not only shows that being from God is the same as seeing him, but he also points to the nature of mankind to be spiritually blind. Man, on his own, is not able to see or know God. Think of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:14: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

In Paul’s sermon on John 3:1–15—which was several weeks ago by now, but perhaps this will ring a bell—he preached that it was only because of God’s initiative to save us that we were able to respond in faith. We were spiritually *blind*, unable to see ourselves as hopeless sinners, unable to see our need for a Savior. We were unable to *see* God, nor perceive him for who he is.

John then closes the body of his letter by turning to Demetrius and offering a final commendation. It is possible that Demetrius was the one delivering the letter, so this commendation could also be a way of implying that Gaius should accept and host Demetrius (just as he did for the other missionaries). Whatever the case was, Demetrius was well-spoken of by everyone, even by “the truth itself.” In other words, his life was consistent with the truth of the gospel. His faith was demonstrated in his love and obedience to God.

## **VERSES 13–15**

Here we arrive at John’s closing statements. (Seems like we just started 3 John though, doesn’t it?) Like he did in 2 John, he says that he has much to write but would rather not use paper and ink.

Instead, he hopes to see Gaius face to face. Coming to see Gaius was not wishful thinking on John's part. The word he uses means that he was *looking forward* to seeing him; he *expected* to see him. And John furthers this expectation by adding the word *soon* (which he did not use in 2 John), though it is perhaps more urgent than that. John expects to come *at once, immediately*. He will not let the situation with Diotrephes fester any longer, but he will address it right away.

In 2 John, he wishes peace to his readers in the greeting, but here John adds it at the end. Perhaps it is more fitting as a conclusion in this letter given all the havoc Diotrephes wreaked. John wants to leave Gaius with words of comfort and peace.

He also leaves him with greetings from the friends and asks Gaius to greet the other friends by name. At the end of a letter detailing Diotrephes' division and hostility, a reminder of the strong ties of Christian fellowship is surely needed.







❖ Close today by thanking God for the believers in your life. Write down their names below, and as you do, think of the ways that they have blessed your life. Praise God for them and ask for his blessings in their lives.

❖ Memorize 3 John 11 today.

*Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.*

# Day 4

1, 2, AND 3 JOHN

## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Great peace have those who love your law;  
nothing can make them stumble.*

Psalm 119:165

❖ Begin your devotional time today by praising God for the work he has done in your life over the last few weeks. Praise him for the peace that his word gives you, and pray that he would continue to give you peace and love for his word. Feel free to write down your prayer below.

## TODAY ' S PASSAGE

❖ Today is our last day in the letters of John. Because of that, I think it is only appropriate to reread 1, 2, and 3 John. This will take some time, but hey, it's your study. Make it work for you. Do a quick reading of all three books today, or slow it down and spread it out over the next few days. It's your study, so make the most of it.

1. What did you notice today that may not have stood out to you before?

2. What verse(s) did you most need to hear today? Why?

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Use the space below to jot down any final thoughts about the letter of John that you want to remember. Write down what you cherish most.

❖ We often end our devotional time with a verse or a prayer from church history, but today, end your devotional time by writing out your own prayer. Praise God for his goodness and for all he has taught you through 1, 2, and 3 John.

# Spiritual Discipline

## GRATITUDE

Today's spiritual discipline is gratitude. What a wonderful quality to focus on! This practice involves developing an attitude of praise and thankfulness to God for all of his goodness toward us.

We all know that gratitude can change our hearts. Having the right perspective—a *grateful* perspective—can turn around any situation. Beyond, that we know that Scripture commands us to be thankful. Think about 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18:

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

So what are some ideas to help foster gratitude in our hearts?

1. Always, always, always, keep a list of things that you are grateful for. Seriously, *always*. I have mentioned that I do this on the left side of my journal, and I keep my prayer requests on the right side. But whatever works best for you, find a way to deliberately notice and record the blessings that God has given you.
2. Has anyone touched your life in the last week? Maybe they did something that deeply encouraged you. Take the time to write them a thank you note. Look for ways to thank people in your life. As soon as you start to feel gratitude toward someone, don't let it just stop there—make an effort to express your thanks to them.

3. Think about the hard things that you are going through right now (or went through recently). What good is God bringing out of it? What do you have to be thankful for even in the midst of pain?
4. Express your gratitude to God through songs and hymns. Maybe create your own playlist of songs that specifically thank God (like my favorite, “Jesus, Thank You” by Sovereign Grace Music).
5. What are some other ways to develop gratitude in your life?



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