

Jesus
OVERCOMES

- FIRST JOHN -



CONTRIBUTORS



PRODUCERS

Todd and Jennifer Conkright

INTRODUCTION

Nick Wackerhagen

DEVOTIONAL WRITERS

Jack Arant

Julie Arant

Sarah Buettenback

Jenifer Conkright

Todd Conkright

Mark Linder

Angela Johnson

Dave Price

INDUCTIVE STUDY QUESTIONS

Tyler Zach

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Phil Smith

LAYOUT DESIGN

Kathy Troia

Jenae Haman

All Scripture is taken from:

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®)

Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

All rights reserved.

ESV Text Edition: 2011

©All rights reserved. Do not copy or distribute without express permission from the authors.



TABLE OF CONTENTS



How to Use This Study Guide	1
Introduction	2
Inductive Bible Study Questions	
Week 1: I John 1:1-4	7
Week 2: I John 1:5-2:2	10
Week 3: I John 2:3-11	13
Week 4: I John 2:12-17	16
Week 5: I John 2:18-27	19
Week 6: I John 2:28-3:10	22
Week 7: I John 3:11-24	25
Week 8: I John 4:1-6	28
Week 9: I John 4:7-21	31
Week 10: I John 5:1-13	34
Week 11: I John 5:14-21	37
Daily Devotionals	40



Citylight Church,

Do you find the Christian life difficult and challenging? Do you often feel stuck, overwhelmed, or defeated? It's only through abiding in God's love that we can overcome all of the obstacles that we face in the Christian life: doubt, sin, hypocrisy, deception, divisiveness, fear, uncertainty, idols, false teachers, the world, and lastly, the devil. Though we face an enemy who seeks to overcome us, we can be assured that Jesus has overcome him and offers us a love that can conquer any enemy in any battle that we face on our spiritual journey. Therefore, the most important thing that we want you to take away from this series is: Apart from Jesus you can do nothing!

We have many new believers in our church. Over the past year we have baptized around 150 people. That's more than 10% of our church! This is one of the reasons we are preaching through 1 John this fall. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, wrote this short, poetic letter on God's love in order to strengthen the faith of new and existing believers.

There are two major components to this study guide: 1) inductive Bible study questions and 2) daily devotionals. The inductive questions are split up into five days to help you to work slowly through the same passage all week long. You may do more than one day at a time but I'd encourage you to slow down and mediate more than you usually do to create space to listen to the Holy Spirit and get more out of the text.

As you start the study, you'll notice that the study questions are the same each week. The reason behind this is to help our young church learn how to study the Bible more independently and thoroughly. I think there will be a long-term benefit for you individually and for our church as the questions in this study guide become more and more intuitive over time. You will however get more thought provoking questions on the passages as you participate in your City Group discussions each month.

There are three daily devotionals each week for you to enjoy. We recommend that you read them on Inductive Study Guide Day 1, 3, and 5 (because there are 5 study days and only 3 devotionals) but you can do whatever works best for yourself.

Thank you for diving into this "home-grown" resource put together by an amazing team of volunteers from Citylight Church. Our hope and prayer is that God would do nothing less than change your life through this series. Remember, Jesus overcomes!

Tyler Zach
Pastor of Leadership Development



Jesus
OVERCOMES
- FIRST JOHN -

Martin Luther - *"This is an outstanding epistle. It can buoy up afflicted hearts. Furthermore, it has John's style and manner of expression, so beautifully and gently does it picture Christ to us."*

TEXT -

There are over 600 manuscripts written in Greek that in part or in whole contain the words of 1 John. Contained in these 600 manuscripts there are so few significant differences between them all that two separate committees a decade apart, both working to figure out what are the most probable original words of 1 John, came to the same exact text except for 3 words. As one author puts it, "no major doctrines or points of interpretation are seriously affected by manuscript deviation." The same commentator also states that the differences in the manuscripts, "offer no room for pessimism regarding whether we know almost exactly what the original text contained." (Yarbrough, 2008)

AUTHORSHIP -

The author of the book does not reveal their name but only points to the most important fact about their life. The author who wrote this book had heard, seen, and even touched the one that was made manifest (1:1-2), Jesus. That puts the author into one of three camps; a definitive liar, a certifiable lunatic, or a witness of Jesus' life on earth with the authority to write a document with enough weight to be counted as God-breathed Scripture. It is the last option that wins out as there is strong and convincing evidence that John, son of Zebedee, Beloved Disciple of Jesus, the Elder (2 and 3 John), and writer of the 4th Gospel, Revelation, and 2 and 3 John is the author of 1 John. This is the John who was called by Jesus from a life of fishing (Matt 4:21), was given the nickname, along with his brother James, Sons of Thunder by Jesus (Mark 3:17), rested against Jesus' chest during the last supper (John 13:23), and was active in the early Church (Gal 2:9, Acts). From history and the book Revelation we learn that John was exiled by the Romans to the island of Patmos, probably during the reign of Domitian (c. AD 81-96), and that he was active in the church in Ephesus and the surrounding cities. John died around AD 100, approximately 94 years old.

The evidence for the authorship of John found in the written works of the early church is overwhelming. Papias of Hierapolis (active c. AD 95-110) attributes the book to him. Papias' life overlapped with John's and Papias himself may have been one of John's students. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 180) both explicitly mention John as the author in their works as well. To give you an modern example: this is similar for us to claim that C.S. Lewis is the author of Mere Christianity. People are still around that were his students, know where he lived and worked, and can confirm or deny claims about him. The authorship of John was also believed as the Church grew. People such as Eusebius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Dionysius of Alexandria, and many others, who lived in the ensuing centuries all agreed With lives in such close proximity and overlap to John's life and ministry, the Biblically external evidence is a strong sign post the points directly at John.

It is also helpful to see that the vocabulary, syntax, and themes within 1 John are extremely similar to the Gospel of John, which has similar external evidence attributing John as the author of that Gospel. There are many examples of similarities within these areas. Similar themes include; the divinity of Christ and trinitarianism, light and darkness, life and death, truth and falsehood, love and hate and more mentioned later in this introduction. How the author writes and uses language in these two books, shows uncanny similarities as well. This can be seen from literary techniques and styles, and even down to how sentences are built in each book. Many of these types of similarities can be found and are documented in commentaries and books. Other evidence also points to John as the author from the manuscripts. Many of the manuscripts that were useful in figuring out what was written have a scribal notes of John as the author.

The two main opposing views, that the author(s) is a group of dedicated students of John the Disciple who wrote the collection of works attributed to John or that the author is a prominent church elder named John who was at large, cannot hold a candle to the weight of evidence for John son of Zebedee as the author. There are other, more detailed evidences that point to John as the author that will not be explained here but can be found in the books listed in the resources section.

FORM AND GENRE -

What John has written is widely considered to be an epistle, or a letter. While Paul's letters have clearly defined structure and showcase a form of letter writing at the time, John's style is quite different. He is very sermon-like and circular in topics, as he comes back to similar themes and explains them in a different light. He does not begin or end the letter the same as Paul. Where Paul has a fairly standard introduction and closing, John seems to jump right into the purpose of the letter and abruptly stop with a command sparing all pleasantries. Even with these differences from Paul and even John's other letters this document should still be considered a letter. A strong case can be made from the people who were closer John's era of writing. Irenaeus, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Eusebius, all believed this to be a letter. These three individuals all believed this document and called it as such in their writings.

The form of a letter becomes more clear to our 21st century eyes when the parts of an ancient letter are pointed out. Like other letters, John begins by addressing the recipients, gives a description of who is writing. He uses "we" and not "I" or his own name to write in unity with the others who had the same privilege of living alongside Jesus while He was on earth. Also, he gives the purpose of writing in his introduction (vs 4) and multiple other times in the body of the document to transition to a new topic. In his conclusion, he still addresses his recipients directly using the term "children" and wishes them well a little differently.

DATE -

Trying to date the writing of 1 John can be difficult. Much of the scholarship and study concerning the date can place the writing before AD 100 with certainty. There are some who would date the writing as early as AD 60-65. One author, after suggesting AD 60-65, even says that earlier is possible. This suggestion would put John in Jerusalem writing to churches warning them of the false teachers that had left the Palestinian church (see 1 John 2:19). Others would date the writing later; 80 to the early 90s. This range seems more likely. 1 John can be shown to be in part defending against the beginnings of a 2nd century heresy that incorrectly used the Gospel of John to support their beliefs. With the writing of the Gospel of John generally credited to post 70 even into the 80s, then the writing of 1 John likely was after this.

DESTINATION AND SETTING -

With no locale explicitly stated we must infer, with some confidence, where this letter was headed. From other scripture that John has written as well as other historical writings, there is good evidence that points to Ephesus and the surrounding cities. It was well known to ancient writers that John was doing ministry in this area during the closing years of his life and the first century. John also specifically addresses parts of Revelation 2-3 to these churches per Jesus' direction. Comparing Revelation 2-3 and 1 John, one commentator details the connections in both style and content between the two sections. Also, the lack of addressing a specific person or place may indicate that the letter was to be passed around to multiple churches, which would fit with John's ministry.

What was happening in these churches? At least part of what may have been happening was the beginning form of an incorrect and harmful doctrine, a heresy, that mainly used and twisted John's writings then denied the divinity of Christ and Trinity in the process. This is guessed from the writings of the next generation who had to defend against it and from hints of it in 1 John. With no certain historical setting, one author puts it well that, "All three [1,2, and 3 John] are frank, realistic, but positive pastoral missives (not congregational creations) seeking to affirm and reinvigorate doctrinal direction, ethical urgency, relational integrity, and a forward-looking faith in God, generally in a geographical setting and temporal era in which relatively young churches were facing the challenges of a longer term existence." (Yarbrough, 2008). Let's be in it for the long haul Citylight!

THEMES -

In 1 John, there are a number of recurring themes throughout the book that are critical to be aware of and understand. John uses these themes to drive his book and often refers back to them in different contexts. Be aware, He does not always use the same key word when touching on these themes, but he uses other words and phrases within the same concept. This helps in recognizing the themes as they come alive in all of the contexts that John purposely placed them.

Abide -

To live life continually being affected by the presence, implications, and/or the quality of what is being abided in and what is abiding. John fleshes out abide's fundamental definition, to remain or stay, and shows the readers that what we abide in affects us. He also shows how there is a mutual abiding with God. Also look for the preposition "in" which John uses without "abide" many times but still has the same idea.

Key Verses: 2:6, 2:24, 2:27-28, 3:6, 3:9, 3:17, 4:12-13

Overcome -

Christians overcome every kind of evil in their personal lives, community, and entire world through God's nature, the Spirit's testimony, and Christ's work. These evils includes lovelessness, deedless love, continued unrepentant sin, and the evil one himself. Jesus already overcame all of those and we need to abide in Him.

Key Verses: 2:13-14, 2:17, 3:6, 3:8-9, 4:4, 5:4-5, 5:18

Light vs Darkness -

Light is a metaphor for the truth, holiness, righteousness, and revelation of God and of the risen Christ that comes from the being of God Himself. Darkness is a metaphor for the lies, deception, evil, and confusion inside the world and outside of God and His presence. While this is a shorter theme, the meaning of the metaphors are explicitly touched upon throughout the book. It is one of themes that ties together all of the books he has written.

Key Verses: 1:5-7, 2 8-11

Truth vs Lies -

Truth is not just the words that comes from our mouths but seen in our very lives and understanding of reality. It is the opposite of lies, deception, and rejection of God. Truth also comes straight from the Spirit of God as He fills believers with knowledge of everything and testifies concerning Jesus.

Key Verses: 1:6, 2:4, 2:20, 2:24, 3:7, 4:6, 4:20, 5:6, 5:10, 5:20

Love -

John is very clear; love is essential to the being of God, love is from Him, and love is at the core of how He relates to us. That we should love others is necessary to knowing God and abiding in Him. God himself is our power to love as He demonstrates this to us in Jesus Christ. His love is "perfected", or finds its full completion, when we are loved by God and we love another.

Key Verses: 2:5, 2:15, 3:1, 3:16-18, 4:7-12, 4:17

Divinity of Jesus vs The Antichrists -

From the moment John's ink touched papyrus to write this book, the divinity of Jesus is a central theme in both theological truth and practical application. Verse 5:20 is worth quoting, "[Jesus] is the true God and eternal life." This is truth and the Spirit testifies to it. Simply put, an antichrist is then recognized by their denial of divinity of Jesus. This denial entails rejection of Jesus as the Christ, God the Father, and that Jesus is from God. They are characterized as liars, rejectors of the truth that has been revealed by the Spirit before them, and disconnected from the community of God. God sends, Jesus saves, the Spirit testifies, and the antichrists deny the Trinity at every turn.

Key Verses: 1:1-4, 2:18-25, 3:23, 4:2-6, 4:14-15, 5:1, 5:6-12, 5:20

OUTLINE -

Outlining John can be difficult because of his style and repeated themes. The one below is a starting point. Many people who teach the Bible and write books about it for a living cannot come to a standard outline. However, John uses a few key phrases to move from topic to topic. These phrases also function as signs of key teaching, application, and statements that are fleshed out in the surrounding verses. Look for these phrases or similar formulations of them to let John guide you through his book and be aware of the context to help you understand.

“I write these things to you...”

“What you have heard...”

“Children”

“Beloved”

“By this we know...”

Prologue and Introduction 1:1-4

Living in Light vs Darkness 1:5-2:17

Fellowship with God who is light 1:5-2:6

Fellowship with Others in the light 2:7-14

Living in the World but out of Darkness 2:15-2:17

Community issues 2:18- 3:24

Warning against antichrists 2:18-2:27

The Children of God 2:28-3:10

Loving one another 3:11-3:24

Test what is from God 4:1-5:12

Love is from God 4:1-4:21

Jesus is from God 5:1-5:12

Conclusions 5:13-21

Go to God 5:13-5:18

Closing 5:19-21

RESOURCES -

Used in the writing of the introduction:

1-3 John in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series – By Robert W. Yarbrough

“1, 2, 3 John” in An Introduction to the New Testament – By D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo

The Letters of John in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series – By John R. W. Stott

1, 2, 3 John in the Word Biblical Commentary series – By Stephen S. Smalley

OTHER RESOURCES

Glorious Intruder – By Joni Eareckson Tada

Unto the Hills – By Billy Graham

What Are You Afraid Of? – By David Jeremiah



INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS



I John 1:1-4

1 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 – 2 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 – 3 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. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 1 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 1 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 1 Devotional #3



I John 1:5-2:2

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. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 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. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Christ Our Advocate

2 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. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 2 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 2 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 2 Devotional #3



I John 2:3-11

3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The New Commandment

7 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. 8 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. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 3 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 3 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 3 Devotional #3



I John 2:12-17

- 12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.
- 13 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.
- 14 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.

Do Not Love the World

15 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.
 16 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.
 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 4 Devotional #1

.....



DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.

.....

DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?
- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?
- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 4 Devotional #2

.....



DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.

.....

DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 4 Devotional #3



I John 2:18-27

18 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. 19 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. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 21 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. 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. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 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. 25 And this is the promise that he made to us – eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 5 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 5 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 5 Devotional #3



I John 2:28-3:10

28 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. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

3 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. 2 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. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 6 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 6 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 6 Devotional #3



I John 3:11-24

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 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. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

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

17 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? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; 20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 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. 24 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.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 7 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 7 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.

DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 7 Devotional #3



I John 4:1-6

4 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. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 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. 4 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. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 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.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 8 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 8 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.

DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 8 Devotional #3



I John 4:7-21

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 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. 17 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. 18 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. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 9 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 9 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 9 Devotional #3



I John 5:1-13

5 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. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Testimony Concerning the Son of God

6 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. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. 9 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. 10 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. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

That You May Know

13 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.

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 10 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?



What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.

.....

DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?
- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?
- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 10 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 10 Devotional #3



I John 5:14-21

14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 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.

16 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. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

18 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.

19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

20 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. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols..

DAY 1

Read through the passage a few times. Draw a square around key words describing God, a circle around key words relating to us, and underline any actions or commands. Double underline the most important points in the passage.

WHO IS GOD?

What does this passage teach you about God? How does believing these truths affect my life?

What does this passage teach you about us? Why is that significant?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on who God is and who we are.

READ: Week 11 Devotional #1

.....

DAY 2

WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

What call to action or commands are mentioned?

What is the main point or points? Summarize the meaning of this passage in your own words?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on what God is saying.



DAY 3

WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Choose at least one of the following questions to meditate on and answer:

- What kind of person is this passage calling you to be? How do you fall short? How is Jesus your ultimate example?

- What sin has this passage exposed in your life? What specific command(s) are challenging to follow? How is Jesus your ultimate solution to this sin?

- What grace is being offered in this passage? Where or from whom have you sought out this grace before? How is Jesus the ultimate source of this grace?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on the person and work of Jesus.

READ: Week 11 Devotional #2

.....

DAY 4

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO GOD?

Which truth from this passage is the most important to you today?

What practical way will you apply this truth to your life?

PRAY: Spend some time praying as you reflect on how God is calling you to respond.



DAY 5

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO OTHERS?

As you reflect on the truth or lessons learned in the passage...

- Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

- Who do you need to encourage, thank, or serve this week?

- Who do you need to share or process this passage with?

PRAY: Spend some time praying for specific people that God brings to mind.

READ: Week 11 Devotional #3



DAILY DEVOTIONALS

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

"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..." 1 John 1:1-2

Have you ever heard something and doubted that it was true? Maybe the information was second hand or from an unreliable source. John begins his letter reassuring us that he is a reliable source. He has heard, seen, looked upon and touched.

For three years he ate with, worked with, and laughed with Jesus. He traveled hundreds of miles and camped with Jesus. He tasted the multiplied bread and fish. He smelled the repugnant odor of Lazarus' tomb before Jesus raised his friend back to life. He felt the water trickle over his feet as Jesus washed them. As he reclined close to Jesus, he ate the broken bread, and drank the wine representing His body and blood.

John watched Jesus perform miracles, listened to His teaching, and heard His cries of agony as he stood by Mary's side and watched Jesus die. Three days later, he felt the sweat trickle down his cheeks as he raced to the tomb. He arrived to find no body, only wrappings and the pungent aroma of spices.

He is the disciple whom Jesus loved...perhaps His best earthly friend. We can trust that what John is about to tell us is true...he was there.

Jesus, as I enter this study of 1 John, help my unbelief. Help me to wholeheartedly trust that what You say is true and lean into Your presence as I go through this day.

EXPERIENCING GOD

"...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." 1 John 1:3

God has given us five senses to experience life...and ultimately Him. Just as John saw, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched, we too can experience God through our five senses on a daily basis.

As you read God's word, imagine yourself in the story. What would it be like to see, hear, taste, touch and smell what is being experienced? Gaze at images that were made to glorify and reflect Him. Listen to what God may be saying to you through the image. Marvel at His creation and interact with its Maker as you do. Smell fragrant flowers, freshly mown grass, or rain, and thank Him for His goodness. Receive affection from others rather than resisting. Slow down and really taste the food He has provided. Listen with fresh ears as you have conversations today and ask God what He may be saying through others.

Then, respond as John did and proclaim what you have seen and heard to those around you. Give a first hand account to others. You, too, are an eyewitness to what God has done and is doing in your life.

Jesus, open my eyes to see what You are doing around me. Open my ears to hear Your wonderful voice. Help me to taste and see that You are good! Give me the confidence to open my mouth and speak about You and the great things You have done.

NO HINT OF DARKNESS

"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." 1 John 1:5

Imagine no darkness. Not an inkling, not a hint, no shadows, no evil, and no sin. God is light. Light dispels darkness, illuminates and radiates warmth. Comforting, isn't it? Light reveals, and darkness conceals. It is God's nature to reveal Himself, and He is pure and holy.

"Jesus proclaims, 'I am the Light of the world.' These words imply that the world needs light, and is naturally in a dark condition. For this state of things, the Lord Jesus Christ declares Himself to be the only remedy. He has risen, like the sun, to diffuse light, and life, and peace, and salvation, in the midst of a dark world. He invites all who want spiritual help and guidance to turn to Him, and take Him for their leader. What the sun is to the whole solar system--the center of light, and heat, and life, and fertility--that He has come into the world to be to sinners." (J.C. Ryle)

Then Jesus tells us, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14a,16) Here is the miracle...we, the people of a land of deep darkness, have the Light living in us, and His Light is able to shine brightly through us. We are His luminaries to dispel the darkness!

Father, You have called me out of darkness into your marvelous light. May I not hide or cover Your light, but shine it brightly in the midst of a dark world.

A WALK IN THE FOG

"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." 1 John 1:7

Jesus said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) Either we are following Jesus and walking in light, or not. If we are walking in darkness, we are surely not following Jesus.

In 2002, our family had the privilege of visiting the Great Wall of China, but we were quite disappointed the day of the adventure. After seeing panoramic postcards for a month, we discovered that, in reality, it is often very foggy. The fog that day was so thick you could "cut it with a knife." Yet, it wasn't dark. We could still see about ten feet ahead. Enough to take the next few steps. My two year old boy took my hand and confidently began the climb.

God doesn't illuminate our whole path, but rather, He guides us through the next steps of each day...kind of like a walk in the fog. If He would illuminate our whole path, we, in our arrogance, would walk in self-reliance, rather than God dependence. As long as we are following Him, we will never walk in darkness. This includes the darkest times in our lives.

Jesus, I realize that today's forecast is for fog, and I need you. I give you my hand and surrender this day to you, knowing that You are the light, and that You know the way.

DENY IT OR DEAL WITH IT!

"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." 1 John 1:8-9

Remember your last walk in the dark? How did you feel with your arms out as you slowly put one foot in front of the other? When we sin, we walk in darkness. John tells us we have two options in dealing with sin.

Door #1 - We can deny our sin, deceive ourselves, and continue to walk in darkness...ultimately making God a liar. Walking in darkness involves stumbling, falling, pain, and lack of direction. King David chose a dark path for a time: An affair with a married woman resulting in pregnancy, and murder. When confronted with his sin, he was blinded by self-denial. Regarding his denial he said, "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." (Psalm 21:3-4)

Door #2 - We can confess, which is simply agreeing with God about our sin, thanking Him for His forgiveness, turning away from darkness, and walking in the light. This results in fellowship with God and each other, and cleansing from sin.

Let's join with David in confession...

"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!...Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...Purge me...and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51)

OUR ADVOCATE

"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." 1 John 2:1b-2

Court is in session. In walks the judge - the just judge. This isn't the first time you've been here. You've been here countless times before. You put your hand on the Bible and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The accuser lays out all of your recent offenses. The judge asks, "How do you plead?" The choice is here once again...deny it or deal with it. Was it really that bad? Not compared to others...faulty reasoning.

You hear yourself admit, "guilty as charged, Sir." followed by a sinking feeling. Then, a ray of hope appears. Your Advocate has arrived. He is not a peer of yours who is guilty as well, He is perfect; Jesus Christ the righteous. He does not try to prove your innocence, because you are guilty. He does not plead mercy on your behalf, He pleads for justice. Verse 1:9 says "He is faithful and just to forgive us..."

"Jesus Christ stands before the Father...and relentlessly and continually says something like this: 'Father, yes he did it again, but I have died the death he should have died, and lived the life he should have lived...I am his advocate...When you look at him, you have to see Me. You have to see all that I have done. You have to see all that I am...I have already paid for it.'" (Tim Keller)

Thank you Jesus for being my advocate!

TO KNOW THAT WE KNOW

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” 1 John 2:3

You’ve tried not to sin. You want to show God your gratitude for all that He has done for you. You want to somehow be perfect and never let Him down. And...you blow it...again. Doubt arises and you ask yourself, “Is it real? Do I really know Jesus? Do I really know God?”

Most of us have been there – shaking our heads at our sin and wondering if our relationship with God is real. In the previous verses, John explains that Jesus is the provision for the forgiveness of our sins. Now, he seems to be saying that we will know that we know Him if we keep His commandments and never sin. As John would say - it’s time to shine some light on the subject.

John writes about two kinds of knowing—an intellectual knowing and an intimate knowing. Knowing Jesus intellectually is not enough. Our head knowledge must be combined with the heart knowledge that comes through an intimate relationship. When we draw close to Him and experience His character, we will become increasingly obedient to reflect His character. Love will express itself in obedience.

Although Jesus alone can live a perfect, sinless life, we are not given a license to sin. The Greek word used for keep “expresses the idea of watchful, observant obedience” (R. Law). John is not speaking of a perfect life, but of a heart that is dedicated to carefully, intentionally and faithfully walking in obedience and love with Jesus.

We need never doubt the truth again. As we grow in an intimate knowledge of Him, sin’s grip will lessen, obedience will increase, and the imperfection that once caused us to doubt will now lead to confession that unites our hearts with Him. We can know that we know Him.

WALK THE WALK

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

Have you ever been giving advice to a friend and realized, mid-sentence, that you don't actually follow that advice yourself? As the words leave your mouth, an lingering uneasiness settles upon you as you realize that you are much better at talking the talk than you are at walking the walk.

Abiding in Christ is more than knowing the right words or being able to give the right advice. John tells us that when we abide with Christ we ought to walk in the same way He walked. What does it mean to abide with Christ? John MacArthur describes it this way,

The word "abide" basically means "to remain." Every Christian remains inseparably linked to Christ in all areas of life. We depend on Him for grace and power to obey. We look obediently to His Word for instruction on how to live. We offer Him our deepest adoration and praise and we submit ourselves to His authority over our lives. In short, Christians gratefully know Jesus Christ is the source and sustainer of their lives.

"Actions speak louder than words." This is one of those truths that has been repeated enough to become a cliché. It is repeated so often because it is true. Parents often laughingly repeat the joke, "Do as I say, not as I do." This statement stops being funny when we begin to communicate it to a world that needs to know Christ.

Do you go through your day "remaining" with Christ? Is every area of your life inseparably linked to Him? Will those who need to know Jesus encounter Him through you as they walk alongside you through life? Decide today to abide. Walk His walk and even your smallest, quietest acts of obedience will not only speak, but shout, to the world of His love.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

“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...” I John 2:7-8a

John is writing about a commandment that is both old and new. What is this commandment? It is a commandment that is repeated throughout the Old and New Testament – the commandment to love others. God gives this command through Moses in Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” When Jesus came to earth, He raised the bar considerably. He said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13:34)

The old commandment has been made new by the increased depth and generosity of the love we are to offer. We are no longer commanded only to love others as we love ourselves, but to love others as Jesus has loved us. Jesus gives us an example of a love that is offered freely to all and willing to sacrifice on behalf of all.

Are you willing to love like Jesus?

It takes faith to believe that it is possible; that He will provide His love to flow from our hearts. Our unbelief and need to protect ourselves sometimes lead us to draw a figurative line in the sand that says, “I will love to this point, but no further.” In our hurt or unwillingness to forgive, we sometimes draw a figurative circle around ourselves in the sand that says, “I will love only these few.” Jesus commands us to clear the sand, erase the lines and invite the world to experience His love through us.

The direction to love is not a suggestion. It is a command. The question is now “Will I trust and obey?”

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” (John 14:21)

A REMINDER TO REMEMBER

*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 him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong, because you know the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.
I John 2:12-14*

Both the challenge and the value in these verses can be found in the repetition. Our texting, twittering, media-driven culture is constantly surrounding us, and at times, assaulting us, with words. This overabundance of words has created a generation of skimmers. As we read, our eyes and minds quickly race across the sentences, seeking to highlight a new idea or bit of information.

Our generation is missing out on a time-honored method of learning and remembering: the power of repetition. In the past, repetition was seen as a valuable method of reinforcing instruction. The repetition in this passage may tempt us to skim over the words in these verses, but if we give in to that impulse we will miss powerful reminders.

John knew the life and death importance of remembering that this darkness has been victoriously overcome by Christ, the Light. He writes, repeats, and reminds. We are forgiven through Christ! We can know the Father! Strength will come when we abide in the word of God! The evil one has been overcome!

There is much at stake in the battle between light and darkness. Remembering who we are and what we have been given in Christ can make all the difference. Let's stop skimming, and truly grasp the victory that comes when these truths are embedded in our hearts and minds. You are forgiven. You can know the Father. Abide in God's Word and strength will come. You will overcome the evil one. Repeat, remind and remember.

A CHOICE TO BE MADE

*"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."
1 John 2:15*

At first glance, this verse seems to be in contradiction with other verses in the Bible. One of John's favorite themes is the call for us to love others. In this case, John is not speaking of individuals, but rather the ways of a world that is at odds with God. He speaks of a world system that persistently rejects God and His ways in favor of following its own wills and desires.

John is telling us that we must choose. Who will we love most of all? Who will be our first priority and our final authority?

This world rebels against either/or statements. A declaration of allegiance to the ways of God is declared to be an act of intolerance. A commitment to Christ as the only path to salvation is branded as narrow-minded thinking.

The truth is that we also struggle with the either/or statements of God. Jesus had no problems stating that a choice must be made. In Matthew 6:24, He declares, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Most of us cringe at the thought of standing up in front of the church and declaring, "I love money! I am devoted to it and I serve it!" We don't want to believe that we love money more than God. And yet...when the job is lost and the paychecks have ended, when dinner has to be macaroni and cheese for the third time this week...what do we desire more? What delights our hearts more - the fullness of the love of God or a wallet full of money?

God will have no rival for his children's affections. There is an either/or decision to be made. In love, He claims all.

FROM NOW TO FOREVER

"For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the 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." 1 John 2:17

This world constantly bombards us with temptations to desire and pursue the brightest and shiniest. We are also constantly bombarded with temptations to believe that the brightest and shiniest people know more, achieve more and matter more.

When we are not abiding with God and desiring to be obedient to His will, our desires become short-sighted. We focus on the here and now. We begin to count our riches by what we can see and touch. We want more. We want what others have. And if we allow ourselves to give power to those desires, we convince ourselves that we deserve what others have. We tire of waiting. We tire of wanting.

"YOLO" (You Only Live Once) is often the anthem of those who believe that the only way to truly live is to grab or experience whatever you want in the moment. What a difference it would make if our mindset were to change from "YOLO" (You Only Live Once) to "YWLF" (You Will Live Forever).

Although "YWLF" doesn't flow as easily from our tongues, the promise to abide together throughout eternity flows directly from the heart of God. This world, the cravings for more, the desires for what belongs to others, the temptations to sin...it will all pass away. Your life of abiding, however, will last forever.

The next time you are tempted to follow the world's version of the YOLO mentality, remember these words from pioneer missionary C.T. Studd:

"Only one life, yes only one, Now let me say Only one, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call, I know I'll say "'twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last. "

DON'T BE DECEIVED

*"Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come."
1 John 2:18*

In the Garden of Eden the serpent, Satan, approached Eve with a question that put doubt into her mind. He said, "Did God actually say...?" Despite having direct communication with God, the Deceiver was able to make Eve question God's instructions. Eve got caught up in the moment and allowed herself to be lured by the promises of Satan, and sin entered the world as her teeth sank into the flesh of the fruit and the juice trickled down her chin.

We know that the Adversary wants to destroy Christ and His Church (1 Peter 5:8). What better way than to plant seeds of doubt in our minds and cause us to question what we know to be true? When we question the simplicity of the gospel, it doesn't seem to be enough, and false teachers are at the ready with deceiving alternatives that get our attention.

False teachers have infiltrated the church from the beginning. These antichrists with a small "a" are shadows of The Antichrist, who will oppose Christ and His Church on a global scale some time in the future. Antichrist means "other than Christ" and refers to those who preach another form of salvation apart from Christ alone.

Paul warned the Galatians (Galatians 1:8-9) just as John is warning his congregation against those who spread lies about Christ and the way to salvation. The challenge is that these false teachers are very persuasive, making great arguments that, in Paul's words, "tickle our itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3).

John pleads with us not to be deceived by the liars who are out to lead us astray, "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you." Stick with the basics of the gospel and be on the lookout for those who add to what Christ has done.

BACK TO BASICS

"If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and the Father." 1 John 2:24

Life can get complicated, and sometimes we can forget the importance of going back to the basics. One of the first verses most Christians memorize is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

The gospel has never changed. Christ died for sinners and made a way for us to have a relationship with God. Romans 3:25 explains, "For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood." (NLT)

That's it! The gospel is so beautifully simple. We were separated from God through sin. Christ came and lived a sinless life and sacrificed Himself as the spotless lamb, removing our sin so that we can reconnect with God. When we believe that He did this for us, we are saved. (Romans 10:9)

Many of us learned the basics of the gospel in Sunday school as little children. We sang "The B-I-B- L-E, yes that's the Book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E." The Bible is our source for truth, and we need to watch for any teacher who argues for something that isn't supported in the Bible.

The old hymns are great at weaving in the basic doctrines of the faith. Amazing Grace was written by John Newton in 1779, yet the words still proclaim the grace that the Father showed in sending us His Son:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind but now I see!*

A SACRED APPOINTMENT

"But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you." 1 John 2:27a

Jewish believers were very familiar with the concept of anointing. Religious and political leaders were anointed by having oil poured on their heads. It was a sign that they were specially chosen by God for that office. In Greek society anointing was used in religious ceremonies to usher in special knowledge from a god.

Anointing was something that only a small number of select individuals got to experience. Until Christ came along, that is. William Barclay observes, "In the old days anointing had been the privilege of the chosen few, the priests, the prophets and the kings; but now it is the privilege of every Christian, however humble he may be."

A Christian's anointing no longer has to be accompanied by the pouring on of oil. An anointing is a sacred appointment to a position as a child of God; a divine blessing we receive when we hear the gospel message and respond with belief in Christ's redemptive work on our behalf.

In the second half of verse 27 John tells us that, "His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie." What this means is that His Spirit confirms the truth within us. When we accept the gospel as true and accept Jesus as our Savior, the Spirit indwells us. We are anointed with the truth and can use our anointing to test any teaching we encounter.

When John says that we "have no need that anyone should teach [us], he's not telling us we have no need for pastors and teachers. What he is saying is that individual believers have means to test whether something is true or not by holding it up to the light of God's Word and listening to the Holy Spirit. If your soul is unsettled, the Spirit may be prompting you to get into the Bible rather than simply accepting what you heard as true.

CONFIDENCE OR SHAME

"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." 1 John 2:28

Have you ever been in that situation where you see someone you haven't seen in a long time? You might think ... "Oh, no. Run... can't talk with that person" or "Oh, hey! It's so great to see you! Have time to catch up?"

The Bible is full of these meetings. One person in particular, Peter, experienced both reactions. Shame when he faced Jesus after denying Him, and gratitude when Jesus restored him.

Think of what your first glimpse of Jesus will be like. Will you want to run towards Him in gratitude or away from Him in shame?

1 John says, "Little children abide in Him." Jesus used the word abide in John 15, referring to Himself as the true vine, and said "Abide in me, and I in you." The branch (us) is grafted into the vine (Jesus), from which all nutrients (blessings) flow. His presence and power, words and love flow through us like sap through a branch. We obey His commands (love God and love people) and bear fruit. We can do nothing apart from Him. That's abiding. Abiding grows confidence.

All of mankind, every soul, will face Jesus one day. Whether we are joyfully confident or weep in shame will depend on our relationship with Him. An abiding relationship with Jesus acquaints us with the depth of His love for us. We obey and desire to obey. We see Him as our advocate and friend, our shepherd and King. We know, then, that we can approach His throne of grace in our times of need.

Without a relationship with Jesus how can we expect to be confident before Him?

Ever wonder what it will be like to reunite with your Creator? Will you be confident or shame-filled? Will your life have been about you and your glory or will you have lived your life for God's glory?

WHAT MAKES YOU SO SPECIAL?

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

“And so we are.” What a proclamation and affirmation of our identity! We are children of God! The proof, of God’s free gift of love, is that every person can be called “my child”.

Sadly, not everyone will. Why? It requires sacrifice, surrender, and submission. Each child of God must trust that Jesus’ sacrifice met the judge’s requirement: justice. It required His life. Jesus laid down His equality with God when He became human, and then died and rose again. Because of His sacrifice, God has given him the name above all names. (Philippians. 2:5-11)

If you are a child of God then you believe that Jesus’ sacrifice was the ultimate display of His love for

you. Ecstatic, you surrender to Jesus and transfer your title from the father of this world, Satan, to your Heavenly Father, your Creator. Grateful, you freely submit your life to serve a new King and a new Father. You receive your new identity: child of God.

On that day when we walk through the thin veil of death, we will see Him, the One who was sacrificed for us, our Advocate and Lord in His full glory. We will become like Him: pure. Until then we long for that day. It gives us something to hope for, a purpose to live for, and a plan to fulfill.

So what makes YOU so special? He does. Your identity is “Child of the Almighty God.” Now go act like it!

If you’re not a child of God, what are you waiting for? Accept Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf. Shed that burden and receive forgiveness. Surrender yourself to His lordship, and become a child of God.

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW

"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." 1 John 3:8-10a

I'm sure you've heard these sayings:

"Like father, like son." "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree." "It's about who you know."

How about these?

"Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?" (James 3:11)

"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit." (Luke 6:43)

A child will emulate the traits and practices of the parent. Why? Time spent together. Basic observations of nature show similar patterns. You plant an apple seed, you expect to get an apple tree that produces apples containing apple seeds. If it's a good tree, you expect good fruit. Why? The design of the tree is such that it normally produces that which it originated from.

In this passage, we observe two opposing forces: sin and righteousness.

Satan is the father of sin. If we practice sinning, we are his children. We abide with him, know his ways and model them. This relationship leads to eternal death. Satan pulls the wool over our eyes and whispers directions to destruction.

But, Jesus, who is righteous, came to open our eyes to the truth, whisper affirmations of His love, and break the shackles that bind us to Satan. This relationship leads to eternal life. Abiding with Jesus heals us, which produces good fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). (Galatians 5:22-23a).

Satan or God. It's all about who you know.

THE WAY OUT OF DEATH

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death." 1 John 3:14

A few years ago I might have thought that John was being a bit melodramatic when he writes that anyone who hates is a murderer at heart. Now, however, I have sons. Countless playful wrestling matches that start with plenty of laughter and brotherly fun disintegrate into full on going-for-the- jugular rage. Cain and Abel moments are not far off fable. They happen today, in my own home.

"But," my son will argue, "I'm not actually going to kill him." He's missing the point. As a mom, any time my kids argue, fight, shut each other out or tear each other down in public or in private, it breaks my heart. There's something deep inside that believes that the mark of a family should be love for one another, but our human bonds of blood are easily broken and marred by envy and all kinds of sin. Parenthood gives us a glimpse of God's heart toward His children. Whether hatred or murder, all of it grieves the Father.

Fortunately, He knows our default state and offers us a way out of our hatred and death. When we enter God's family through faith in Jesus He gives us his Spirit. Galatians 5:22 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love. Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is evidence and assurance that we have truly received the gift of eternal life. If you have no love, the answer is not: Try to love more. The answer is: Run to Jesus and He will change your heart.

LOVE IS PERSONAL

"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?" 1 John 3:17

I glanced at my phone. No Caller ID. I pushed ignore.

There is a person in my life whose calls ring in as No Caller ID. We'll call her "No Caller ID" to protect her identity. When I first met her, I had started a youth basketball program to "make a difference" in our community and I was filled with idealistic notions of loving my neighbor.

No Caller ID is the mom of one of our basketball kids and she has taught me that words and talk are child's play compared to deeds and truth. Difficult past. Overwhelming needs. I thought I could help her and save her. We became friends, but not the real, reciprocal kind. It is the kind of friendship that leaves you so empty that your heart starts to close and you start ignoring calls. I have realized that I liked the idea of loving my neighbor rather than actually demonstrating love to my neighbor.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular."

John takes us from idealistic notions of laying down our lives for others to the reality that real love is demonstrated in a hundred little ways as we truly see needy people and do not close our hearts against them. He gives the secret to this kind of love at the end of verse 17 "...how does God's love abide in him?" A closed heart is a sign that we have stopped abiding in God's love. Sacrificial, life-giving love is always born out of an abiding faith in Jesus' love and sacrifice for us. No Caller ID revealed the truth to me that "apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

WHERE IS OUR CONFIDENCE?

"...God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything." 1 John 3:20

Do you ever feel like your own heart is condemning you? Do you have an inner voice that whispers to you, telling you that you've failed, you haven't done enough, that you are not enough? Even those of us who have fallen to our knees at the cross and accepted the full grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ have the need to be reassured. The truth is, on this side of eternity, we will continue to wrestle with our flesh, sin, failure, imperfect motives and screwed-up hearts.

My friend is filled with guilt because she needed to set a boundary with a toxic person. Of course, the person is not thrilled and has already waged an attack. (Remember, the person is toxic.) Now a seed of doubt has crept in my friend's heart and made her question if setting a boundary is the loving thing to do. This godly woman is tormenting herself. How can she find confidence again?

John reminds us that "God is greater than our heart and he knows everything." I am so glad of that! Why? Because sometimes we truly don't know if we are doing the right thing. We wrestle and pray and try to discern God's will. In the end, we have to make a decision and trust that God knows our heart. Ultimately, our confidence rests in the finished work of Jesus Christ. When our hearts lead us toward repentance we can do so with confidence that we will receive forgiveness. (1 John 1:9) When our hearts falsely accuse us, our confidence, too, rests in Christ and his sovereign ability to sift through mixed-up motives and messy outcomes.

TEST THE SPIRITS

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." 1 John 4:1a

People say a lot of things about Jesus. You may have opened your door to find a pair of pleasant people offering copies of their magazine, or two young men in white shirts and dark slacks, "elders" in their church.

Even people with no particular religious commitments are likely to offer their thoughts about Jesus. "His teachings are very meaningful," or "His life is an example of love and connection to God and others" are common sentiments.

Most things people say about Jesus sound nice, and there is truth in many of them. Even if they don't sound quite right, we might feel that the spirit behind them is okay. But John, in this passage, raises the bar when he tells believers to test the spirits, focusing on what people teach about Jesus.

The fact that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh was important to John because to deny it meant to deny that in his death and resurrection Jesus represented all of us human beings to God. In our day people are more likely to deny that Jesus came from God in heaven, but it comes out as the same problem of denying Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Many people, from a religious figure like Mahatma Ghandi to a songwriter like Jackson Browne to many politicians in Washington, D.C., have wanted to connect their beliefs and ideas to Jesus. That shows the undeniable power and influence of Jesus' life and teachings. It also shows the work of God's Spirit in the message of the gospel. But Paul warns Timothy about people who seem godly while they deny the power of God in Christ (2 Timothy 3:2-5). So we must be careful, testing the beliefs behind what people say about Jesus. We need to test the spirits.

YOU'RE AN OVERCOMER

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." 1 John 4:4

Life is hard.

Sometimes it's easy to see, when health problems or a family tragedy make each day a difficult struggle. Problems with money (or lack of it) or failure at work or school cut at our sense of identity and worth. No matter how we look on the outside, every person deals with relationship problems, disappointments, and those times when nothing seems to be going right and life feels like a bummer. Life in this world is a difficult passage for every single person.

John doesn't try to paper over and hide the difficulty of life, but he raises our sights to what is even more important, the greatness of Jesus, the one who is in us.

The one who is in the world is the source of the evil we encounter, the doubts and fears we feel, the lies we hear about ourselves and life in this world. Sometimes it seems it would be easier to give up in the struggle against our obstacles. It sure looks at times as if conflict, pain, war, poverty, and death are the way things are always going to be. It can be tempting to believe the world's lies, to live according to the world's values, as if it doesn't matter.

These are the times we need to hear John again, "Greater is the one who is in you than the one who is in the world." Even if we feel like we've hit bottom, we have already overcome everything against us because Jesus is in us. Jesus guides us and provides for us. He teaches us his way and he reaches us in our troubles. And in this very important passage John wants to make sure each one of us hears Jesus say, "You're an overcomer."

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

"We are from God." 1 John 4:6a

"Where are you from?" tends to be one of the first questions we ask people we meet. It gives us a chance to learn something about the person, and sometimes it helps us to understand their background and history. Knowing someone grew up in Waverly or in north Omaha might help us avoid some misunderstandings.

John reminds us where we are from, when he writes "You are from God" in verse 4, and again in verse 6, "We are from God." More than being from the American South might explain our manners, or being from Asia might explain our commitment to family, being from God explains our commitment and our confidence and our concern. We're committed to the truth of the gospel about Jesus. We're confident in the power of God in us to overcome the challenges we face from the world. We're concerned about letting God keep all of our beliefs and behaviors in line with his character and nature.

Being from God does put us out of step with the world and its commitments and concerns. As John says in verse 6, those who are not from God don't listen to us. If you've ever read the news or watched television and wondered how a person could say the things they say or do the things they do, remember that it's not only that the world doesn't believe in Jesus and his message of hope in God. The world's commitments and concerns keep people from hearing us and understanding what God has done in our lives to redeem us and restore us. That's why it's so important for us to continue to pray for the world and to love like God loved us when he sent Jesus into the world.

TRUE LOVE CAN ONLY COME FROM GOD

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." 1 John 4:7

There is a profound joy in loving and being loved. When I was a little girl, I was deeply drawn in by sentimental love stories like the epic story of Cinderella. Any story with a handsome prince rescuing a lovely maiden was captivating. Love is a story written on our hearts. If we are honest with ourselves, I believe that we are all drawn to adventurous romantic love stories.

True love, the deepest form of agape love, is rooted in the heart of God, fashioned by the Greatest Lover of our souls.

God knows us fully; knows our sin - yet still He sent His son to be the payment, the substitute for us. As a result, because our debt has been paid, He can accept us fully.

Not only does He truly love and accept us fully, His love and kindness can never be exhausted. God will never run out of fresh ways for us to experience the profound joy of being loved. The wealth of his love and grace is immeasurable.

Ephesians 2:7 reveals the aim of God even in saving us. It is "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Now we know the breadth of God's love; it will take eternity for Him to show us all the love and kindness He has to show!

As the true love of God fills our hearts, we are empowered by that love to serve Him and others with great joy!

GOD'S VERY NATURE IS LOVE

"God is Love." 1 John 4:8b

The word "love" is used to mean many different things. We say that we "love" our car or our house, or a favorite place to travel. We even might say that we "love" a particular food, like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Yet, there is something altogether different and deeply profound when we say that "God is love."

If there is one thought about God that gives me the most comfort, it is the fact that He is Love. As a matter of fact, my favorite prayer for people who are lost is to pray that He will "draw them with His Love, that His kindness will draw them to repentance."

When we say "God is love," we do not mean simply that He is a loving God, but that love is an innate part of who He is. Love is in His very nature like justice and mercy are.

The nature of God consists of three distinct beings who are also one. Between the three beings of the Godhead is perfect love. God has been in this eternal dance of a love relationship in the Trinity. He also has been and always will be love. It is part of his very essence.

If God had only talked about how much He loved us and never proved it by sending His Son to rescue us, to meet our greatest need—the forgiveness of sin—and restoring us back into a love relationship with Himself—He would have been a very cruel God. But He did more than talk. He demonstrated His love for us by sending the most precious offering He could make: His only and sinless Son, who became sin on our behalf that we might be delivered from sin and live eternally with Him in heaven.

Now that's true love!

GOD LOVED US FIRST

"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." 1 John 4:10

The average person today may meet as many people in one year as his great-grandfather met in a lifetime. Why is he lonelier than his great-grandfather? We are seldom alone, yet there is more sense of disconnection and feeling unloved than perhaps in any other century. Sometimes the least likely people seem to be the loneliest and feel the most unloved. David Jeremiah gives the following examples in his book, "What Are You Afraid Of?"

Actress Anne Hathaway confessed, *"Loneliness is my least favorite thing about life. The thing that I'm most worried about is just being alone without anybody to care for or someone who will care for me."*

Comedian Lily Tomlin said, *"We're all in this alone."*

Albert Einstein wrote, *"It is strange to be known universally and yet be so lonely."*

The truth is, we are passionately pursued by the great Lover of our souls, who relentlessly seeks us out.

This always stands out to me, because the gospel is absolutely nothing that I do. It's not about me at all. It's pure grace. Even my ability to respond to the gospel is grace. My ability to love God is because He loved me. That's why I love the gospel. Look at a few ways He wonderfully invaded an otherwise lonely existence:

He revealed himself to a Abraham, in the town of Ur, and built a nation.

He brought conviction to a young woman named Esther and saved His people.

He moved the heart of a greedy tax collector to climb up a tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.

He entered the womb of a virgin to stomp out Satan's plan to destroy humanity.

In our loneliness, God loves us first. He is the initiator. He cares enough to step into our lives, not because we love Him, but because He loved us first.

BELIEF AND BIRTH

“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.” 1 John 5:1

“Are you one of those ‘born again Christians’?” I was asked this question several years ago. I don’t remember my exact answer at the time, but the simple correct answer is: “There is no other kind!” To be a Christian, according to Jesus, you must be born again. (John 3) John wrote about that clear command of Jesus in his gospel, and now reflects on it once again in this letter.

Most of us are so familiar with the words “born again” that we have lost the wonder and excitement of its meaning. Consider the love and thrill when a young couple witnesses the birth of their baby.

It is an unforgettable experience. So it is when a child is born into God’s family. Unlike our physical birth that we can’t remember, believers have a clear remembrance of an encounter with Christ.

Charles Wesley, one of the greatest hymn writers of all time, expressed it in the fourth stanza of his hymn “And Can It Be?”

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light!
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Born of God. He has shined the light into our darkness and set us free! Even that spark of faith to believe is a gift from our God of love. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Take a look back to when you were “born of God” and sing a song of praise and thanks to Him!

THE LOVE TEST

“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.” 1 John 5:2-3

Love.....Love....Love...is used three times in these two short verses, and is a major theme of John's letter.

How do you know if you are living a life of love?

An old spiritual says, “Everybody talkin’ ‘bout heaven aint goin’ there,” and in the same way everybody talking about love doesn’t have it. I’ve been to more weddings than I can remember, even officiated some. Love is the theme about every wedding, and it should be! Sadly, many of those marriages didn’t make it, in spite of all the love talk.

1 Corinthians 4:20 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”

I’m a pretty good talker. It’s easy for me to tell my wife how much I love her. Words are my love language. To her, talk is cheap. She knows my love is real when it’s expressed through my actions. Real love is more than words or a feeling. It is a force that spurs to action. It’s the same principle we learned from James - real faith leads to good works. Real love leads to obedience.

“Love keeps.” That means that God’s love has staying power. Think of how patient and long-suffering is His love that keeps loving us! If we catch even a small portion of that powerful, enduring love of God, like the earth catches just a tiny portion of the warmth of the sun, it will be enough. When real love is present, obeying becomes natural, not burdensome. It is like a loving husband and wife delighting in serving each other.

Jesus said:

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21)

Real love delights in obedience!

ETERNAL LIFETIME GUARANTEE

"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. 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." 1 John 5 11-13

I heard the gospel many times as a child, and it seemed that every time there was an invitation to respond I felt compelled to raise my hand, march down the aisle, stand, or whatever else was required. I had waves of uncertainty about my eternal destiny, because I was keenly aware of my sinful tendencies. I was looking at my performance to determine my security as a real, heaven-bound Christian.

What I really wanted was a rock-solid, iron-clad, inscribed-in-granite guarantee!

Our lives are full of examples of security and guarantees. A baby finds security in a mother's arms, and his mother's soothing voice is the guarantee of the mother's love. My little grandson stands at the edge of the pool, and because he trusts my promise to catch him, jumps into the deep water. I just bought new tires for my car that came with a guarantee that they would last a long time and a promise of free replacement if they don't. A title company guarantees that you own your house, and someone else can't lay claim to it.

How much more do we need to be able to leap into eternity with guaranteed confidence! One of the best things I did in my early Christian life was to memorize John 5:11-13, and I would urge you to memorize them too! They are the guarantee; the re-assuring voice of God to us.

"Whoever has the Son has life...you may know that you have eternal life"

ASK WITH CONFIDENCE

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

1 John 5:14

One of the greatest joys of life is when we have the ability to bring pleasure and happiness to others. Many years ago, when my kids were little, I heard Dr. James Dobson say something on the radio that made a big impression on me. He encouraged parents to say "yes" whenever they could.

That simple instruction helped form my attitude while raising my kids. I said "yes" whenever it was reasonable and I saw no danger. My son crashed his dirt bike and had to get some stitches, but some yeses are still worth the risk!

Now the standing joke among my grandchildren is: "Ask Papa Jack- he always says yes!"

We have a Heavenly Father like that! He's not grudging, grouchy, or stingy. He wants to say yes! 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."

The other good thing is that, unlike an earthly father, if our Heavenly Father tells us "no" it is not because He had a bad day, felt inconvenienced, or couldn't afford it. It is because He knows what's best. His will is always for our best. We can go to Him with confidence, knowing He turns and listens to us. He wants us to ask!

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11)

TWO KINDS OF SIN

"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

Sin is a present reality in this world, and in all of our lives. All sin is destructive and has the power to condemn us before a perfect and holy God. These verses give us instruction and caution us about sin. No sin in our lives should be taken lightly. Satan's plan is to use sin to "steal, kill and destroy" us. (John 10:10)

What does John mean by the statement of some sins leading to death? Let's look at two familiar stories of sins that led to death.

Pharaoh stubbornly refused to heed God's warnings and his heart was hardened. As a result, death came to countless thousands - the death of every firstborn in every family in Egypt, and the drowning of his entire army in the Red Sea. (Exodus 11-14)

Ananias and Sapphira made a proud scheme to deceive others so they could look good and promote themselves. That scheming deception cost them their lives. (Acts 5)

Pride, stubborn disobedience, and unbelief lead to death! We must guard our hearts and keep them sensitive to sin, and quickly repent. As we do that, we have life.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

GOOD-BYE IDOLS!

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

When I first read this, I thought, "What a strange way to end a letter!" Why not, "Give my greetings to Phoebe and Linus," or an inspiring benediction, or even an "Amen"?

I then had flashbacks to being puzzled as I read the Ten Commandments as a kid, and wondering what the big deal was about idols. After all, we are Christians living in modern times. We certainly don't have idols around our house, and I don't really know anyone that worships idols, yet they are at the top of the Top Ten! These are the easy ones to keep!

How shallow was my thinking! A light went on in my mind and heart when I heard this quote from John Calvin, "Our hearts are idol making factories."

Oh, now I get it! It is not only an external idol that's my problem; it is my heart's natural desire to value (worship) anything more than God. Whatever I live for, long for, or set my affections on that take God's place in my life are idols. Things, relationships, position, comfort, entertainment - even good things that consume my time and steal my affection from God - are idols.

This new awareness moves me to ask God to search my heart and show me where I have set up shrines to other "gods" in my soul. David said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart." My heart sings this phrase from an old hymn:

Break down every idol,
Cast out every foe.
Now wash me
And I shall be
Whiter than snow.

Good-bye Idols!