



AUTHENTIC

A STUDY OF THE
BOOK OF 1 JOHN

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First Edition, June 2020

**Published by:
The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd.
Holly, MI 48442**

**Scriptures are taken from the Bible,
English Standard Version (ESV)**



THE RIVER CHURCH

Printed in the United States of America



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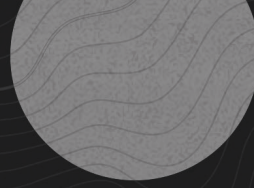
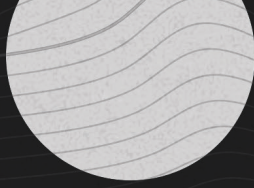
PREFACE

When shopping for something important, the words genuine, bona fide, certifiable, honest, right, and true are important. We want something that is authentic. This is even more important with people. We want them to be real.

The letter of 1 John talks about what it means to be real. This life will be characterized by fellowship with God and each other. John also talks about walking in the light and walking in love. There are so many benefits including our joy being made complete.

Authentic is a verse by verse study of 1 John. It consists of five study guides for personal or group discussion and thirty devotions to help you reach your full potential in your walk with the Lord.

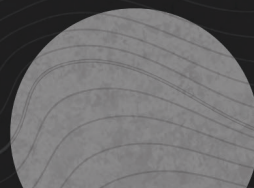
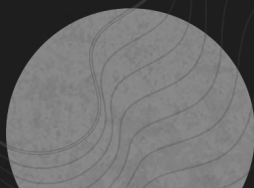
“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35



LESSON ONE

1 JOHN 1

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



The well-respected preacher and theologian, Warren Wiersbe, entitled his commentary on 1 John, “Be Real.”

The Apostle John (different than John the Baptist) wrote 1 John about 50 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He also wrote the Gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation. He actually may have written 1 John before his Gospel.

John, ***“the disciple whom Jesus loved”*** (John 21:20), was a fisherman before he and his older brother, James, decided to follow Jesus.

Professor Zane Hodges gives an excellent summary of this book, “The First Epistle of John is an intensely practical letter addressed to Christian readers. It warns against the dangers of false teaching and exhorts believers to lives of obedience to God and love for their brothers and sisters. Its controlling theme is fellowship with God the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

What else do we know about the Apostle John?

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the title, “Be Real?”

The first four verses of 1 John say, ***“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, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and***

we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

What similarities do you see between 1 John 1:1-4 and John 1:1-14?

What indicators do we have that this book is real and true?

What are the two goals of John in writing this letter (verses 3-4)?

In verses 5-8, John challenges his readers to walk in the light, ***“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. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”***

What images go through your mind when you read, ***“God is light?”***

How is light a good illustration for truth and darkness a clear indicator of sin?

What does ***“fellowship with one another”*** look like?

How could you improve in this area?

John closes off the first chapter with some well-known verses, ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”***

Drs. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas have written a book entitled *The Five Languages of Apology*. According to Chapman and Thomas, the five languages of an apology are:

- Expressing regret – “I am sorry.”
- Accepting responsibility – “I was wrong.”
- Making restitution – “What can I do to make it right?”
- Genuinely repenting – “I’ll try not to do it again.”
- Requesting forgiveness – “Will you please forgive me?”

I believe we spend a lot of time discussing forgiveness, but maybe not enough time concerning our own sin and confessing to others. I found these “languages” to be an interesting study where different people “hear” apologies differently. I am typically satisfied when someone says, “I am sorry.” However, I have noticed through years of counseling, some expect something more or different.

Do you see any distinctions between these five apologies?

When do you think saying, “I am sorry” might not be enough?

How should these love languages relate to our interactions with one another?

How should these love languages relate to our interactions with God?

Walking in the light does not mean we can live a perfect life. We will sin, but that should not be taken lightly. When we sin, we need to confess our sins to God and others. There may need to be some hard steps in striving to make it right.

Lee Strobel said, “Few things accelerate the peace process as much as humbly admitting our own wrongdoing and asking forgiveness.” If we want to have “***fellowship with one another***” and “***walk in the light,***” then there will be times when we need to confess our sins.

“The confession of evil works
is the first beginning of good works.”

Augustine

PROCLAIM

1 JOHN 1, DEVOTION 1

Pastor Pat Rowland

“I was there and saw the whole thing.” Whenever you hear a story from a first-hand account, you can believe it. John, the author, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus who lived and walked with Jesus for three years. For three years, he was right there beside Jesus as he healed the sick. He was there for the feeding of the 5,000 and witnessed Him walk on water. John, listened intently as Jesus spoke to the crowds as well as later when He explained the parables to the twelve. As he opens his letter in 1 John, he identifies his credentials as an eye witness of Jesus.

“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, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it.”

1 John 1:1-2a

For John and the other ten remaining disciples, they could not help but share the story of Jesus because it was so much a part of their story. I love hearing the stories of those that have trusted Jesus as they share how that decision completely changed their life. If you are a believer in Jesus, you know what I am talking about. Whether your life was a mess or without challenge, you still had this emptiness that was only made complete when you accepted Jesus as your Savior and trusted Him with your ordinary everyday life. Your life was changed the moment Jesus' story connected to your story.

Whenever I meet someone for the first time, I struggle with not wanting to answer the question, “What do you do?” I know as soon

as I say I am a pastor, there is a chance that this person either will be guarded around me, or they will want to debate their beliefs or ideas of theology. They are always disappointed when I will not share my thoughts on creation and shift the conversation to my story of what Jesus has done in my life. I will share stories of people I have known that were changed through the Gospel message. I have found that people can debate Scripture, they can argue theology, and quote something they read. However, they cannot argue with a personal story of a life changed.

In verses 2-3, John writes, ***“The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”***

He proclaims his story as he proclaims the Gospel. You and I have more than belief in Jesus; we have a story to proclaim. Our lives testify to what Jesus has done and wants to continue to do in our lives and the lives of those around us. Your story is powerful and unique because it is your story. It cannot be debated, and it can change lives as you proclaim it

STOP THE PRESSES

1 JOHN 1, DEVOTION 2

Pastor Ty Woznek

When I was a kid, I loved it when a Muppet yelled, “Stop the presses!” The newsroom came to a screeching halt as it normally means something is up, but it was a joke. In first grade, I yelled it out. My teacher was not as enthusiastic about the joke. Next to her desk from then on stood mine. We do not like disruption, inconvenience, or anything else that messes with our busy lives. We place our church, family, and work in their “boxes.” When there is that brief moment of free time, we ought to open the enjoy life box. We do not like people messing with our “boxes.” Sometimes we need to stop and remind ourselves of something. John is being disruptive. If I may (I always wanted to do this): Stop the presses!

Seriously, stop. Stop worrying about work, kids, drama, finances for a moment. If 1 John 1:1-4 is already familiar to you, read it again in a different translation (The NET Bible):

“This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life— and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us). What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ). Thus we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

John is screaming, stop the presses to people. He is telling us something incredible. Are you and I too busy to listen to what John is saying? We heard it preached, and we read about it yesterday. However, did it sink in? Reading these devotions can become routine. It does not have to be that way. People say, "Nice sermon," but then ignore it the rest of the week. John's news is not something that can be ignored.

Biblical meditation fills our mind with God's Word. It chews on a passage over a period of time to move from knowledge to joy, and then to action. You probably can already explain this passage to someone. You may even have that joy of Jesus John writes about. Here is the stop the presses question: Is your joy complete? Are you satisfied with the number of people who know about Jesus? Are you satisfied with the number of your family, neighbors, and coworkers who know Jesus?

Hurry up, grab a pen and paper. Time is probably tight as you are reading this. Let us do three things before we resume our day:

- 1) Write down two or three names of people you like who do not know Jesus.
- 2) Write down how you would feel if they chose to follow Jesus.
- 3) Pray that John's desire for complete joy would be your desire as well.

For some of you, that prayer will be one of repentance; you honestly felt nothing after writing their names down. For others, it will be for boldness; you are scared of what would happen if you shared Jesus. I hope for all of us, it would be that John's desire to share Jesus would be our desire as well. Do not be afraid to yell, "Stop the presses." The news of Jesus is worth it!

GREY FACADE

1 JOHN 1, DEVOTION 3

Roger Allen

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Given to his own devices, man will waiver. With few examples of courageous action, most wilt at “real sacrifice.” That is why men and women who regardless of consequence, stay the course, stand out in a crowd. Given the option of right and wrong, they weigh the cost of their action and choose their path through conviction. What makes the difference between those that chose the “light” instead of some form of the grey facade? Is there a difference, or are we all cut from the same cloth? Do we have the ability to face our giants and behave courageously, or will we find out later we were only fooling ourselves? Is our concern that our bravado and actions are only skin deep, an example of an illusionary appeal to fears in our life? Are we worried someone may see us for who we really are? Should we be afraid?

Fear, perceived or real, can be a very powerful weapon. It can keep us entrenched in past behavior or move us to action. The fear of being “found out” can have positive and negative implications in our life. Hidden, sin becomes shame and guilt and keeps us in a state of fear. When illuminated, we find that the darkness no longer has a hold on us. This is the promise that Jesus brings you and me. Where the enemy would lurk in the shadows and prowl in the valleys, he now has no place to hide. He has been dispersed by the “light of the world.” Sin will have no hold on you.

We read in 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.”***

The big question is, are we fooling ourselves? Have we somehow whitewashed our action to the point of appeasing our beliefs? Are we examining the intentions of our heart, or are we playing the one foot in the grave game? Are we trying to ride the fence of sin and righteousness? A life, instead of being illuminated by the light, is dimmed and appears as fog. Peeled back, we see our facade for what it is, a lie.

John continues, ***“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”*** (1 John 1:6).

For those of us who proclaim Christ as Savior, this should bring fear and trembling at the very thought of living a life contrary to our faith. If we do not illuminate His presence in our lives, is it possible to claim Christ as our Savior? If there appears no fellowship with Him, can we really make a case for our salvation? The Bible makes it very clear that we not only deceive others but ourselves as well. Our biggest fear should be at the day of our redemption, Jesus says: ***“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 workers of lawlessness’”*** (Matthew 7:22-23).

Our respect for God should transcend our fear of appearing peculiar to the world. In fact, the very distinctive characteristics of a born again believer should be a calling sign to those who search for the truth. Those who have yet tasted the goodness of the Lord still rely

on the “flesh” as their barometer. So by example, we must be true to the Word if we are to make the most of our time here on Earth. The renewing of our mind becomes an exercise that we incorporate in our day to day life so that we are able to show the light that is in us. So stand up and do not be shaken by the opinions of the non-believing world. Be the lamp we are called to be to those around us and remember, His promises are true.

Deuteronomy 31:6 adds, ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”***

He has given us a reason to be strong and steadfast in our faith. As the Son of Man's light shines as we walk in fellowship with Him, the fear of controversy quickly fades in our life. Our strength is emboldened by the illumination of His righteousness in our life. We can now proclaim in any situation, He is my Savior!

Finally, 1 John 1:7 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.”***

PRACTICE WHAT HE PREACHES

1 JOHN 1, DEVOTION 4

Holly Boston

“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice truth.” 1 John 1:6

Truth be told, I would rather write a devotion on just about any other topic than this one. We have all heard the phrase “practice what you preach.” Parents, if we are honest with ourselves, the phrase “do as I say not as I do” has characterized our parenting at one time or another. My husband and I are addicted to pop. Sadly, we have passed this down to all three of our children. We frequently discuss how unhealthy this is and our need to quit. Now, every time I pour myself a pop, my son proudly announces, “Look, I am drinking water!” There is nothing like your own child whacking you with the hypocrisy stick right between the eyes.

As a teenager, I was tormented by hypocrisy. In those days, we called it “two-faced.” I struggled with friendships as I found girls to be prone to drama and being two-faced. On Friday, I would have a great sleepover with my best friend, Katie and by Monday was the subject of her vicious rumor. The pain and lack of trust still affect me today. It amazes me that God has called me to serve women. I think He loves irony.

In preparation for writing this, I Googled “hypocrisy in the church.” Statistics indicate that as many as 72% of people who do not attend church do not go because of hypocrisy. Brennan Manning is quoted as having said, “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny him by their lifestyle. This is what an unbelieving world finds unbelievable.”

Until about six months ago, this kind of hypocrisy was something my family read about or heard about in the news. Now, it is a reality as we learn of past and present mentors who have been living contrary to how they profess. I can not describe the pain and disillusionment I have experienced as I try to make sense of all that has happened, and as I try to help others deal with it as well. In order to cope, I have been brought back to several truths.

Jesus taught, ***“And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock”*** (Matthew 7:25).

I have been reminded of the importance of building my life upon Him, His example, His love, His faithfulness, and His promises. Our dependence on self and others leads to destruction. God also tells us all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), including our shepherds. God warns us saying, ***“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust man”*** (Psalm 118:8). God promises, ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you”*** (Hebrews 13:5).

While these truths bring comfort and have helped me to turn my focus to Him, there is also the truth that convicts and calls me to self-examination. All believers are called to be His ambassadors and His representatives (2 Corinthians 5:20), and we are warned about causing others to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:9). I have come to realize that I have been so consumed with the sin of those around me that I have become blind to my own. I have no problem seeing the speck in their eye but ignore the plank in my own (Matthew 7:3-5). I am often guilty of weighing sin. Certain sin committed by certain people is less forgivable than my own. However, with God, sin is sin (James 2:10), and all sin separates us from Him (Isaiah 59:2).

This week God shed light on hypocrisy in my walk, and it has rattled me to my core. A lady at church said, “Holly, I love how transparent you are.” At that moment, I saw the enormous plank in my eye. I am ashamed to say that I now realize my honesty about my struggles has given me license to continue in my sin and has stunted my spiritual growth. In other words, it is ok to fall short as long as I admit it. Believer, I now know the slippery slope I have been riding. I have become apathetic toward my sin in the name of transparency. By claiming to be one of His while choosing to live in darkness, I am a liar.

Believer, what if you are the only face of Christ they ever see? What if you are the only Bible they read?

“Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” 1 John 2:6

ORIGINAL SIN

1 JOHN 1, DEVOTION 5

Isaiah Combs

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” 1 John 1:8-10

Sin entered our world when Eve allowed herself to be deceived by Satan, who was in the form of a snake. Satan convinced Eve to eat off the tree that God told Adam and Eve not to eat. Then Eve gave the fruit to Adam, and he also ate the fruit that he was commanded not to eat. Sin then entered into the world, and everyone born of a woman was born with original sin.

Psalm 51:5 says, ***“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”***

I believe we were all born with different original sins in which we are more susceptible. I struggle with many things, but they are different than those with which my wife struggles. I think we can all agree that different things affect different people in different ways. We are all different.

We can all admit we all have struggled with sin in our lives. Sin is anything that we do that is against God. In 1 John 1:8-10, John says that if you say you do not have struggles with sin in life, you are a liar and you are lying to yourself. However, if we admit we have sinned and confess them, God will always forgive us of those sins and makes us clean from those things.

I have been born with original sin. However, I am thankful that no matter what I struggle with in life, if I confess it to the living God, He will forgive me and cleanse me from it.

“TO AGREE WITH”

1 JOHN 1, DEVOTION 6

Sierra Combs

I want to let you in on a little secret that is important in virtually every aspect of life - context is key. Whether you are trying to make small or large decisions, listening to a conversation, or dressing for an event, you put yourself in the best position when you know the context. It is just as important, if not more important when reading the Bible. It is so easy just to open up the Word, read a verse, and read into that verse something completely different than its meaning, only because we do not take the context into consideration. This happens more often than you think and can lead to a lot of issues. If you have ever read the Bible, chances are you have done this at least once or twice. Today, I want to talk a little about a verse that I have seen believers take out of context, taking them right back into a place of bondage that Christ has already freed them from. The passage is 1 John 1:8-10 (NIV), ***“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us.”***

As I was saying, I think it would be helpful to start off with the context of this specific passage. The book of 1 John was written to a confused church in Asia, with the goal of addressing some major doctrinal errors that had been floating around. One of these false teachings was called Gnosticism. The Gnostics were a group of people who believed they possessed superior spiritual knowledge, that Jesus did not actually come in the flesh, and that sin was just an illusion. These false beliefs were quickly spreading through the church, and a letter was written to help clear things up. Here in these verses, John

addresses the Gnostics, who were deceived by their own teaching, wanting them to understand that what they believed conflicted with God's Word.

Now that you know the context go back and read that passage again. John is saying that those who claim to be without sin (like the Gnostics) are completely deceived and are not actually saved. Just like anyone else, if they were to confess their sins (more on that in a minute), they would be forgiven and have their slate wiped clean. However, if they continue to claim to have never sinned, they are calling God a liar and His Word is not actually in them. Those top and bottom verses are pretty straight forward, but that one in the middle has tripped people up for centuries when taken out of context. Many people take this to mean that although their sins may have been forgiven before they got saved, after salvation, it is up to them to obtain forgiveness through daily, weekly, and monthly confession, or that they cannot experience forgiveness unless they confess or ask for forgiveness each and every time they sin. I often wonder how people even do that? What happens if you miss one? I would be filled with anxiety and guilt. Not only that, but this kind of thinking oftentimes makes confession a mindless cure-all, turns it into works-based salvation upkeep, and ultimately takes away from what Jesus did on the cross.

So what does confession mean in the context of this verse? While most people might assume the act of confessing is the same as asking for forgiveness, it is not. Here in 1 John, the word that is used in the Greek basically means "to agree with." To confess our sins is to look at our sin and call it what God calls it. If we do not recognize the fact that we are sinners, why would we need a Savior? It is only when we realize just how lost and wretched in our sin that we truly are that we realize how much we need Jesus. It is only through Jesus that we can be saved, and the blood that He shed on the cross was

and is sufficient to wash every one of our sins away. God has forever settled the sin issue in the life of the believer. When Jesus said that it was finished, He meant it!



LESSON TWO

1 JOHN 2

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



The word “abide” (abides or abiding) is found 33 times in the New Testament. John uses the word 29 of the times. In 1 John, we find the word 17 times, with ten more times in John and two occurrences in 2 John).

How many times do we find the word “abide” (abides or abiding) in chapter 2?

What concepts come to mind when you think of the word “abide?”

Why do you think he used the word so often?

How does John 15:1-11 add to the discussion?

John shows how abiding in Christ helps us avoid falling, ***“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. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does***

not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:1-6).

What does the first sentence say is John's purpose in writing this section?

What does the word **“advocate”** mean?

How is Jesus an **“advocate”** for believers?

John goes on to say that living a godly life is not a new concept, *“Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 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” (1 John 2:7-11).

How does this compare with Jesus’ summary of all the commandments (Matthew 22:35-40)?

John changes his style of writing in verses 12-14, ***“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. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”***

What is John emphasizing and why do you think he wrote to specific groups?

Verses 15-17 contain Satan’s triggers for temptation, ***“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 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. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”***

What do ***“the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life”*** mean?

How are these seen in the temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:6)?

How are these seen in the temptation of David (2 Samuel 11:1-4)?

How are these seen in the temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:1-13)?

In verses 18-25, John warns about antichrists (false teachers), ***“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 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. 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, and because no lie is of the truth. 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. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. 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.”

How does John describe a false teacher?

What is the promise God has made to those who put their faith in Jesus?

John continues his thought on abiding in verses 26-27, ***“I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 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.”***

What does John mean by ***“the anointing?”***

John closes off this chapter with a final reminder, ***“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone***

who practices righteousness has been born of him" (1 John 2:28-29).

What does it mean to be a child of God?

"It is one thing to believe in God;
it is quite another to believe God."

R. C. Sproul

CHRIST OUR ADVOCATE

1 JOHN 2, DEVOTION 1

Pastor Manning Brown

One of the more popular TV genres that has been on the air, since literally TV started, has been law themed. Perhaps the quintessential show of this type was *Perry Mason*. He was always cool, always prepared, and always confident. Supposedly, he lost only one case during the run of the series. In the movies, arguably the most famous courtroom drama was *Twelve Angry Men*, which told the story of jurors struggling with the guilt or innocence of a defendant. Both still air occasionally on TV today.

The idea of an advocate, or the process through which the accused is represented in court, has always been intriguing and can make good entertainment. John is ***“writing these things”*** (1 John 2:1) so that we may not sin. Of course, we recognize in our fallen state we are already condemned and born into sin. Even those who have repented of their sin and acknowledge Christ as personal Lord and Savior, still sin. However, even in our sin, the Christian has an advocate. Christ alone is righteous, and Christ alone is able to advocate on our behalf before the Father. Christ is the propitiation for our sins, meaning, He is the appeasement for our sin before the Father.

John goes on to write that as followers of Christ, we are to keep His commandments. Although we are not saved thru works, part of our identification as Christians is how we lead our lives. Do our actions reflect Christ? John cautions about the hypocrisy of a person who claims to be Christian but lives his or her life otherwise. Our behavior becomes part of our testimony, good or bad.

When I was first saved, I had the simple illustration given to me about how God sees me after I am saved. God does not see me in my sin, but rather He sees His Son, Christ. Christ's blood was the atonement for the world's sin. An "oldie but a goodie" classic hymn goes:

*Oh victory in Jesus, my Savior forever
He sought me, and He bought me with His redeeming blood
He loved me 'ere I knew Him And all my love is due Him
He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood*

It is good and right to sing of the hope we have in Christ. Yet, just as importantly, we must sing of the blood of the Lamb, the sacrifice of Christ. A result of His bearing the weight of the sins of the world, and the penalty of that sin, His death, we have an advocate that has never lost a case, nor ever will.

BLINDED

1 JOHN 2, DEVOTION 2

Michael Fox

Do you ever feel blinded? Maybe not literally, but often I am blinded and lose sight of what is important. This can show in many ways: poor decisions, anger, fear, behavior, and selfishness. I want to know where I am going in life, and as Christians, we should know where we are going. We are warned of the darkness often, and also of being blinded.

John writes, ***“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”*** (1 John 2:11).

Looking at a larger part of this passage, 1 John 2:7-10 says, ***“Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.”***

We see one of the commandments here and a promise against darkness and being blind. In verse 10, ***“Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.”*** A simple act of loving one another can directly help from the side effects of being blinded, but it also has a greater purpose.

John 13:34-35 says, ***“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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

In John 13:35, he tells us, ***“By this all people will know.”*** By loving others, they will see the love of Christ through us and can be one of the greatest ways to witness to others.

Loving our brother is a common theme throughout the Bible; try thinking of one way you can love someone else today.

John 15:12 says, ***“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”***

Romans 12:10 adds, ***“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”***

JOHN ENCOURAGES GOD'S CHILDREN

1 JOHN 2, DEVOTION 3

Debbie Gabbara

The Bible gives us accounts all through the Old and New Testaments of God's children in unexpected circumstances. Time after time, we find God sending someone to encourage and often rescue His people.

We have all been in a place in our life when we have needed encouragement. In 1 John, that is exactly what John was doing for the church. He wrote this epistle to encourage God's people. He wrote to remind them of who they were in Christ. Boy, have I had times in my life when I needed to be reminded that I am forgiven in Christ, and I have won the biggest battle in this life – the battle against Satan for my soul.

John writes, ***“I am writing to you who are God’s children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus. I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one. I have written to you who are God’s children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God’s word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one”*** (1 John 2:12-14 NLT).

John says his letter is written to God's children. His letter is for us, all who have put our faith in Christ, God's one and only Son. Even when we know in our hearts that we have everything we need in

Christ, it sometimes feels like life's challenges will overtake us. John reminds us that our sins have been forgiven, and we can do all things in Christ's strength.

John writes to those who are mature in the faith. Romans 12:2 gives us a goal for which to strive, ***“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”***

Growing in the Lord changes us. Our mind is transformed when we read, pray, and trust that Christ is weaved into everything we are, all we believe, and worship.

John also writes to encourage those that he refers to as young in the faith. Young in faith could be someone that gave their life to Christ yesterday or ten years ago. Time alone does not make us mature. Growing in the Lord takes commitment and devotion. We all, young or mature in the faith, need to be reminded that the pull of the evil one is strong. John's letter is a reminder that though the fight will always continue for God's children, the battle has been won!

BUYING WHAT THEY ARE SELLING

1 JOHN 2, DEVOTION 4

Richie Henson

Every year, American companies spend \$205 billion on advertising and marketing. It is their sincere hope that through brand exposure and coercion, they will garner business growing their company and expanding profits. Each person is in some way targeted by these ads. We see them every day on TV, on the road, and on our phones. Whether we like it or not, these ads are influencing us and our buying process. In this climate, self-indulgence seems natural and expected. However, if we are not careful, we can fall in love with the world and all it has to offer.

John warns us in 1 John 2:15-17, ***“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 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. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”***

The world is easy to love because it is all about us and what we want. It is natural to want to get the car of your dreams, go on the vacation of a lifetime, eat at the coolest new restaurants, or buy the freshest new clothes. These things make a person feel great at the moment. Pursuing our wants always makes us feel full for a time, but the things of the Earth are fleeting. They are here today and gone tomorrow. Where does that leave us? We are left broken, alone, and hurting. God never designed us to be self-serving; instead, we are to love God and others enough to be a servant. As we learn to lay down our own desires and pursue God, we will be filled up by God's will and purpose that will last forever.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

1 JOHN 2, DEVOTION 5

Kenny Hovis

I have been blessed with the opportunity to take teams into prisons to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with inmates and staff alike for the sole reason that it is the only thing that changes people's lives. I have encountered many people that can be placed in one of three categories: belief, disbelief, or unbelief. I have seen God move miraculously in all three, but one in the "unbelief" category stands out in my mind.

We were in Warren Correctional, London, Ohio, for one of our trips. We went in early in the morning with motorcycles, a band, and a comedian who is also a magician as a means of getting inmates around us so we could have as many as possible with whom to share the Gospel. The team did a great job setting everything up and getting ready to be in front of the inmates. We normally set up a receiving line of sorts to welcome the guys as they enter. We start shaking hands, smiling, sharing a few words of encouragement, then we attempt to find a few guys to connect on a deeper level. I will never forget the first three guys through the gate on this day.

When they came through the gate, there was no one else around the three of them. Tattooed on all exposed skin, including their shaved heads, they declared their unbelief and denial of who Jesus and God are, and many of the symbols proclaimed something darker. They were giving off a "strong stay away from me" vibe with their demeanor and lack of eye contact. One or more of our team attempted to greet and make them welcome, only to be ignored. One of our team actually had his hand slapped away and was told, "Get out of here with that Jesus #*&\$! We don't need it here!"

As I stood by the chaplain, he explained to me that they were Aryan Brotherhood Satanists. That is quite a combination. It is hate upon hate. The Apostle John states in 1 John 2:22, ***“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.”*** They have been deceived by lies and have been convinced that they have no need for Jesus. As self-proclaimed Satanists, they are declaring that they have bought into the sales pitch of the Father of Lies (John 8:44)!

Many people walk around in that same state. They may not proclaim that they are Satanists, but they also do not profess Jesus as their Savior. They have been fed lies that if they are good enough, moral enough, kind enough, giving enough, or forgiving enough, that will be enough to get them to Heaven. By not acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord, they, by default, deny who He is, and are at enmity with God! In 1 John 2:23, it states: ***“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”*** It is the confession of who Jesus is, redeemer, forgiver, and Savior that gives us the restored relationship with God the Father.

As I watched the three of them actually listen to the Gospel as it was presented, I was nudged by the Holy Spirit to go give them one of the books we hand out to all those who want one. I was very hesitant, seeing that not one other inmate would even talk to them, but I grabbed three books, told some team members to tell my wife I love her and headed towards them. I walked up to them and asked the apparent leader if he wanted a book. He paused for what seemed to be hours, but was actually only seconds, and then replied, “Sure.” After I picked my jaw up from the ground, I asked the other two as well, and they both took a book. Some small talk commenced with them; then, they asked what the tattoo was on my arm. I told them it was “Solus Christus,” which in Latin means “Christ Alone.” You could have heard a pin drop until the leader replied: “That’s cool.” Over the

next few minutes, I was able to share the Gospel with them, and then the horn sounded for them to go to count. I quickly asked if I could pray with them, to which they replied, “No, thanks.” Not giving up yet, I asked if I could pray for them every time I told the story of how I met them because I would never forget it, and they said, “Sure.”

In 1 John 2:20-21, it says, ***“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, and because no lie is of the truth.”*** As Christians, because of our restored relationship with God, through the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, we have been anointed by the Holy One, and we have knowledge of the truth that the world needs to hear. We just need to have the boldness to proclaim the truth.

I would love to tell you that the three guys rejected the Father of Lies, and came to a relationship through our sharing of the truth, but I do not know that to be true. What I do know are these two things. One, they have now heard the truth, and it is up to them what they do with it, and that I continue to do what I promised to pray for them (even now as I write this devotion). Secondly, on the way out, the guy whose hand they slapped away, they actually shook his hand and thanked him for coming in that day. I believe the truth, Jesus, was already at work. “Soli Deo Gloria” (Glory to God alone)!

YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST!

1 JOHN 2, DEVOTION 6

John Hubbard

It is so hard to imagine life in the early church, and probably even harder to imagine life in a gentile city. As a gentile, you were not raised with the hope of a coming Messiah. You likely worshipped a Greek god or goddess at the local temple. All of a sudden, a disciple, or maybe even the Apostle John himself, comes to town and proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ to you. From that moment, you receive the free gift of salvation. You are radically changed and are ready to take the next steps. You sit under John's teaching for as long as he is in town, but the time comes for him to leave.

What is next? You try to spread the Gospel yourself, and it does not go as smoothly as you hoped. You just do not have the words right, as John did. The questions are confusing, and you do not know how to answer them. You cannot hop online and find out, you cannot get John on the telephone over in Ephesus, and unless you have one of the few, if not the only, hard copies of the Book of John in town, there is no obvious way to figure out what is what. False teaching, Gnosticism (knowledge-seeking), and other heresies are attempting to chip away at the foundations of your faith.

This is what John is writing about in 1 John 2:24-29, ***“Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. 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. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 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. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”

Who has been teaching you lately? Who are you letting speak into your life? Often times, we look for the answers we want to hear or the answers that make sense to us at the time. We will try to fix things on our own, in our own power. If we develop this mindset, we can so easily deceive ourselves into thinking that, on our own, we can earn or maintain our salvation. We must always remember that it is a **“free gift”** (Romans 6:23). Eternal life is the promise of God that John points out in these verses. Paul also stated this in Romans 10:9, **“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

When you first heard the Gospel, and you responded to it, you then received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). John says that we abide in the Spirit so **“that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”** Have the confidence that only comes when you abide in the Holy Spirit today!



LESSON THREE

1 JOHN 3

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



Most people, religious or not, live by a standard called the Silver Rule. They will also teach their children to do the same. The Silver Rule basically says, “If you do not want something done to you, then do not do it to others.” It is good, practical advice. Just about every religion has an element of this.

However, Jesus was radical and took the standard to a whole other level. He taught the Golden Rule, **“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”** (Matthew 7:12). Jesus took the passive concept of the Silver Rule and called believers to live out their faith by loving others.

What are some practical examples for today on how we can practice the Golden Rule?

In John 13:35, Jesus says, **“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** Love is the identifier for followers of Christ.

John says this also for children of God, **“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure”** (1 John 3:1-3).

Instead of love, how do some “believers” finish the statement, “They will know we are Christians by our _____.”

How is godly love demonstrated so that it is clear to the world we are children of God?

“Those in the circle of Christ had no doubt of his love;
those in our circles should have no doubt about ours.”

Max Lucado

I am not a Pomologist (the branch of botany that studies fruit trees). However, whenever I grab an apple from a tree, I am dogmatic that it is an apple tree. If I take an orange, then I would argue that it is an orange tree. John says that our fruit (works) reflects or represents the tree (the source).

In verses 4-10, John challenges our actions, ***“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 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. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice***

righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

If someone is a follower of Jesus, what will he stop doing (the goal)?
Also, what will he continue to do?

What was the reason for the Son of God appearing?

What does that mean?

John is slightly redundant as he reminds us to love one another, ***“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him”*** (1 John 3:11-15).

Who was Cain? What were some of his sins?

“Do not waste time bothering whether
you ‘love’ your neighbor;
act as if you did.”
C.S. Lewis

In James 2:15-17, Paul says that our faith must include action, ***“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”***

John agrees with Paul as he states in 1 John 3:16-18, ***“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”***

How is 1 John 3:16 similar to John 3:16?

How is faith without works dead?

“What does love look like?
It has the hands to help others.
It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy.
It has eyes to see misery and want.
It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men.
That is what love looks like.”
Augustine

God sees our actions and knows our hearts. Love must overflow. Our love for God should drip on those around us. John continues, ***“By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us”*** (1 John 3:19-24).

How does John summarize the commandments?

Who are you choosing to show love to this week? How?

“Where Love is, God is.”
Henry Drummond

CHILDREN OF GOD

1 JOHN 3, DEVOTION 1

Larry Gabbara

Christians are referred to as “children of God,” but how do we become God’s child?

We are His children through the free gift of salvation, which God provides. We can display our decision through baptism. This act of obedience shows the world we are a follower of Jesus, thus a child of God.

As a child of God, He is now our Father. We are able to talk to God and relate to Him as a good and loving Father.

In the song *Good Good Father* by Chris Tomlin, the chorus is:

“You’re a good good father.

It’s who you are; it’s who You are, it’s who You are.

And I’m loved by you.

It’s who I am; it’s who I am, it’s who I am.”

As God’s child, we can easily take for granted and abuse the endless love, mercy, and grace that God shows us. Parents also find that their children do the same, yet we too forgive and love them.

God disciplines us, His children. Parents show their deep love through discipline, as God does.

Life is full of trials and tests; it takes prayer and perseverance to endure all that life throws at us. Oftentimes, it seems like our prayers are not answered. God does not always answer our prayers the way we think He should. We do not always understand His timing.

Sometimes, it is not for us to know why; the Bible says that God's ways are not our ways.

In 1 John 3:1, we read, ***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”***

The world has its eyes closed to the Heavenly Father. If they would open their hearts to Jesus, the world could then see the Father and love and accept the Son.

John continues, ***“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure”*** (1 John 3:2-3).

God's love is righteous, and His love is never-ending. He is such a loving and wondrous Father. One day He will appear, and we who are called children of God will be like Him!

I am so blessed to be a child of God!

THE RULE OF LOVE

1 JOHN 3, DEVOTION 2

Taylor McCullough

“**B**e home by ten.”
“Tell the truth.”

“Finish your chores before playing outside.”

You may have heard these growing up. We all had rules to follow. These rules were made because our parents, or those caring for us, were looking out for our best interest. They either tried to save us from negative consequences, or they tried to instill values in us. They hoped that the rules they gave us would shape our decision making.

In a similar way, our Heavenly Father is trying to save us, and look out for us. Through the Word of God, we are warned of sin and taught rules or laws to follow. He has done this because of His incredible love for us. He wants to protect us. He wants us to make decisions and act in a way that is loving and not hateful.

We have been given the freedom to choose. We can choose to know Him, follow Him, live a life honoring Him, or practice lawlessness.

In 1 John 3:4-6, we read, ***“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”***

Jesus never sinned, yet He died to wash us clean of our sins. He has provided us with the opportunity to live free and spend our eternity in Heaven with Him. He has provided us with the opportunity to be

saved once and for all from what we actually deserve. When we ask for forgiveness of our sins and make Him our Savior, we are given a new life. In living this new life, one of the ways we grow in our relationship with Him is to read His Word. In reading His Word, we are fed with wisdom to no longer continue a life of sin. While we still have the freedom to make our own decisions, relying on the Lord and His Word will help us to follow Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, ***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”***

Acknowledge Him.

Trust Him to direct you.

There is worth in His Word, and love in His “rules.”

IS IT EVIDENT?

1 JOHN 3, DEVOTION 3

Pastor Ryan and Cathy Story

Can you think of a time when you have seen a child who acts just like one of their parents? In our house, we like to joke that when our oldest is being most particular, he is acting like his mom. In a similar way, when our middle child is acting rather crazy or stubborn, he must be acting like his dad.

The concept of nature versus nurture has been discussed and debated for many years. The question concerns whether people are born to act a certain way (nature), or whether there is more influence from outside factors on a person's life (nurture). Ultimately, there are factors from both that seem to impact the way a person will turn out. This same concept is quite true for our Christian life. Our nature, the way we are born, is sinful. Romans 3:10 states, ***"None is righteous, no, not one."*** Some are more familiar with Romans 3:23, which writes, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** If it were up to our nature, we would not stand a chance with coming to know Christ, but thankfully God had a different plan! We have the ability to be nurtured within the church or live differently than our nature would tell us to live. Romans 12:2 encourages us, ***"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."*** Being part of a church body, when we seize the opportunities to learn, grow, fellowship, and challenge one another, can transform us into being more like Christ and less like the sinful nature with which we were previously destined.

In the same way that we can see children and relate them to their parent, or look at our own children and relate them to ourselves, others should be able to look at our lives and relate us to Christ. We

read in 1 John 3:10, ***“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil.”*** I hang on the words ***“it is evident”*** and question in my own life, is it truly evident to others that I am a child of God? If someone else would have to wonder, question, or pause to consider, that most likely is not pointing to whom I belong.

How does one make sure it is evident to whom they belong? We can find this by going back one verse, 1 John 3:9 states, ***“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.”*** We are born again when we have professed with our mouths and believed in our hearts that Jesus is Lord. Our faith walk does not stop there. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning. This can be such a struggle! Our nature wants to continue to sin; it constantly leads us astray. This is where we must rely on the nurturing of God’s Word to lead us in the right direction.

If I am genuinely a child of God, then I will not want to continue sinning, I will want to be and strive to be different. When we truly love God, we will not want to keep sinning but will want to make changes in our lives to better glorify Him. In these changes, it will be evident that we are children of God. This does not mean we will become perfect, but the effort we put in will not go unnoticed.

OL' BLUE EYES

1 JOHN 3, DEVOTION 4

Shawna Johnson

Love. The word alone makes me want to burst into song. I enjoy the one by Frank Sinatra.

*"L is for the way you look at me
O is for the only one I see
V is very, very extraordinary
E is even more than anyone that you adore."*

Often, the first thought that comes to my mind regarding love is a romantic one. It is the kind where two people just adore each other and want to spend every moment together. I suppose this would come as no surprise seeing as I recently got married (insert your version of total cheeseball, giddy, girly, smile here). We know, of course, that is not the only kind of love. There are many opinions of what the word means, some self-serving, some feelings-driven, and some divine. I took a poll on Instagram, asking people what love meant to them (unashamed millennial here). Some of the responses are listed below. Please note, these are from both Christ-followers and non-believers.

"Compromise, tolerance, and patience."

"Something or someone that you cannot stop craving."

"When someone genuinely cares about you, and you care about them too."

"Willingly dying to yourself for someone or something else."

"Sacrifice and devotion."

"Unconditional."

"I can't describe it, but I can feel it!"

“Serving someone where they are at without any agenda.”

“God. He is love.”

Often times, myself included, we get confused with that true love is. Good thing for us, as Christians, we do not have to guess; the Bible is full of examples of true godly love.

John writes, ***“For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another”*** (1 John 3:11 NIV).

Sometimes love means graciously giving news or guidance that others do not want to hear. Paul writes, ***“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently”*** (Galatians 6:1 NIV).

Sometimes love is forgiveness when you just do not want to forgive (Ouch, this one is personal!). Paul also writes, ***“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you”*** (Colossians 3:13 NIV).

If you are a believer and claim to follow Jesus, there will be evidence by the way you love and live! John adds, ***“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him”*** (1 John 3:14-15 NIV).

Do not live a life of death. Choose love. Lord, help us choose true, godly love, even when we do not want to.

“TO DIE FOR”

1 JOHN 3, DEVOTION 5

Josh Lahring

Is there anyone in your life you love enough that you would die for them? It may be a friend, family member, spouse, or your children.

Would you die for someone who hurt the person you are willing to die for? That probably would be much more difficult, if not impossible, for us to say we would do. However, this is the great love that Christ has shown to us. We are the ones who sin against a holy, righteous, perfect God by even crucifying His only Son, and yet He showed His great love and mercy upon us.

Romans 5:6-8 says, ***“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”***

Since we have received this great love, we are to love as He loves us. For if Christ abides in you, that same love will abide in you. This is what drives us to love others. We have received immeasurable riches of love and grace that all we can do is pour that out towards others because we are so undeserving of it.

Ephesians 2:4-7 adds, ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”***

It is impossible ever to measure or comprehend the riches of His grace. We will forever be in awe and wonder of the love that Jesus has for us. The more you try to comprehend, the greater you will realize how beautiful it is. Receiving this kind of love and grace will bring us to action to love and serve others.

We also read in 1 John 3:16-18, ***“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”***

God did not just tell us He loved us; He demonstrated it on the cross. We are to also demonstrate our love to our brothers by laying our lives down for them, putting them before ourselves, and taking care of their needs. This is the love of Christ shining through us.

OPPORTUNITY IS KNOCKING

1 JOHN 3, DEVOTION 6

Wes McCullough

I am not good at stepping out of my comfort zone. In too many instances, I have passed on an opportunity to bless someone in some way. Many times I tell myself, “it is not convenient for my schedule” or “if they are still there on my way back,” I will approach them. I like to help people, but my quiet nature wants to avoid awkwardness. Every time I pass on one of these opportunities, my heart feels heavy. God had blessed me with the means to be a helper to someone in need, but I chose to go around what God had put in front of me.

In 1 John 3:19-24, John includes a reference to Jesus’ teaching in John 15:5-6, ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”*** This is a sobering passage. It really condenses the cause and effect of a true relationship with the Savior. Jesus said it plainly, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”*** (Matthew 22:37-39).

If you ever feel guilty for missing an opportunity from God, 1 John 3:20 offers some encouraging words, ***“Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”*** It is great that we are loved by such a powerful God. He knows our every failure, but His grace abounds. Thankfully for us all, our salvation is not based on works.

I encourage you not to bypass any opportunity God puts in front of you.



LESSON FOUR

1 JOHN 4

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



I have never been in “the market” for a Rolex watch, but I do like getting a good deal. The *Business Insider* gives four simple ways to spot a fake Rolex watch.

1. Check the second hand. Fake watches tend to “stutter” as the hand does not move smoothly.
2. Check the “heft” of the watch. Fake Rolex’s tend to be much lighter.
3. Check the winder on the side. A true Rolex will have a finely-crafted winder with engravings and grooves that are “quite a work of art.”
4. Check the cyclops lens on the face of the watch. A true Rolex will magnify the date.

I would also suggest, check the source. The guy wearing a trench coat near the dark alley with ten watches adorning his arm who has a great deal for cash today only might be questionable.

Do you have any fun experiences with a cheap imitation?

In 1 John chapter 4, John commands that we test the spirits. Verses 1-6 say, ***“Beloved, 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. 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. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are*”**

from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

What do faithful preachers teach?

How can you recognize a false teacher?

In verses 7-12, John goes back to his familiar theme about love, ***"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."***

What does this passage say about love?

Why do you think he speaks about love so much?

“The world is not a playground; it is a school-room.
Life is not a holiday, but an education.
And the one eternal lesson for us all
is how better we can love.”
Henry Drummond

What are some practical suggestions on how to live out aspects of this quote?

Although verses 13-21 appear to be a new paragraph, the theme is the same, ***“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 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. We love because he first loved us. 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. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”***

LESSON FOUR • 1 JOHN 4

What do these verses say about love?

What does “*perfect love casts out fear*” mean?

What commandment is given in this passage?

“In the New Testament, love is more of a verb than a noun.

It has more to do with acting than with feeling.

The call to love is not so much a call to a certain state of feeling
as it is to a quality of action.”

RC Sproul

Who do you need to show love to that you have not been? How will you do it?

KNOW THE TRUTH

1 JOHN 4, DEVOTION 1

Debbie Kerr

Do you believe everything you hear, or do you fact-check and consider the source? Sadly, it is sometimes more satisfying to believe a lie than the truth, that is why gossip is a favorite indoor sport! We often share or listen to information learned from someone other than the source. Consequently, the telephone game begins. The more it is shared, the more it changes and eventually becomes so twisted there is little truth left. The writer of 1 John is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. He was a true eyewitness to the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. He learned first hand who Jesus was. He walked and talked with Him all the way through His resurrection and ascension into Heaven. In this small book, he needed to address this issue.

In 1 John 4:1-3, John is instructing the church to test every spirit because false teachers had been sharing another gospel and another Jesus. I encourage you to read these three very important verses carefully and then read them again. What was happening thousands of years ago is happening today. There are many false teachers that are very convincing. They include just enough truth to confuse us with the lie. Does this sound familiar? John is warning us as well to test every spirit. Just because you hear or read the name Jesus, it does not always mean it is the Jesus of the Bible. There are 66 books in the Bible that reveal who the true Jesus is, yes, even in the Old Testament. We need to know the truth before we can recognize a lie.

Today, in many American churches, the true Gospel message is being changed and distorted. It is no longer about Christ alone

for salvation. Teaching another gospel is not new, but for the first time in our history, it is seducing mainline denominations. Just in the past month, at least four popular Christian leaders or Pastors have denounced their faith and walked away from their ministries and Christ. Why is this happening? It is because the false gospel and false Jesus cannot deliver what is promised. It is counterfeit. Jesus said this would increase in the last days. I urge you to stay in the Word, learn the truth, and run from a false gospel. Teaching that claims to offer Christ plus something or Heaven on Earth is not the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.” 2 Corinthians 11:3-6

PEOPLE ARE SO INTERESTING

1 JOHN 4, DEVOTION 2

Kenny Hovis

People are so interesting. We look for affirmation from other people for who we are as individuals and what we are doing. We are so concerned with whether someone “tolerates” us for our actions or lifestyles that if someone does not agree with us, we become militant and confrontational to the point of hatred for one another. It is sad and causes division amongst those created in God’s image. We have lost the ability and desire to “love one another.”

Recently on vacation, I was just sitting watching people. There is a prevailing disregard or lack of concern for other’s created in God’s image. We seem to be oblivious to other’s needs at the expense of our desire to read a text, talk on the phone, read an email, laugh at the joke of the day, or find the nearest Starbucks! We struggle with being genuinely selfless (unless it benefits us), but display every attribute of selfishness. We are so distracted by and concerned with the things of the world (that were meant to be a blessing to us) that we allow Satan to use them as the primary tool to cause separation between ourselves and God. He, Satan, is a deceiving spirit.

In 1 John 4:4-6, the Apostle John explains it this way, ***“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They [the deceiving spirits] are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”*** We are not to be like others who do not have the Spirit of truth dwelling in them. We are to be sensitive to the Spirit of God that dwells inside of

us to show love and concern to those that are deceived by the spirit of deception. We, as a creation, have become deceived. What we want or perceive as a need is more important than what others want or need. Had Jesus displayed this same characteristic, none of us would be able to be possessed by the Spirit of God. We would have no hope of a relationship with God.

Later in 1 John 4, the apostle gives us the solution. Verses 20 and 21 state it plainly, ***“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. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”*** God loved us so much that He sent His son to die for us to have a restored relationship with Him (John 3:16). Jesus loved us so much that He came to Earth not to give us a death sentence that we deserved, but to give us hope of eternal life (John 3:17).

In my mind, this is the logical conclusion. God, the Father, displayed His love by sending God the Son. He displayed love by His sacrifice and gift of God the Holy Spirit to live inside of us as the great Influencer of the divine attribute, love. We as Christians should conclude that our responsibility is to selflessly love our brothers (and sisters) as a demonstration that the Spirit of truth lives within us. This gives us the right to share the truth with them that will set them free from the spirits that deceive them.

Jesus committed the ultimate selfless love act in laying down His life for those that He considered His friends, humanity. In John 15:12-13, Jesus made this statement, ***“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.”*** Are we willing to lay down the things of the world that distract us from

showing love? It may not require us to lay down our lives, maybe just our smartphones. Maybe if we do, we will realize that people are really interesting!

IMAGE BEARERS

1 JOHN 4, DEVOTION 3

Jill Osmon

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” 1 John 4:7-12

Love. It is a concept that is all over our culture today. As humans, we constantly get it wrong. As Christians, we constantly get it wrong. The Bible uses the word love over 400 times. So maybe it is something we should pay attention to and get it right. I hear your inner thoughts, “I love my people well,” and “I love my neighbor.” I hear you, but I have also seen your social media posts, your attitude at restaurants, and your ranting over politics (this is where I would insert the wide side-eye emoji if I could. LOL).

So can we pause for a minute and look at what the Bible says about love? John has a lot to say about it in 1 John chapter 4. Verse 11 says, ***“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*** It seems pretty simple; God loves us, so we love other people. Why is it so difficult to actually do this? Is it because we do not really understand where love originates from?

Verses 9-10 say, ***“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 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.”*** We should love not simply because we love God, but because He loved us so much He sent his Son. That is what verse 11 is saying. Our ability to love is born out of gratefulness for what God has done for us. I read a quote from a commentary that I thought was perfect, “Love is manifested in us because of what was done on the cross.”

We are all image-bearers of a God who gave up His only Son to die for all of us, not just the conservatives, a specific race, or a specific gender. He died for all. Our love should reflect that. Preach the Gospel and love people because the cross demands it.

We need to challenge ourselves. Next time we get irritated, angry, or prideful, we will remember the cross and the love it took for God to send His only Son. View people through that lens, an image-bearer whom God sent His Son to die for. I think it may radically change our perspective and our actions. We need to pray that our actions and words honor and reflect the love it took for the cross to happen.

THE GOSPEL REVISITED

1 JOHN 4, DEVOTION 4

Max Sinclair

I have heard the story of Jesus countless times. I have heard others lead people down the “Romans Road.” I have seen the Gospel of Christ change a person’s heart. I am a church kid. I sat in a seat for years. I was in AWANA and student leadership. I could tell you that hearing the Gospel story or evangelism, in general, is nothing new to me. Yet, when I read passages like 1 John 4:13-16, I ask, “Why again?” I would not venture to doubt that you do the same. I have come to the conclusion that salvation and the magnitude of what Jesus did for us is not something to think about once. The Gospel is what motivates us, it is what moves us to action, it is what should propel us forward, and we need to be reminded about it.

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” 1 John 4:13-16

This is what has happened to us. Because of God’s love, He sent His son Jesus to us to be the Savior of the world. His love reached down and rescued us from sin and from death. That love is something we can abide in if we only confess and testify that Jesus did come from His Father and died for our sins.

As simple as we may look at the Gospel, it is the crux where everything falls. It is the most important part of our walk with the

Lord. Knowing just simply that the Gospel is enough for us will aid us in moving forward.

Personally, I find it refreshing. My wife and I are currently reading a book by J. D. Greear called *Gospel*. In this book, we have learned so much more about our faith, our life, and the Christian walk by just taking a look at the Good News of Jesus. I encourage you as a part of this church to do just that. Remember and revel in the Gospel. Know that what Jesus did for us is not just a story and is not just the first step, but it is the way we are to live now.

PERFECT LOVE

1 JOHN 4, DEVOTION 5

John Rigg

It has been some years now, but I can remember one summer day, standing in line at a major theme park with my nephew, as we waited to buy our tickets to ride the park's latest tall coaster. This ride had been publicized for months as the tallest and fastest roller-coaster in the world, and we could not wait to ride it! The two of us were thrill-seekers and bantered back and forth for the entire ride in the car, and now here we were, just moments away from experiencing the thrill of our lives!

Because this was the coaster's debut, the line was long, so long in fact that when we first entered the line, we could not even see the ride. As the line moved along, the coaster's massive structure revealed more and more of itself the closer we came to the entry point. Words could not possibly express the excitement and anticipation that was running through me as I now could hear the screams of the current riders as they were coming to a sudden stop! All my senses were activated, and I knew this was my moment. The time had come, and I was ready to go!

On the flip side, this was not the case for my 13 year-old nephew. He was terrified! He was so terrified, in fact, that he tried to turn around in the line and go back to the entrance. However, it was too late; it was his turn to enter onto the ride. Yet, he was full of fear.

"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.” 1 John 4:17–18

The apostle John writes about a time in the future called the “**day of judgment.**” It is a time when we will stand before the Lord. The question to us is, will we stand before Him in “**confidence,**” or like my nephew, will we tremble in “**fear?**”

John says that “**perfect [or complete] love casts out fear.**” What he is alluding to is the fact that Jesus’ love for us was complete, and that His substitutionary death on the cross for the penalty our sins was sufficient and final. There is no need for us to worry or live in fear of punishment on the day of judgment if we have placed our lives in Jesus’ hands. John tells us that “**whoever fears has not been perfected in love.**” In other words, if fear of judgment haunts us, then maybe we have never come to God in repentance and asked Him to forgive us of our sin.

With the work of Calvary finished, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, and “**as He is so also are we in this world.**” Knowing that His love was made perfect, we too can stand before Him on that day, not with the fear of punishment, but with perfect confidence that His love for us was perfected in His sacrifice.

LOVE YOUR BROTHER

1 JOHN 4, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Gareth Volz

“We love because he first loved us. 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. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” 1 John 4:19-21

God’s Holy Spirit uses the apostle John to point out something important to those who follow Jesus – we could not love God if He did not first love us. There are many words in the Bible that are used to describe God. He is “omniscient” (all-knowing), “omnipotent” (all-powerful), “omnipresent” (everywhere at the same time), faithful, just, and righteous. However, first and foremost, God is “Love.”

Let me ask you a question, “Why do you love God?” We generally love people we are attracted to, they are fun to be with, they have interests similar to our own, or some other reason that benefits us.

Yet, the Bible tells us, **“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). Think about that for a minute. God is Holy, and yet He loved us when we loved sin. God loved us when we loved the things that He hated. That is truly amazing love. It is unselfish and unconditional. That is why God is Love!

Verse 19 begins, **“We love.”** Surely because God first loved us and did so unconditionally and lavishly, we should respond by loving Him. I am sure that most of you reading this will say, “I do love God!” If

asked to give evidence of your love for God, many would say, “I lead a Growth Community,” or “I work with the youth ministry.” Others may say, “I attend a Bible study,” or “I have gone on prison trips.” These are all wonderful ways to show you love God, but that is not the point John is stressing here.

John says that if you really love God, you will love people. If you love God, you will love what He loves – people. As a point of emphasis, John says this is a commandment from God, ***“Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”***

People are not always easy to love. This is even sometimes true of other Christians. However, if we truly love God and are filled with His Holy Spirit, we will have love (which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit) flowing out of us to people. God will give us a love for others, despite their imperfections, because He is Love.

We need to show everyone how much we love God by loving those He loves, imperfect people.



LESSON FIVE

1 JOHN 5

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



Benjamin Franklin said, “In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” He has been quoted often over these words, but John gives us another item we can “know for certain.” Death, taxes, and eternal life are certain for the believer.

What are some other things that are “for certain?”

In 1 John 5:1-5, John talks about love again, but also refers to overcoming the world, ***“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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”***

What does John say about love here?

Who overcomes the world and how?

The next section talks about the testimony concerning Jesus, ***“This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, 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”*** (1 John 5:6-12).

What does it mean that Jesus came by blood and water?

What role of the Holy Spirit is listed here?

What verses listed here could be used to talk about assurance of salvation?

In 1 John 5:13-15, we read that we can have confidence in our salvation, ***“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. 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.”

What did John want his readers to know in John 20:31?

What does he want them to know here?

How can knowing we have eternal life be comforting?

Although we are saved, we will still sin. This is not an excuse or permission to sin; however, it is a reminder that one who sins may be a believer. In 1 John 5:16-19, we are told how to help them, ***“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”***

What should we do if we see a fellow believer sinning?

What is the Matthew chapter 18 principle?

John closes the book saying, ***“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols”*** (1 John 5:20-21).

What does this section say about Jesus?

The word love is used 26 times in 1 John. Love is central to true Christianity. In Philippians 1:9-10, Paul says, ***“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”***

What does this passage say should be our prayer requests for others?

Based on this passage, write out a prayer for a loved one right now.

[illegible]

“The world does not understand theology or dogma,
but it understands love and sympathy.”

Dwight L. Moody

WORKING PROPERLY

1 JOHN 5, DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan Story

Have you ever have had an inanimate object not function to the specifics of its designed purpose? Let us all be honest; we all have. There is something about a stove that does not heat, a light that does not light, a dishwasher that does not wash, or a pen that does not write that brings frustration, anger, and at times, disposal of said object. Sadly, I am quick to throw things away instead of trying to fix them. I am truly in awe to anyone who can fix a thing broken. The hard thing about objects that are not working properly is that if you keep using the object that is broken, over time, the brokenness becomes worse.

John has always been a fascinating person to study in the Bible. I had always felt when John was writing his Gospel, that he was a young man, full of energy, emotions, and poetic ways of describing how his Jesus lived. Fast forward to 1 John; I feel John has become an old, wise, and a bit more straight forward. John echoes a statement that Jesus Himself said. We read 1 John 5:3, ***“And his commandments are not burdensome.”*** Jesus says in Matthew chapter 11 that ***“my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”*** (verse 30). The amazing truth that Jesus and John are communicating is that living for God should not be difficult, heavy, or burdensome.

Now, if you almost threw your book, phone, or digital device across the room, hear me out. Living for Jesus was never meant to be a burdensome, heavy load. The reason why living for God, honoring Him in our actions, loving people like Jesus, serving others like Jesus, or simply not losing your temper on your family becomes so difficult is because our hearts are not functioning to the specifics of

its designed purpose. God created man to be sinless with nothing between Him and us, but sin came into the world. At that moment, our hearts were no longer functioning properly, thus making the one thing we were made to do now burdensome and impossible.

Trying to do anything apart from the love of Jesus is impossible. Trying to live a life without God is like ice skating uphill. Are you trying to live for Jesus, but it seems like it is always difficult? To get to a place where living for God is not burdensome, you have to look at your relationship with God. Jesus did not make living for Him burdensome because He did all the heavy lifting for us. He died on the cross, He rose again, and He gave us the gift of salvation. God did all the work and gave us new hearts. It is amazing to think that God does not throw us away because we are broken, but He fixes our hearts allowing us to work properly.

Are you at a place where you have given your heart to Jesus? Do you believe that He died on a cross and rose again three days later, but it is seemingly burdensome to live for Jesus? It is time to re-examine your relationship with God. Living for God is not void of work. Before sin entered the world, God instructed Adam to work in Eden, but that work was not burdensome or hard. While we are still called to “show our works,” that work of living for Jesus is not meant to be heavy.

If you still see living for God as a burden, relook at 1 John 5:1-2, ***“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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.”*** Believe that Jesus has done all the work on the cross, believe that God loves you, and believe in His grace. We function properly when we believe fully.

THE FATHER GIVES EVIDENCE

1 JOHN 5, DEVOTION 2

LaRae Wing

Several years ago, my husband and I witnessed an incident of road rage that resulted in an individual's death. It was a harrowing and life-changing experience. As a result, I, along with my husband, was called to testify in court. I was asked to precisely tell what I saw and heard. Specific facts and details were important to the case because the judge had not been present and was going to determine the punishment of the accused.

The circumstances of what John is telling us in 1 John 5:6-12 are so different. No witnesses are needed because God, the righteous judge (Psalm 50:6), is telling us that He knows the One being judged as the Savior of the world. He knows all about who Jesus is. Why? It is because Jesus is ***"His Only Begotten Son"*** (John 3:16 NKJV) manifest in the flesh, sent by God to be sacrificed for our sin and to raise from the grave as our living Savior.

Throughout Jesus' life on Earth, God had been showing and telling the world who Jesus is. God's angels declared it at Jesus' birth. At the water-baptism of Jesus, a dove (the Holy Spirit) descended, but more importantly, God spoke from Heaven and said, ***"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*** (Matthew 3:17). Even when Jesus' blood was shed on the cross, the sky became dark, the earth quaked, and the curtain enclosing the Holy of Holies in the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:45-51). Three days later, an angel spoke to the women from inside Jesus' empty tomb (Matthew 28:1-7). So many signs and wonders that could only be acts of God declaring that Jesus of Nazareth was truly His Son. These things were evidence to man. Clearly, God's actions were saying to people, "Stop doubting, this is my Son! Believe Him."

In today's culture, people often need evidence (facts and details) to believe that something is true. John was telling the world (both Christians and non-believers) that there was plenty of evidence as to Jesus being the one in which to place our eternal faith and hope. What is better verification there than what is given by a loving, merciful holy God?

Jesus Christ was God's Son in the flesh. His humanity was affirmed when He was born as a human - by water and by blood. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, came from Heaven at His baptism, and God, His Father, confirmed Him as His Son. On the cross, Jesus' humanity was confirmed when He was stuck in His side with a sword and out came water and blood.

All those years ago, I was a witness before a judge. I acted as his eyes and ears at an event that he did not witness. In the best selling book, *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel retraces his spiritual journey from atheism to faith by showing how the historical, archaeological, and ancient written evidence led him to a belief in Jesus as God. Yet, I just cannot help but believe that the most powerful declaration comes from the works and words of our God, who gave testimony to the veracity of the claims that Jesus was His Son and our Savior. As believers, we should need no other evidence!

At the end of this passage comes one of the most powerful and sobering verses in the Bible, ***"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life"*** (1 John 5:12). Do you truly have "life" through belief in Jesus as God's Son?

“THAT YOU MAY KNOW”

1 JOHN 5, DEVOTION 3

John Stone

Am I really saved? This thought harasses even the most seasoned Christian. Our lives are filled with uncertainty and reminders that life is short. Too often, we fail, and along with guilt come feelings of inadequacy and fear that God will reject us. God knows that in our human frailty, we wrestle with these things, so He inspired the letter of 1 John, not to make us feel like failures but to encourage us. There are nine indicators throughout the book that we can look for in our own lives to give us the assurance that we have eternal life:

Do we believe in the name of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23)? Most would answer, “Yes! Of course, I do. I prayed when I was 6.” However, is our life distinguishable from the life of an unbeliever? Do we agree with the hard things Jesus taught? Is our hope based on what He promised to do?

As believers, God gives us His Spirit (1 John 4:13) to comfort us and give us peace. We can feel His guiding influence in our decision-making.

Do we strive to please God by following His commands (1 John 2:6)? Doing what He says should not be a compulsory action but a willing, joyful life of submission to the One who is worthy. His Word should not be a boring book filled with lists of “do’s and don’ts” but a window into the mind and character of the one true and living God, a book of promises that should fill us with hope. Are we walking in the light of Christ (1 John 1:6-7) seeing every obstacle, or are we stumbling in the dark tripping over addictions and distractions and wasted days? Are we grieved by our sin, knowing that it dishonors

God? Do we confess (1 John 1:8-9) to Him with true repentance? Do we recognize that our flesh is sinful and plead with God to help us fight against our sin with the intention of violently destroying it, or do we claim grace over and over again with a live-let-live attitude? Do we truly love other believers (1 John 3:18) and demonstrate that love through serving and giving? Is a weekend spent with Christians an uplifting time of joy and encouragement, or is it so tedious that we cannot wait to get back to work, TV, or to our “real friends?” Do we love the things of this world (1 John 2:15) more than we love the things of God? Can we quote the interest rate of our investment account but have not memorized a Bible verse since we were in AWANA? Are our monies, talents, and time spent to further God's eternal kingdom or our bottom line?

Lastly, have you been ridiculed, teased, avoided, or even assaulted because you are a Christian? The world hated Christ, and it should not come as a surprise that it hates His followers today (1 John 3:13). We should not want to just fit in or fly under the radar. The Bible says true Christians are lights in a dark world, a world that hates light.

God calls us to a life of self-sacrifice and love for others. Our greatest joy should be found in using the gifts He has given us to serve others and spread the Gospel of Christ to unbelievers. I challenge you to pray that He would break you of the love of worldly “stuff.” Pray that He would place you into the hard situation where you have to affirm or deny Christ, share your hope or stay quiet, and give or keep for yourself. If you do this, you will not be disappointed. God will answer so that you may know you have eternal life, overcome the fear of uncertainty, and walk confidently in His grace.

LIFTING UP A BROTHER

1 JOHN 5, DEVOTION 4

Mark O'Connor

“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.”

1 John 5:16-17

This has been a very difficult passage for me to break down. I like answers. Knowing exactly what something means is important to understand what to do with it fully. It is like working on a car and not having the right tool for the job. I like to tinker with working on a car in that if it is not an emergency and something that needs to be done immediately, I enjoy it. Say my main form of transportation breaks down and needs to be done today, I get stressed. You work quickly to get a job done, and when you do not have exactly the right tool, you make it work. I have done this, and so far, it has worked out okay. However, when I have the chance, a stop at Auto Zone is not far away, so I do not find myself in that position in the future.

I have studied commentaries and books looking for the answer to what John is referring to when he talks of a sin leading to death in verse 16. I have ideas, so do many scholars, but no one seems to want to say for sure. This assures me further that we will never be able to fully comprehend the magnitude of who God is and what the Bible says without the help of the Holy Spirit. One day, I will learn.

In the meantime, I will look at this passage for the very clear part of what it says. I will pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ, who

everyday struggle with sin. Knowing that, I and we will always fall short of the perfect mark of Jesus. John lays out that we should be praying for those falling into sin. We should not pray in a gossipy prayer circle kind of way when we pray together, but on our knees behind a closed door where no one will see us kind of way. We should be petitioning God on behalf of that person that they are convicted by the Holy Spirit to repentance and restoration.

When was the last time you saw a fellow believer struggling and went home, or right then and there, prayed for them to be delivered from that sin? I believe the honest answer to that question would be sad if we surveyed the entire body of Christ.

REMINDER

1 JOHN 5, DEVOTION 5

James Mann

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” 1 John 5:18-20

As I read through this passage of Scripture, I realized that the apostle John is not treating this section as new information being given to his audience. John is not ending this letter with any mind-blowing information. Instead, John chooses to have this section serve as a reminder to the believers reading this of things that have already been taught either earlier in this letter, or the Gospels themselves. Why is this so important?

Being that I am not yet a parent, I cannot attest to the parental side of this, but I can speak for the child side of what I am about to say. I can remember growing up and having my parents tell me things multiple times. Usually, the things that mattered the most were told to me hundreds, if not thousands, of times. These were the things that were life and death. Sometimes I would understand and follow these things right away, and then sometimes it took thousands of times to hear it until it finally clicked, and I began to understand the importance of what was being told to me. The same thing is going on here. If we, as followers of Christ, could read the Bible once and understand and apply everything we have learned to our lives the

first time, life would be amazing. Instead, it takes multiple times hearing and trying to follow the Scriptures until it finally sticks.

The apostle John is wrapping up his letter with reminders to stop living in our sinful ways. We need to understand that God will protect us, and if we are faithful followers, then the evil one cannot touch us. We need to remember that we live in a world that is filled with the power of the evil one. Finally, we need to understand that God has given us understanding so that we may know Him and understand that through His Son, Jesus Christ, we can have eternal life. This should serve as our battle cry as followers of Christ. We are so blessed to have a God that has given us protection from the desires of the evil one and has given us the ability to live eternally through Him.

FREE

1 JOHN 5, DEVOTION 6

Noble Baird

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” 1 John 5:21

One of my all-time favorite movies is *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Within the first opening minutes, we find Indiana cautiously making his way through an ancient cave. Narrowly avoiding all the traps and obstacles, he ultimately finds what he has been searching for - the golden idol. Yet, after what he thinks is a clean exchange (the idol for a bag of sand weighing almost as much as the idol), the trap is sprung, and a chain reaction of destruction begins.

In 1 John 5:21, John reminds us of a very similar idol which Indiana was seeking. Although the idol John is referencing is not necessarily a golden object, the outcome is the same. John, writing in 5:21 says, **“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”** Here, John is reminding us and warning us of the dangers of this world. The world is full of temptation, traps, and snares that, at a glance, are enticing. Satan knows how to deceive us. Ever since Genesis chapter 3, he has been doing it and doing it well. However, John is reminding us first of all of our faith in Christ; he calls us **“little children.”** This term is not used in a derogatory way, but a reminder of what he said in 1 John 2:28-3:1, **“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”** Secondly, John is warning us and reminding us to flee from temptation and the desire to place anything in this world before God.

When Indiana grabbed the golden idol, the chain reaction of destruction began. The world around him in the cave he was in literally began to fall apart. Church, I want to remind and encourage you to heed the warning of John here in 1 John 5:21. We are so privileged to be called children of God. However, sin has one goal, destruction. Flee from temptation; do not touch or dabble with the idols in this world and surrounding you. No matter how easy and harmless it may seem, you may think that you can simply take the idol and no one will notice. Yet, if we take that step and fool ourselves thinking that we have gotten away with it, we will trigger a chain reaction of destruction that, once triggered, is almost impossible to escape.

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “we don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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