



MARK DRISCOLL
MINISTRIES

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It's a great joy helping people learn about Jesus from the Bible, so thank you for allowing me to serve you. If you would be willing to support our ministry with an ongoing or one-time gift of any amount, we would be grateful for your partnership.

A Nobody Trying to Tell Everybody About Somebody,

Pastor Mark Driscoll



1 JOHN

THE FATHER HEART OF GOD

1 John: The Father Heart of God Study Guide

A 13-week curriculum including small group and
group inductive studies

by
Mark Driscoll

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Foreword by Mark Driscoll

This study guide includes:

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Thirteen weekly studies designed to help you and your small group navigate 1 John together in community

GROUP INDUCTIVE STUDY

Thirteen weekly studies that challenge small groups to examine Scripture using in-depth reading techniques

Pastor Mark Driscoll is the founding pastor of The Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona. He is the author of numerous books, and in 2010 *Preaching Magazine* named him one of the 25 most influential pastors of the past 25 years. Pastor Mark and his wife, Grace, have five children all walking with Jesus.

For more content from Pastor Mark, visit markdriscoll.org.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD

SMALL GROUP STUDY

GROUP INDUCTIVE STUDY

APPENDIX FOR LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

This study guide is divided into two different sections:

1. The Small Group Study is intended for small group Bible studies. Many churches encourage these types of midweek studies, but each shares the same goal—that the people of God gather together in community to study the Word, encourage one another, pray, and get equipped for the mission of making the gospel of Jesus known to one another, their families, and their communities.

2. The Group Inductive Study approach encourages digging deep into Scripture and employs an in-depth reading technique designed for a discussion-based setting. An inductive study asks the questions, “What does the Bible say, and what does it mean?” “What do we observe, and how should we interpret it in light of the whole truth of the Bible?” This portion of the study guide focuses on delving deep into the text in a collaborative environment, and it is a great complement to the Daily Devotions and Small Group Study material.

For additional resources on how to use these studies, please refer to the Appendix for Leaders.

Lastly, I want to thank the team of volunteers who worked hard to make this great study resource available.

FOREWORD

By Pastor Mark Driscoll

Today, the fatherhood of God is more vital than ever. Of all the metaphors and images by which God could have chosen to reveal himself, Father is the most affectionate and all-encompassing.

A father is supposed to bring us to life, welcome us into a family, provide for our needs, protect us from harm, give us an identity, teach us wisdom, correct us when we wander, comfort us when we grieve, and ensure that life includes a lot of silliness and fun.

When it comes to Jesus, the old adage rings true: “Like father, like son.” This is what Jesus meant in John 14:9 when he said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Like a mirror that perfectly reflects, Jesus shows us the Father’s heart. Echoing Jesus, 1 John says that in eternity past, Jesus was “with the Father” and came to reveal to us that “our fellowship is with the Father” (1 John 1:2, 3).

The Father heart of God is perfectly seen in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Subsequently, those who walk with Jesus become more and more like the Father. This is precisely what happened to a young man named John.

John’s Ministry

The Bible introduces us to John when he was a young man—perhaps in his twenties. He was a fisherman working in the family business on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called John and his brother James to join the first disciples. “Immediately,” Scripture records, “they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:22).

The Scriptures portray John as a passionate, if not impetuous, young man; and his mother, Salome, was possibly the sister of Jesus’ mother Mary (Mark 15:40–41; John 19:25). If so, then John was perhaps Jesus’ cousin, just like John the Baptizer.

John’s father, Zebedee, was a rather affluent businessman with a successful fishing business that included a fleet of ships and employees (Matthew 27:55–56; Mark 1:20). It was at the family business that John worked with his older brother, James, and it seems they probably fished in the same area of the Sea of Galilee as two other brothers, Peter and Andrew, who were also Jesus’ disciples.

Arguably, no one knew Jesus as well as John did. Not only were they close friends, but John was only one of three disciples whom Jesus chose to be a part of his inner circle. Peter, James, and John had unique access to Jesus when the others did not. Subsequently, they were present for the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5 and Luke 8) and Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9), and they saw Jesus sweating drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). These were moments in Jesus' life and ministry when no one else was present as an eyewitness.

At the Last Supper, John sat at Jesus' side and asked who the betrayer of our Lord would be (John 13:23–25). While hanging on the cross to atone for the sin of the world, Jesus looked down at his devastated mother, Mary, and asked John to care for her upon His death (John 19:26–27). John was the first man to arrive at the empty tomb (John 20:1–10) and to recognize Jesus risen from death (21:4–7). John was even gazing into heaven as his best friend Jesus ascended to his eternal throne (Acts 1:1–11).

Who is your best friend? Who is the person you've invited to be with you in your most meaningful and mundane moments? It's the person who knows you best.

In Jesus' life, that person was John.

John's Personality

The Bible reveals John was a force of nature. Jesus gave John and his brother James the name "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17)—which sounds like a pair of tag team wrestlers. And no wonder!

Jesus rebuked James and John in Luke 9:52–55 after they asked for permission to call down fire from heaven to consume and destroy an entire village of godless Samaritans. The brothers had the audacity in Mark 10:35–37 to ask Jesus, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." On another occasion in Luke 9:49–50, John described how he tried to stop someone from casting out a demon because they were not a part of his group.

As a young man, John was—at least on occasion—prone to anger, pride, rudeness, and being unloving. But it was his strength and courage that made John a great disciple who needed to be directed—much like a wild colt needs to be broken so its strength can be harnessed and focused.

Walking with Jesus changed John. In fact, five times John is referred to as Jesus' best friend and "the one whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20).

John left everything to walk with Jesus; and in the years that followed, he witnessed firsthand the miraculous life, death, and resurrection of the Lord. When Jesus preached, taught, healed, cast out demons, and raised the dead, John saw it all. Jesus trusted John, and John remained fully faithful to his friend and Lord.

After Jesus returned to heaven, Father John spent decades caring for the young church, leading them according to the Way and the Truth, and reminding them to "love one another, for love is from God" (1 John 4:7).

John lived a long time. He was the only apostle to avoid martyrdom, although he narrowly escaped death on numerous occasions. John's brother James was the first of the twelve disciples to be put to death for following Jesus, but John was the last disciple to die. He lived to be around 100 years of age. He was the most authoritative Christian leader on earth at the end of his life.

At one point, according to historians, John was boiled alive, but he didn't deny Jesus or die, so he was exiled to a penal colony on the island of Patmos. I've been there, and I can tell you it's a lonely, rugged, and barren place in the middle of the sea, covered in jagged rocks and beset by high winds.

It was on the island of Patmos where Jesus came down from heaven to encourage his best friend John and reveal to him the book of Revelation. Many tourists, including my family, have ventured to visit the cave where it's believed John lived and Jesus visited him.

John was eventually released from exile on the island of Patmos and returned to pastoral ministry. Church history reports that much of his time was then spent in Ephesus, where he is buried in a tomb I've had the honor of visiting on a few occasions.

John is mentioned roughly 50 times in the New Testament, which is second only to Peter among the disciples. He and Peter are often mentioned together as partners in ministry throughout Acts (3:1–10, 4:1–22, 8:14–25). Galatians 2:9 speaks of the two men as spiritual "pillars" that held up the early Christian church. John also wrote five books of the Bible (John, 1–3 John, and Revelation), which is more than any of the other eleven disciples. In Acts 4:13, the critics mocked John and Peter as

“unlearned men”; but as is often the case, you can’t put too much stock in the mockery of critics.

Regardless of what was said about or done to John, nobody could get him to stop talking about Jesus’ love. According to historical accounts outside the Bible, it’s possible John was a very elderly man when the church gathered to hear him speak about what it was like to hang out with Jesus.

In various ways he would tell them over and over, “You are the children of God. Jesus loves you. Love one another.” In doing so, he echoed Jesus’ words from John 13:34–35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Roughly 40 times in 1 John, John speaks of love and admonishes Christians to act like brothers and sisters and “love one another” (3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11–12). This is the Father heart in John’s writings.

John’s Legacy

By the time 1 John was written, there were second- and third-generation Christians. Some were halfhearted in their commitment to Jesus. As a result, they were tempted to chase false doctrines and faddish but unfaithful spiritual trends.

After all John had endured with and for his great God and dear friend Jesus Christ, he was not going to allow false teachers to confuse the new Christians. John wrote his letter of 1 John to primarily young and new Christians, as their pastor and spiritual father who continually referred to them (and us) as “little children.”

John used other fatherly and familial language as well, including “beloved,” “brother,” and “children,” teaching us “we should love one another” because we are “born of God.” Throughout his letter, John also refers to God as a loving Father, Jesus as our saving Big Brother, and the Holy Spirit as the One who causes us to be spiritually born into the Father’s family with new brothers and sisters in Christ to love.

John’s Writing

If you want to start studying ahead, there are some insights from the book that will help you understand what John was trying to communicate in his letter.

- John’s love for people is obvious, but even in his old age he retained his steely spine.

- The letter—at least in part—was written in response to false teachers whom he referred to as “antichrists,” “liar,” “trying to deceive,” “lawlessness,” “children of the devil,” “like Cain,” “the world,” “false prophets,” “the spirit of the antichrist,” “the spirit of error,” and “in the power of the evil one.”
- Like wolves among a flock of sheep, these false teachers confused the Christians, especially those who were newest to the faith. Some had apparently even left the Christian churches (1 John 2:19) and were waging a public relations war on John and other pastors in an effort to draw people to their newly formed religious group (1 John 2:26; 4:1–3; 2 John 7).
- Their false teaching included a denial of Jesus Christ as fully God and man (1 John 4:2–3), and the necessity of the cross for the forgiveness of sin (1 John 5:6–7).
- Losing friends and leaders to the false teachers, many Christians were discouraged, confused, and uncertain what the truth was and if they were truly saved. In response, throughout his letter John teaches that the four purposes of his writing are that true Christians may have:
 - Joy (1 John 1:4)
 - Holiness (1 John 2:1)
 - Correct Doctrine (1 John 2:26)
 - Assurance of Salvation (1 John 5:13)

John wrote his letter primarily to show how people can know they are truly Christians (1 John 5:13). And the entirety of his letter can be broken down into three categories that are helpful for determining whether or not you are a Christian.

John met Jesus, received Jesus’ love, and spent the rest of his life walking with Jesus. John’s relationship with Jesus utterly, completely, and eternally transformed him. This is the normative experience of the Christian life.

John’s letter emphasizes that it is impossible to be a Christian who doesn’t experience change. This doesn’t mean a true Christian changes all at once or achieves moral perfection. But throughout 1 John, three categories simply reveal that someone cannot become a Christian without

experiencing a transformation in how they think theologically, act morally, and relate socially. Here are the categories John gives:

1. **Believe: Your beliefs change.** Do you believe Jesus is the eternal God who became a man to die for our sins?
2. **Behave: Your lifestyle changes.** Do you admit you are a sinner and you want to stop sinning and live a holy life like Jesus?
3. **Belong: Your relationships change.** Do you receive God's love and in response love him and other Christians?

The point John makes is not that we are loved by God and saved if we do these things. Instead, once we have received God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ, these changes start to occur in our life as the Holy Spirit begins a change process at our deepest levels of being.

This is what John means in 1 John 3:24 when he says, "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."

Simply, the Christian life is the life of Jesus Christ at work in and through people of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

John's Credibility

From John's day to our own, there's been no shortage of contradictory yet confident opinions about Christ and Christianity. But whom should we trust as an honest and accurate source of information about both?

John establishes his credibility as second to none in the opening lines of his letter, saying in 1 John 1:1–4,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Unlike anyone else, John's report about Jesus is firsthand. What he teaches us are things he heard from Jesus with his own ears, saw with his own eyes, and touched with his own hands.

And while the book itself doesn't mention its author, we can assume the author was John for four reasons:

- The style of writing and vocabulary are very similar to John's Gospel.
- The author claims to be an eyewitness to Jesus' life (1:1–4; 4:1).
- The early church fathers Ignatius and Polycarp attributed the authorship of the book to John.
- There was no one else alive at the time to speak to the entire Christian church with the authority that John exercises throughout the letter.

John begins his letter by establishing his credibility as a teacher: He was a friend and apostle of Jesus who was present for His entire ministry and to hear Jesus' teaching, see Jesus' life and miracles, and touch Jesus' resurrected body. John's argument is very compelling because eyewitness testimony would have been the most credible kind of evidence in an age that was devoid of technology.

There is simply no one more credible about Christ and Christianity than Father John, because he was Jesus' best friend. Of anyone on the earth, he had the most intimate access to Jesus during His ministry years. He was the last living of the twelve disciples. And he was the father of early Christianity who trained the first generations of Christian pastors.

John's Impact on My Life

For me, the book of 1 John is particularly meaningful. I don't just resonate with John and his journey from a passionate but unbridled young man who became the seasoned and equally passionate, loving spiritual father. I resonate with John because Jesus also called me to follow him when I was a young man. At the age of 19 while I was in college, I became a Christian. Shortly afterward, God told me to marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men, and plant churches. Since that calling in 1990, this is what I have been pursuing by God's grace, beginning with my first Bible study.

In that study our pastor sat us down—a bunch of zealous, new Christian men—and tried to give us 1 John as a rudder to steer our sail of passion. This was the first Bible study I was ever a part of, and it was the

first time I'd ever studied a book of the Bible verse by verse. After some weeks spent teaching us, our pastor assigned to us sections of 1 John to prepare to teach for ourselves.

It was in 1 John that I taught the Bible for the first time—something I have enjoyed doing ever since. And I pray that as you read John's letter, the Father's heart would be revealed in every page and in every word you read.

SMALL GROUP STUDY

WEEK ONE

Read

1 John 1:1–4—That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Discuss

1. John emphasized that he and others heard, saw, looked upon, and even had physical contact with Jesus, the “word of life” (1 John 1:1). Why is it important that John and others heard, saw, and touched Jesus, and didn’t just relate a story someone else told?
2. John said that he was proclaiming this message “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; cf. John 17:3). Is this a new concept for you? Explain.
3. How can we as a community best express the fellowship that the gospel creates? What would it look like to love one another in our everyday lives?
4. Overall, how is your Christian community? What would you like to stay the same? What would you like to see changed?
5. One of the reasons John wrote this letter was to promote joy (1 John 1:4). What are some ways we can sustain our joy in God and others?
6. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week’s passage relate to John’s big idea and his hope for Jesus’ Church?

Pray

1. Pray that the group’s fellowship with God and one another would become enriched during this study.
2. Pray for the removal of hidden sin or other obstacle that may be inhibiting your joy.

Do

This is a great week for each person in your group to set aside time for a short getaway or prolonged time with God—for instance, a morning, afternoon, or evening—devoted to reading the Bible and prayer. There are a myriad of options. Based on one of the big ideas of this week’s passage, encourage everyone in the group to take a break from their normal day-to-day routines and purposefully spend time with God.

WEEK TWO

Read

1 John 1:5–10—This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Discuss

1. How does John describe the Christian life in 1 John 1:9?
2. How does your faith in Jesus change your view of sin?
3. Is it possible to have faith in God and continue living in sin? Why or why not?
4. How does “walking in the light” encourage you to live your life before God and others? (See John 3:19–21.)
5. Why is repentance such an important part of the Christian life? What are the consequences if we are unwilling to repent? (See 1 John 1:6–10.)
6. Do you consider yourself someone who is quick to repent? What causes us to delay repenting?
7. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week’s passage relate to John’s big idea and his hope for Jesus’ Church?

Pray

1. Pray for everyone in the group to come to a greater understanding of God—that he’s light (i.e., holy)—and how he desires for us to live by faith in Christ, trusting his cleansing work, not ours.
2. Pray for your group to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” knowing that “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Do

This week’s text dives into the depths of our heart and life by examining whether or not we are walking in the light. This text provides a great opportunity to encourage your group to walk in the light with God and with one another. Depending on the makeup of your group, you can consider one of the following options:

1. Set aside some time at the end for confession, prayer, and encouragement. You can keep the group together as a whole, or consider breaking up into small groups.
2. If you don’t have enough time, encourage people to get together outside of group time for confession, prayer, and encouragement.

WEEK THREE

Read

1 John 2:1–11—My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Discuss

1. Does Jesus' advocacy encourage you to seek him when you sin? Why or why not?
2. Why is it not possible for self-identified Christians to habitually sin and disobey God?
3. How has knowing God changed your heart and life? How have you and others noticed the difference?
4. Why do you think John emphasizes our love for other Christians as much as he does? (See John 17:20–23.)
5. How has your love for other Christians changed since you first placed your faith in Jesus?
6. How does participating in community (or not) affect your faith?
7. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church?

Pray

1. Encourage your group to confess their sins and reach out to their Advocate in heaven.
2. Pray that God would illuminate any area of darkness in your life.
3. Pray that God would gracefully develop deep and meaningful relationships in the group throughout this study.

Do

As you can see, John places a huge importance on love and Christian community. This week, spend some time with your group to connect outside of your weekly meeting—at someone's home, a café, or a restaurant. Encourage

your group to use these hangout times to share their personal stories of their relationship with God.

In addition, encourage your group to prayerfully examine their hearts. If there is someone with whom they are not on good terms, encourage them to ask for or extend forgiveness. (Some situations, such as abuse, will require a greater level of ongoing love and support. It would be a good idea to involve pastoral support, depending on the severity of the situation.)

WEEK FOUR

Read

1 John 2:12–17—I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Discuss

1. What does it mean that our sins are forgiven by God “for his name’s sake”?
2. What was your reaction to John’s statement: “Do not love the world or the things in the world”?
3. John describes love for the world as “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life.” Do you struggle with any of these specific temptations? Why do you think these are a struggle?
4. According to John, what does having a love for “the world” and the things of the world indicate about our relationship with God?
5. What does (or would) it look like to fight and avoid worldly temptations in your daily life?
6. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week’s passage relate to John’s big idea and his hope for Jesus’ Church?

Pray

1. Pray the gospel over your community group this week. Remind those present who have placed their faith in Jesus that their righteousness (right standing before God) is based on what Jesus has done for them, not on what we do for God. (See Romans 3:21–26.)
2. Pray that God would make the group aware of any blindness or dullness they have toward worldly temptation(s), so they can see, confess, and turn away from it.
3. Pray that God would fill everyone in the group with the Holy Spirit, empowering them to live the life God has called them to live. (See Ephesians 5:18.)

Do

This week, have each member of the group compare their social media experience, advertisements, and entertainment with all that is in the world according to John. They should ask themselves, *What temptation is this based on? Is it the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, or pride of life?* Discuss

your findings with one another throughout the week or before the next time you meet.

WEEK FIVE

Read

1 John 2:18–27—Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

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

Discuss

1. What does your relationship with the Church say about you?
2. What do you learn about false teachers in this passage?
3. Has there ever been a time in your life when the Holy Spirit made you aware of false teaching?
4. Why is it important to regularly ask the Holy Spirit to teach you?
5. Apart from the leading of the Holy Spirit, another way to combat false teaching, according to John, is to know and remember the gospel. Out of everything he could have said, why do you think John said this? (See Paul's presentation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 as another example.)

Pray

1. Pray that the group's love and devotion to the Church mirrors that of Jesus.
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give the group greater discernment to detect and combat false teaching in their daily lives.

Do

This week, pay close attention to what friends, pastors, leaders, the media, etc., say about your family, humanity, society, and God. Write down as many statements as you can. At the end of the week, consider each of these statements and evaluate whether they are wholly true, partly true, or completely false. Discuss your findings and conclusions with the group.

WEEK SIX

Read

1 John 2:28–3:10—And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Discuss

1. To “abide” in Jesus is to actively remain and continue in him. Are you abiding in Jesus? Do you consider yourself one who strives to do this? Why or why not?
2. John expresses a sense of urgency for us to abide in Christ so that we may have confidence when he returns. How does Jesus' imminent return alter our faith, daily lives, and priorities?
3. As a Christian living in the world, what challenges do you face day to day, at school, work, etc.? (See John 1:10; 3:13; 4:5; and 5:19.)
4. John says God is a Father, we are his children, and we are to love other Christians as brothers and sisters. Why do you think John emphasizes these family relationships?
5. Why was it important for Jesus to be without sin? What does his sinlessness have to do with our personal relationship with God? (See Hebrews 7:27 and 10:10.)
6. What did you find most surprising or helpful about the list of traits that indicate whether someone is considered a part of God's family or is associated with the devil?
7. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church?

Pray

1. Pray that your group would be encouraged and empowered to abide in Christ and live their life in light of Jesus' imminent return.
2. Pray that your group would live as salt and light in the world and seek opportunities to proclaim the gospel to nonbelievers in their life.

Do

Some in your group may be enslaved to a pattern of sin. This does not necessarily mean they're not Christians (see 1 John 1:8–10), only that they need encouragement and support to help overcome it. This week may be a good time to bring up these matters with individuals in your group and encourage them to seek Christ for deliverance and support. Challenge the group to consider how they can love one another through the process of repentance.

WEEK SEVEN

Read

1 John 3:11–18—For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Discuss

1. John tells us to love one another and then provides an example of how not to love one another. What are some things we can learn from Cain's example about how *not* to treat one another? What might it have looked like for Cain to love Abel instead? (See Genesis 4:6–7 and Hebrews 11:4.)
2. Why do you think John tells us not to be surprised when the world hates us? How does this change the way you interact with nonbelievers, current events, politics, etc.?
3. Are you surprised by verses 14 and 15, in which John says that our love for other Christians is one barometer of our faith in Christ? Why or why not?
4. What is one important lesson about love, hatred, and faith we learn from 1 John 3:15? How does this change your relationship with God and others? (See Matthew 5:22–28.)
5. What do we learn about love from Jesus' example? How does his example differ from contemporary notions of love? (See 1 John 3:18.)
6. Why is it impossible for us to say we love God and yet hate others—even the Church? How would you define “hate” in this context? Why do you think John makes such a big deal of this?
7. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church?

Pray

1. Pray for the group and their loved ones to love others well, just as Christ loved us.
2. Pray that the group would experience grace and the Holy Spirit's empowerment to respond in love when the world expresses hatred.
3. Pray for the group to express sacrificial love toward those with material need.

Do

John provides one very practical way to love one another: meet the material needs of other believers (1 John 3:17–18). This week, as a group, prayerfully consider identifying an individual or family whose material needs you can meet. This is just one example. Feel free to explore other opportunities to love others the way Jesus has loved you.

WEEK EIGHT

Read

1 John 3:19–24—By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Discuss

1. John tells us that if we love “in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18), our hearts are reassured before God. How does knowing God’s love for you strengthen your faith?
2. Where does the ultimate source of our reassurance come from? How does this influence your faith in God and life?
3. How does the presence and practice of sin in our life inhibit our relationship with God? Is there anything in your life that is creating tension between you and God?
4. What do we learn from this passage about the correlation between our life and our prayers? (See 1 John 5:14–15.)
5. John makes following God sound so simple: Believe in Jesus and love one another. Are there ways you tend to overcomplicate or add to what it means to glorify and enjoy God?
6. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week’s passage relate to John’s big idea and his hope for Jesus’ Church?

Pray

1. Pray for the group to love one another in deed and in truth.
2. Pray for the group to experience a greater level of reassurance in their relationship with God through faith in Christ, and that God would cast away any fear or doubt.
3. Pray for the ability to enjoy the simple life of loving God and one another.

Do

At the end of this passage, John states that the Holy Spirit validates our relationship with God by empowering us to love God and others. This week, consider having your group share how they observe God the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and in the lives of others in the group.

WEEK NINE

Read

1 John 4:1–6—Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Discuss

1. Why does John encourage us to “test the spirits”? How does this change the way we accept or reject teaching from others?
2. Read 1 John 4:1–3 and identify the criterion John gives to “test the spirits.”
3. Why are false prophets and teachers capable of drawing large crowds and garnering fame, status, and popularity?
4. What are two characteristics we learn about non-Christians in 1 John 4:5–6?
5. Why is it so important for us to discern, accept, and embrace teaching from godly teachers?
6. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week’s passage relate to John’s big idea and his hope for Jesus’ Church?

Pray

1. Pray that the Holy Spirit would convict and lead the group away from false teachings, and that the group would be able to discern true prophets from false ones.
2. Pray that the group would “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Do

This week, spend time individually or with others discerning the insights of contemporary teachers who are popular because of their spiritual insights. Examine if what they say aligns or disagrees with Scripture. This would also be a good opportunity to identify Christian teachers and preachers with whom you may not agree on every fine point, but who are nevertheless Christian. How does this passage change the way you think and talk about these teachers and preachers? Do you express love to them as a brother or sister, or anger and hatred as an adversary?

WEEK TEN

Read

1 John 4:7–21—Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Discuss

1. Where do we find the source and motivation to love one another? How does the answer to this question alter the way you strive to love others?
2. What does someone’s lack of love for others say about them?
3. God has revealed himself as light (1 John 1:5) and love (1 John 4:8). What do these characteristics tell us about God?
4. Have you ever doubted God’s love for you? How does 1 John 4:9 encourage us during these times of doubt?
5. How is love defined in 1 John 4:10–11? How does this definition of love change the way you love others?
6. Do you struggle with having assurance about salvation? Why or why not? What do we learn from 1 John 4:14–18 about receiving assurance?
7. The theme of our study is “Love One Another.” How does this week’s passage relate to John’s big idea and his hope for Jesus’ Church?

Pray

1. Pray for the group to experience the love of God for them in Christ and to respond in love toward others by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Pray for members of the group who have struggled with receiving or doubting God’s love for them.
3. Pray for those who have struggled with being sure about their salvation, that they would clearly see their right standing with God, based on the work Jesus has done for them.

Do

Perform one thoughtful action for a different person each day this week. Observe not only their response, but your own. If your response is one of joy, ask yourself why you're joyful and examine whether your answers are centered on God's glory or something else. Discuss these experiences with your group the next time you meet.

WEEK ELEVEN

Read

1 John 5:1–5—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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Discuss

1. How are our love for God and obedience to his commandments related to the love we give others?
2. Do you find God's commandments burdensome? Why or why not? (See Matthew 11:30.)
3. How is obeying God out of love different from obeying him out of fear?
4. How are we capable of overcoming the temptations and sins of the world?
5. The theme of our study is "Love One Another." How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church?

Pray

1. Pray for the group to experience love and acceptance by God through faith in Jesus, so that their motivations to live for and glorify him are rooted in love, not fear.
2. Pray for anyone in the group who may be experiencing burdens to live in God's freedom.
3. Pray that the group would experience victory in Christ over the temptations and sins in the world.

Do

Obeying God is a joy—or so we hope. This week, create a two-column chart and title it "Motivations for Avoiding Sin." Title the left column "Fear" and the right column "Joy." When you are faced with the opportunity to sin and avoid it, place a tick mark under the appropriate column. At the end of the week, examine what your primary motivation was for avoiding sin—duty or delight. If you find that it was duty or fear, spend some time reflecting on God's unconditional love for you through prayer and worship.

WEEK TWELVE

Read

1 John 5:6–13—This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

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.

Discuss

1. Why is God's testimony about Jesus important? What does he testify about his Son?
2. How do John's words in 1 John 5:10–12 address the modern idea that all religions are basically the same and lead to God? (See John 14:6.)
3. What is the one point John emphasizes that assures us of salvation? Why do you think it is important for us to have an assurance of salvation?
4. The theme of our study is "Love One Another." How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church?

Pray

1. Pray for the group to persevere in their faith in Christ through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Pray for the group to know they have eternal life in Christ.

Do

Encourage the group this week to spend time identifying three to five people in their life who do not yet know Jesus. Have them consider writing down their names as a reminder to pray for these individuals. Pray that the group would be emboldened to share their faith in Christ with others.

WEEK THIRTEEN

Read

1 John 5:14–21—And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

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

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

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

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Discuss

1. How has the message of 1 John and this study influenced you? Have you been encouraged to make any changes in how you love others?
2. In your prayer life, do you have confidence in God similar to what John expresses? Why or why not? What do you learn from John about gaining confidence in your prayer life?
3. What does it mean to pray according to God's will? Does this change the way you pray? (See John 16:23–26 and 1 John 3:21–22.)
4. What is usually your initial response when you observe a brother or sister in Christ sinning? How does John encourage us to respond in such situations? What does this mean for the local church? (See Galatians 6:1.)
5. Do you ever struggle with the thought that Satan or sin will lead you permanently away from God? What do we learn about persevering through evil from 1 John 5:18?
6. How does the last verse summarize this entire letter? What do you take away from this summary?
7. The theme of our study is "Love One Another." How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church?

Pray

1. Pray for the group to experience a greater level of confidence in God.
2. Pray that the group would be an expression of mercy and grace to others.
3. Pray that God the Holy Spirit would continue to enlighten the group of the truth of the gospel, so they may discern error and flee from idols.

Do

Plan a time this week to celebrate the fact that your group traveled together with the church through 1 John. During your time of fellowship, spend some purposeful time reflecting on this letter and what God has done in the lives of the group members—both individually and together—through it.

GROUP INDUCTIVE STUDY

WEEK ONE

Read 1 John 1:1–4.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus declared to a crowd, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). At this, the crowd began throwing stones at him. By uttering the phrase “I am,” Jesus was putting himself on equal footing with God (a.k.a., the great “I Am”), and this was blasphemy—a crime punishable by death (Lev. 24:16).

When our first parents sinned in the garden, they “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God” (Gen. 3:8). After this initial sin, humanity was forced apart from God. The Old Testament paints a clear picture of a fence around God’s name and glory; in Exodus 33:20, God tells Moses, “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” In Deuteronomy, after receiving the Ten Commandments, the people ask Moses to hear from God on their behalf, out of fear of his glory, saying, “This day we have seen God speak with man, and man still live.... If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived?” (Deut. 5:24–26).

Yet this God, whom no one could look on and live, became flesh. Philippians 2:6–7 says Jesus, who is God, “emptied himself... being born in the likeness of men.” To the Jews of Jesus’ day, this was unbelievable. That the God of all glory would save his people in such a humble way was beyond comprehension (Isa. 53:3; Matt. 13:53–58; John 1:10–11).

Not only did God become flesh, but he chose eyewitnesses to this amazing salvation story. The book of 1 John opens with the exclamations of an eyewitness to the incredible event of the incarnation, God come in flesh. The author of this letter was able to do what no human had done—stand in the presence of God and live. He describes this in John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The incarnation restores fellowship, for “no one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18). And the joy of the presence of God is the ultimate restoration (1 John 1:4).

Observation

1. What, according to John, was from the beginning?
2. What was “made manifest” and to whom was it manifested?
3. List the ways John has experienced “the word of life.”
4. What does the author “proclaim” and “testify” about?
5. Who is John’s fellowship with?
6. How will the apostle’s joy be completed?

Interpretation

1. Read John 1:1–5. In light of this, what could the author mean by “the word of life” of 1 John 1:1–4? What attributes of Jesus are revealed in 1 John 1:1–4?
2. What is the “beginning” to which the author refers? Read John 1:1–2, 8:58; Colossians 1:15–18; 1 John 2:13; and Revelation 17:18. The Greek word for “made manifest” is *phanerō*, which is defined as “to cause to become visible, to cause to become known... [this includes] both sensory and cognitive connotations.”¹ Twice John uses this word. What point is he

trying to make? Why is this important? See Philippians 2:5–7; John 17:6–8; 1 Timothy 3:16; and 1 Peter 1:20.

3. The apostle proclaims that which was from the beginning has been made manifest. What is “the beginning”? Read Colossians 1:20, 2:9, and Philippians 2:6–7.
4. Why does John “proclaim” and “testify” about his experience with Christ? Read 1 John 1:5, 4:14, 5:9–10, and Acts 4:19–20.
5. Fellowship is one of the ultimate purposes of John’s letter. How can the Church gain fellowship and love one another? Read John 17:20–21; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 1:5, 2:1; and 1 John 1:7.
6. The apostle also writes, “so that our joy may be complete.” What joy is he looking toward? How can “joy” be completed? Read John 15:11, 16:24, 17:13; Philippians 2:2; Cf. Luke 15:10; Philippians 1:25; and Psalm 16:11.

Application

1. In her commentary on 1 John, Karen Jobes writes, “John wishes to point to the Word who *is* eternal Life as the grounds for assurance about eternal life.”² How does the reassurance of eternal life change your daily life? See Romans 15:13 and Titus 1:2.
2. In the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to himself as the life (John 11:25, 14:6). The promise of life in Christ isn’t just a future eternal life, but it has implications for right now. How does the Word of life change the nature of your daily life?
3. The incarnation’s awesome power is the God of all glory become flesh. In what ways do you ascribe glory to God? In what ways do you seek to ascribe glory to yourself?
4. Martin Luther described his reaction to the incarnation this way: “When I am told that God became man, I can follow the idea, but I just do not understand what it means. For what man, if left to his natural promptings, if he were God, would humble himself to lie in the feedbox of a donkey or to hang upon a cross?”³ What have you learned about the character of God through the incarnation? How has Jesus’ earthly life and death changed your position before God? Read 2 Corinthians 8:9, Ephesians 2:1–10, and Jude 24.
5. The apostle John cannot help but proclaim and testify about his experience with the living God in the flesh, even decades later when he was an old man. How do you proclaim the work of Jesus in your life?
6. In John 17:21, Jesus prayed that those who believe in him would have the same unity of fellowship that he has with the Father. What does fellowship with God look like? What about fellow believers?
7. Robert Candlish describes earthly joy as being “dependent upon outward circumstances, and has no deep root in the soul itself.”⁴ Where do you seek joy? When have you experienced joy through fellowship with God?

WEEK TWO

Read 1 John 1:5–10.

It takes only a glance at popular blog posts, magazine articles, and social media to see that we live in a staunchly post-Christian culture. The anti-Christian message is clear and its adherents are quite vociferous about their beliefs. The claims? There is no God, or the concept of the God of the Bible is antiquated and needs to catch up to modern times. Jesus was merely a good man, but most certainly not the God of the universe. There is no such thing as sin, only unwise choices. As such, we don't need salvation, just knowledge and understanding. In our culture, truth is believed to be relative—"What's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me." God's Word is no longer the plumb line for truth.

Unfortunately, these postmodern philosophies are heavily influencing the Church today, including the lies that Jesus wasn't really God's Son; that we're all inherently good; or that, once saved, it doesn't matter how we live our lives because we have been forgiven. All of these are lies, and we must know God's truth to combat the lies.

Much like the Church today, the early church faced false teachers who advocated lies like these. The new believers had no written Bible to turn to for truth. These lies confused the young, vulnerable church, leaving them feeling unsure about their standing before God. Among other things, John's heart for writing these letters was to give believers assurance of eternal life through Jesus and to refute the lies being taught and circulated.

Observation

1. According to verse 5, what message have they heard from Jesus and are now proclaiming to the readers?
2. The word *fellowship* is mentioned four times in chapter 1, starting with verse 3. The original Greek word for "fellowship" is *koinonia*, which indicates "partnership, communion and intimacy." According to these verses, with whom are believers to have fellowship?
3. Read 1 John 1:6–10. There are three lies presented here that Christians can buy into. What are they, and what truth statements are attached to each?
4. "Word" appears again here. Is it being used the way it was in verse 1? What does it mean here? (See 1 John 2:4–5.)

Interpretation

1. Read the following verses and note what you learn regarding God as light in Isaiah 60:19 and Psalm 76:4, and of Jesus as the light in John 1:9 and 8:12.
2. Light is a common metaphor in the Bible for righteousness and goodness. Darkness, by contrast, is a common metaphor for sin and evil. Read John 3:20, Ephesians 5:3–14, Acts 26:14–18, and Proverbs 4:18. Who are children of the darkness? What does the light do to the one who is in darkness? What turns one from darkness to light?
3. The phrases "walk in darkness" and "walk in the light" indicate a continuous action or lifestyle. What does it mean, practically, to walk in the darkness? What does it mean, practically, to walk in the light? Can a

believer walk in darkness? Why or why not? In light of what you've learned, what do verses 6 through 7 mean?

4. Read Romans 3:10 and 23 and record what you learn about the sin nature. How does this contrast with what the false teachers were teaching, according to 1 John 1:8? What does this verse say about the one who denies sin? Can this person be a believer?
5. The Greek word for "confess" in verse 9 is *homologeō*, which means to "agree with another." To confess, then, means to agree with what God says about our sin nature and sinful actions. How does this contrast with the culture's view of confession as a mere admittance of wrongdoing? How does this contrast with verse 8?
6. Our sin makes us dirty. It defiles us. Jesus not only forgives and pays the penalty for our sin, but he "cleanses" us of the filth and defilement of our sin. Where else in the Bible do we see the idea of cleansing oneself of sin?
7. While the lie in verse 8 revolves around the denial of the sin nature, the lie in verse 10 revolves around the denial of specific, individual sins. How does verse 9, then, contrast with verse 10?
8. Read 1 John 1:5–10 again and note all the verses referring to the gospel message. How would that have given hope and encouragement to the believers of the day? How do these truths encourage you?

Application

1. Have you grown up in a church environment where some or all of these lies have been taught? Have you believed these lies? How do these verses challenge your thoughts and fellowship with God, beliefs about sin and confession and the life of a believer?
2. Think about the statement, "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." Do you struggle with that idea? How can this truth comfort and encourage you?
3. Take a moment to honestly examine your life. Have you been brought from light into darkness by the blood of Jesus who has forgiven your sin? Have you allowed Jesus' light to expose your sin? Have you, as a result, confessed your sin and turned away from your sin and turned toward God and stepped into the light? If you have not, or aren't sure if you have, please share this with your group leader. If you have, do you make it a daily practice of confessing to God your sin and repenting of it? What sin is God asking you to confess today?
4. The blood of the sacrificial lambs could offer only temporary cleansing, with a new sacrifice needed every time certain sins were committed. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin—past, present, and future. If you are in Christ, you are not only forgiven, you are clean. How can this truth make a difference in how you view yourself, your sin, and your Savior?

WEEK THREE

Read 1 John 2:1–11.

Parents who love the Lord and their children will set clear expectations for their children's behavior that are grounded in biblical principles. These expectations are not set because the parents believe their children will obey and meet them perfectly; they're designed to show them what it means to live a life that's pleasing to God. When children sin, parents help them to recognize the sin and encourage them toward repentance and reconciliation with God in an atmosphere of grace and truth.

Like wayward children, some of the believers in the first-century church had strayed from the foundation and were teaching and practicing a false gospel. Without compromising truth, John reminded believers of the grace extended to us by our Savior. This is demonstrated in the first two verses of our passage. His tenderness in addressing his readers as "little children" shows that his motivation in sharing truth is not to shame and scold, but to lovingly remind those in sin that they have an advocate who comes alongside and vigilantly acts as a "propitiation" for our sins (2:2). Jesus is the intermediary between the sinner and the Father. Those who are not living a life that demonstrates love for God and others are choosing to live in darkness.

Observation

1. Based on this passage, what character trait qualifies Jesus to be our advocate in this passage?
2. For what did Jesus die?
3. What is the evidence in a believer's life that demonstrates knowledge of God?
4. What must one do if he or she "abides in the light"?
5. What names does John call God in this passage?
6. What happens to those who keep God's commandments?
7. What happens to those who do not keep God's commandments?
8. What words are repeated in this passage?

Interpretation

1. Verse 2 says Jesus died "for the sins of the whole world." Who exactly do you think this includes and why? See 1 John 2:4, 23; 3:10; 5:12; John 3:18; and 5:24 for further insight.
2. What is the "old commandment" referred to in verse 7? (See Deuteronomy 6:5.)
3. What is the "new commandment"? (See Matthew 22:37–40 and John 13:34–35.) Why do you think it is called "new" here?
4. What does it mean to love one another?
5. Why do you think John chooses light and darkness as metaphors for those who are abiding in Christ and those who are walking in sin? See John 1:1–5 and 1 John 1:5.
6. Read Hebrews 7:23–28. What does this passage say about Jesus as our perfect advocate?
7. According to verse 10, how can we demonstrate love for our brothers and sisters?

Application

1. In the first verse of chapter 2, John states that his purpose in writing is so that believers might not sin. But he then says, "But if anyone does sin..." So although he encourages us not to sin, he understands that at times we will. How difficult is it for you to keep in balance the understanding that you still sin sometimes while striving not to? Are you apt to dismiss or excuse your sin because you know your standing before Christ as righteous, or are you more inclined to wallow in self-condemnation?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus Christ the righteous is always standing before the Father as an advocate for you?
3. Does your daily conduct in public and private life demonstrate that you know God? What would have to change for your life to stand as a witness to your love for God?
4. Karen Jobes writes, "One who truly knows God recognizes his glory and excellence and obeys God's commands because they are excellent and beautiful."⁵ Do you view God's commands as excellent and beautiful? How will you seek to know God better so that you will have a higher view of God and his commands?
5. Is there someone in your life toward whom it is difficult for you to demonstrate the love of God? How could you best love that person? If you are holding hatred or bitterness in your heart toward anyone, begin to pray in repentance of this sin today!
6. Verse 10 tells us that if we love others well, then we will not cause them to be tempted toward sin by our behavior. Is there anything in your behavior that might cause temptation or make it easier for a fellow Christian to continue in their sin? Do you speak words of loving truth when a brother or sister is in sin?

WEEK FOUR

Read 1 John 2:12–17.

Every baby has desires—the desire to be fed, the desire to be comfortable, the desire to be held, the desire to be loved, and so forth. These are good, natural desires. The same sweet baby also has desires that are not good, although they are just as natural or worldly. The desire to have his or her needs met immediately without delay, the desire to be the center of everyone’s world, the desire to put anything that delights the eyes into his or her mouth, etc.

Whether we are brand-new Christians or believers of many years, we all struggle with our sin nature—just like that little baby, and just like the believers to whom John wrote. God knew we’d need to be reminded of our identity in Christ and what he has done for us, so we might be better able to stand against the world’s temptation.

The first recipients of this letter were facing great temptation in the world around them, as they were living in a pagan culture that exalted lasciviousness in every form—not unlike what many of us face today. John exhorts us to remember the things that are eternal so we might not be distracted by those that are temporal. Idolatry of these fleeting desires causes us to deny the work of God’s Son on the cross and who we are because of it.

Observation

1. Why did John write his letter? Note all the phrases that begin with the word *because*.
2. What are all the things listed that have been done for believers or are true of believers?
3. What is the clear directive given to believers in the passage?
4. What does this passage say about “the world”?
5. What three classifications of worldly desires are listed?

Interpretation

1. What do you think are the distinctions being made among the three groups specifically addressed in verses 12 through 14?
2. In verse 13, John says he writes to the “children” because they “know the Father.” How does a believer come to know the Father? (See John 8:19; 14:6–7, 20; Ephesians 1:16–18; and 1 John 2:3.)
3. How does a believer “overcome the evil one”? (See Ephesians 6:10–18.)
4. John gives his reasons for writing or sharing this message with us, and he begins each reason with the word *because*. In what tense are the reasons stated? Is this important? Why or why not?
5. What two things does verse 15 tell us cannot coexist in the heart of a believer? How does one avoid love of the world? (See Romans 12:1–3 and James 4:1–8.)
6. Verse 17 tells us that the one who does God’s will “abides forever.” Read John chapter 15 and make note of all the correlations between abiding, commandments for believers, the world, who God is, who we are in him, and eternity. Compare this to 1 John chapter 2. How does the John passage add extra dimension to the 1 John passage?

Application

1. How are you personally in your faith like a little child? A young man? A father? Pray and ask God how he would like you to grow in any or all of these areas listed in verses 12 through 14. Share with a friend what he reveals to you.
2. Of all the qualities true of believers listed in verses 12 through 14, which is the most difficult for you to believe as being true of yourself? Why? Will you prayerfully consider that it may be a sin for you to not humbly accept this thing as being true of yourself if Jesus says it is true?
3. There is a “now and not yet” duality to the things that are true of us as believers in verses 12 through 14. While because of Jesus’ death and resurrection we are already these things in regard to our position and identity, we are also not perfected completely while we are still on this earth. So we still seek to more fully abide in him, know him, be strong in him and his Word, and overcome the evil one in our fight against sin. In which of these areas are you most complacent or apathetic? How will you seek to become more obedient?
4. What worldly desires tempt you most often? The desires of the eyes, the desires of the flesh, or pride of life? How have you relied on self-sufficiency in facing that temptation? How does this passage encourage you away from your temptation? Answer these questions while remembering that our “sins are forgiven for his name’s sake” (v. 12).
5. There is always someone who is a newer believer than you are, even if you are young in your faith. How will you seek to encourage and come alongside a newer believer today? Pray and seek the Lord’s guidance about whom he might have you love well in this way!
6. How have you allowed natural desires (of the eyes, flesh, or self) to become idolatrous? How will you turn these desires back toward God? For example, if you are tempted toward gluttony with food, you might seek to be more worshipful in the way you choose the types and amounts of food you eat. Be prayerful, thoughtful, and intentional in this exercise, remembering that we live not under law but under grace!

WEEK FIVE

Read 1 John 2:18–27.

“God helps those who help themselves.” It’s not in the Bible, but walk into any bookstore and you will entire aisles dedicated to self-help. Popular magazines, radio and television programs, and websites offer suggestions on how to best achieve happiness and peace by manipulating one’s mental state, circumstances, and even those around them. They all preach a gospel of joy through the betterment of self. Even the word-faith movement preaches a gospel of manipulation, telling believers they can manipulate God into changing their lives to be more pleasing to them if they do certain acts.

Yet the number of people using antidepressants and describing themselves as depressed in our country is ever on the rise. As a nation, we are fundamentally unhappy and discontent. So there is some disconnect between the message that we can achieve happiness on our own—living permanently in that state of being if we choose—and the reality of our daily lives.

There was also a false gospel being preached to the new Christian church that first received John’s letter. This gospel was all around them, in their culture, and in their hearts. It was a gospel of self-reliance. It was a gospel that enticed the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and pride of life (2:16). It was a gospel that offered many avenues for worship of many gods. It was a gospel that smacked of truth but was wrapped in a lie. A lie that spoke to their hearts and whispered that they were not good, not worthy, not wise, not complete, not close to God. This false gospel in its many forms is all around us today and is just as tempting. It can seem just as true at times and is every bit as much a lie as it has always been, from the first time Eve heard and believed it, and then chose to allow herself and the entire human race to be enslaved by it.

In this passage John exposes the enemy’s false gospel and reminds us of who we are and what we have in Christ, encouraging us to remain in him so that we might not be deceived and enticed by the world.

Observation

1. Who is coming?
2. What is the tone of the passage?
3. How is a liar described?
4. What does the passage tell believers to do?
5. What is the promise offered to believers?
6. Who are “they”? Who are “we”?
7. What words or phrases are repeated or emphasized?
8. What contrasts or comparisons do you see?

Interpretation

1. Read Matthew 24. How does this illuminate your understanding of verse 18 in the 1 John passage?
2. When did the “last hour” begin? (See Hebrews 1:1–2.)
3. How does 1 John 2:12–17 define “antichrist”?
4. What does it mean that we are “anointed by the Holy One”? (See Exodus 28:41; 1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 61:1; and 2 Corinthians 1:21–22.)
5. How is it we can “all have knowledge”? (See 1 John 2:20 and John 14:26.)

6. What is the consequence for antichrists, according to verse 19 and also 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10?
7. What does verse 27 tell us is a function of the Holy Spirit in us? What lies of the antichrist does this truth show to be a false gospel?

Application

1. How does the news that we are living in the “last hour” make you feel? Urgent? Excited? Apprehensive? Guilty? Examine your heart with the Spirit’s help, seeking to have it be in alignment with the joyful anticipation we should feel as we look forward to Christ’s return.
2. What antichrists have you allowed to have a voice in your life and heart? Many Christians are fearful of the word *antichrist*. While this term is used in Scripture to refer to the Enemy, it is also used to refer to anything or anyone that is contrary to the gospel message and person of Christ. So keep this in mind as you evaluate what those antichrists in your life might be. What is appealing about them? How will you ask the Spirit to come alongside you as you root them out?
3. How do you use your access to knowledge for your benefit and God’s glory? How have you not been a good steward of this resource? How will you better use this gift of God?
4. This passage makes clear distinctions between the liars who deny the gospel of truth, and true believers. Do you draw such clear distinctions? Are there people with whom or situations in which you are tempted to blur the lines so you are more comfortable or well liked and accepted, or so life is easier? How have you denied the gospel of truth?
5. To abide in the Son and Father, we must allow the message we heard in the beginning—the gospel message—to abide in us as well. What practices do you make a habit of to ensure that the gospel message is abiding in you?
6. Do you believe in both your head knowledge (i.e., what comes out of your mouth) and in your heart (i.e., your actions) that the Holy Spirit residing in you is able to teach you all things and is completely true and reliable in his teachings? When are you most unsure and hesitant in trusting your discernment from the Spirit? What are you saying about the Holy Spirit’s teaching and guidance if you deny it in your heart and mind according to verse 27?

WEEK SIX

Read 1 John 2:28–3:10.

In the world of fine art, authentication is a growing field. A person willing to spend substantial funds to buy the painting of a famous artist wants to know the painting is real and not a fake. How does one know the difference? One examines the painting and its characteristics, such as brush stroke and patina, in detail. He asks questions like, “Who has owned the painting?” and “Has it been documented with photographs or manuscripts?” Or he hires an expert, one who’s spent a lifetime studying the work of the master artist and is so familiar with his or her work that he knows a real from a fake. Not unlike money counterfeiting experts, you can determine a fake only by having thoroughly studied the real deal.

John writes in this section about discerning genuine believers in Jesus from the false teachers of the day who offered a forgery gospel. Those whom the Master has saved bear the characteristics of him. And John details how they can’t help but practice righteousness since God is righteous. The false teachers were saying that one saved by grace could keep on sinning, but John argues that this is impossible for the children of God. God is righteous. Sin is lawlessness. Those who keep on sinning are children of the devil. Those who practice righteousness are children of God. John argues that those who practice lawlessness cannot have God’s seed in them. It’s as unlikely as a Monet having loud primary colors and harsh angles, or a dollar bill being orange.

Our heavenly Father calls us children of God because we are, having been born into his likeness through saving faith in Jesus. While we are now akin to him, we will be even more like him, as John writes, when the Lord Jesus appears again. When we see Jesus—God’s perfect masterpiece—as he really is, his full glory will transform us into a perfect replica: a radiant image of the Creator.

Observation

1. What does John say about love in 1 John 2:28–3:10? Where else does he say it? How does this relate to the new commandment mentioned in 1 John 2:7–11?
2. In 1 John 2:28, what is the reason we abide in God?
3. In this passage, what do we learn by looking at every mention of the “children of God”? (See 2:28; 3:1, 2, 7, and 10.)
4. In 1 John 2:29, John introduces the idea of being born of God for the first time in the book. It will be a recurring theme through the rest of 1 John. What is learned about every “born of God” reference (2:29 and 3:9)? How does this impact our righteousness?
5. The word *appear* is used five times in this passage. Why did Jesus appear in the past (3:5, 8)? What do we learn about ourselves at his next appearance (2:28, 3:2)?
6. List all the descriptions of the lawless mentioned in 1 John 3:4–12. List all the descriptions of the righteous in 1 John 3:4–12. Why does John compare and contrast the lawless from the righteous (3:10)?
7. In 3:7, John says, “Little children, let no one deceive you.” Deceive them of what?
8. According to 3:8, what is “the practice of sinning” evidence of?

Interpretation

1. Read 1 John 3:1. What makes God's love for us so gracious?
2. What kinds of privileges are afforded to children by their parents? How does the comparison to earthly parents expand your view of God the Father? How does it constrict it?
3. What do the following passages say about glory and image?
 - Romans 8:18, 29
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:17
 - Philippians 3:21

John admits ignorance as to what the redeemed in heaven will be like. What do you think we will be like? How does that unknown but glorious state propel our response? (See 1 John 3:3.)

4. Do 1 John 3:6 and 1 John 1:8 contradict each other? If not, how can their coexistence be explained?
5. Within John's discourse on lawlessness and righteousness in 3:4–10, one verse stands out. Verse 7a reads "Little children, let no one deceive you." What does John's warning tell us about issues facing the early churches in Turkey, the first audience of this letter? Do those issues still apply today?
6. In 1 John 3:9, what is "God's seed" a reference to? (See 1 Peter 1:23 and John 3:5–8 for possible answers.) Why is this seed important? Where does it reside?

Application

1. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be *called children of God*; and so *we are*" (1 John 3:1, *emphasis added*). We can call ourselves children of God and yet not believe that we are. When do you forget you are a child of God? How do you act when you forget?
2. What are some examples of how "the world does not know [Christians]"? Describe a time when you felt unknown by the world as a Christian. How does 1 John 3:1 encourage you when you are misunderstood by the world?
3. According to 1 John 3:9, since the divine nature of God has been implanted in the believer, the Christian cannot keep on sinning. Do you have the divine nature, God's seed, in you? Or are you pretending to be a Christian? How do you allow your old nature rather than God's seed to rule you? How does knowing that God's nature abides in you change your approach to sin and lawlessness?

WEEK SEVEN

Read 1 John 3:11–18.

Imagine a child who has known only abuse and hatred. But now he has been adopted into a new family. In his new family, he has a brother who hasn't known the pain of abuse. Since this brother has known only love, he does not respond with fear to touch, or with distrust to his parents' care. The adopted brother grows jealous of his new brother. He hates him. Although this child has a new family that loves him, he still holds on to his old identity and responds in hate instead of love.

John, in the beginning of chapter 3, differentiates the children of God from the children of the devil. The children of the devil are characterized by hate, jealousy, lawlessness, and deceit; the children of God aren't. When God welcomes us into his family, he does not leave us with our old nature, marked by hatred and sin. He gives us his nature, and we are transformed into his likeness. The evidence of this is that we start to love like him—sacrificially, even to the point of death. Jesus, our big brother, is the ultimate example of this. He is God's love, displayed in the action of self-sacrifice.

If you are in God's family, he has made you an heir to everything. You can give up anything because you have been given everything already. This love is shown especially to those in our family. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are our family, and love is what binds us.

Observation

1. What message have the listeners heard from the beginning?
2. How is the world characteristic of Cain?
3. How do we know if we have passed out of death into life?
4. If someone hates his brother, what does that mean?
5. What is the ultimate act of love, and who is the example of this?
6. What does John say about the person who is not generous to a brother who is struggling?
7. How is love really demonstrated?

Interpretation

1. Read Matthew 5:21–22 and John 13:34–35. How is this commandment from the beginning and yet new with Jesus?
2. Read Psalm 38:20 and Proverbs 29:10. How can God equate a concealed hateful thought to the outward action of murder?
3. Does being a Christian mean we will never sin or hate again? Read 1 John 1:8–10 and 2:1. How is it different once you are a Christian?
4. Why is Cain's murderous action compared to the world? Read John 15:17–19. Why will the world hate Christians?
5. What do actions of self-sacrifice convey? Why? Would it be the same if someone wanted to show you they loved you and jumped into a river even if you were not in danger? How would it be different if they jumped into the river to save you?
6. How is Jesus the ultimate example of this self-sacrificial love (Phil. 2:5–8)? How can a Christian model this love if another person's life isn't in danger?

7. According to Titus 3:1–11, how are we changed from being dead in sin and hate to being heirs of God? Is it possible to be a child of God and not love?
8. Are children of God able to produce this love on their own? How is it accomplished?
9. How does remembering that God rescued us foster sacrificial love?
10. How is engaging in controversies or quarrels with the world unprofitable?

Application

We cannot love sacrificially without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit—which refers to the change from the inside out. When we are convicted of sin in our lives, we can confess it, and God is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:9). It is our response to our sin that makes us different from the world. We cannot be content to keep sinning once we recognize our sin.

1. How do you hate like the world instead of love like Jesus? Is there jealousy in your heart?
2. Do you treat hate in your heart as seriously as you would murder?
3. Jesus humbled himself first in order to sacrifice for us. In what area do you need to be humbled so you can be like Jesus?
4. To what needs of others do you close your heart?
5. Do the people you interact with in the world know you are a Christian by your actions? Why or why not?
6. What is keeping you from loving people sacrificially?
7. What worldly definitions of love do you want more than sacrificial love?
8. How do you respond to the world's hatred of Christians?

WEEK EIGHT

Read 1 John 3:19–24.

At the end of the movie *Schindler's List*, Oskar Schindler, a Nazi factory owner, is surrounded by the Jewish people he saved during the Holocaust, and he has to flee because it's the end of the war. The saved people wanted to thank him for their lives. They presented him with a ring that reads, "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." He looks at all the faces of the people that are alive now because of his actions. He saved more than 1,100 people.

Instead of feeling accomplished, he looks at the gold pin, his car, everything of value he has, and sees them in the currency of lives, and responds, "I could have gotten more out." His Jewish manager, who actually wrote the list that saved lives, reassures him that he did so much. Schindler leaves, inconsolable.⁶

Why was this man who saved so many lives so miserable? He was convicted by his selfish acts and motives instead of satisfied by his loving ones. With new eyes he looked at his good works and knew they were lacking. Schindler looks back over the course of the war and realizes he wasted so much money that could have been used to save a life. His heart condemned him.

What are Christians supposed to do when confronted with the simple reality of our own failures? We bring our righteousness before him and realize it's dirty, stained by the sin in our hearts. Jesus paid the price for sin, and a believer can stand before God, forgiven and righteous. Unfortunately, we will sin again; but the good news is we can confess it, and God will forgive us. It is gone and paid for. God is the judge, the eternal Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9), who sees the whole truth about us, and yet holds nothing against us. This freedom that we experience time after time then flows over into obedience and loving like Jesus.

Observation

1. According to John, how do we know we are of the truth?
2. Where is the condemnation coming from?
3. What kind of condemnation is John referring to? Is it failing to achieve a goal or something else? What does the context of 3:11–18 reveal?
4. What is it about God that reassures us?
5. What can you have before God when your heart does not condemn you?
6. When we obey him, what will we ask of him and receive?
7. What does it mean if we keep his commandments?
8. What is his commandment?
9. Who makes it possible for us to abide in him, and what is the evidence?

Interpretation

1. What does it reveal when your heart condemns you?
2. Who sees and affects hearts? When is that reassuring, and when is it terrifying?
3. Romans 2:14–16 talks about when nonbelievers do good things. What do their hearts do?
4. Compare Romans 14:22 to 1 John 3:21. What does it mean when your heart does not condemn you?
5. Read John 14:10–26. What does the mutual abiding of the Holy Spirit in us and us in Jesus look like? When Jesus, who is facing his torture and

death, explains abiding in the Father, what motivates him? What does he promise to leave them that goes along with the Holy Spirit?

6. What is the stipulation of God granting whatever we ask? (See 1 John 3:22.)
7. In Matthew 7:7–9, Jesus explains prayer. Why does he give us good things? Why isn't it always what we ask for? Is his response based on our actions? Why or why not?
8. How does having the Holy Spirit abiding in us affect what we want?
9. Read Romans 8:15–16. What is the exchange between our spirit and the Holy Spirit? Why do we need this indwelling reassurance?

Application

1. Is your heart condemning you of sin?
2. Are you self-condemning when God has forgiven you? Why?
3. Are you abiding in Christ? How do you know?
4. A child of God is deemed righteous and can have confidence before him. Do you pray with this boldness? What is preventing you?

WEEK NINE

Read 1 John 4:1–6.

There is a notion in our postmodern world that asserts that all paths lead to heaven. You may have heard the parable about the blind men and the elephant. Six blind men approach an elephant from different sides and reach out to feel different parts of its body (e.g., the tail, the ear, the tusk, the leg), causing each to have a different understanding of what the elephant is. The takeaway? Each of us understands a different aspect of God, but all believe in the same God.

Or perhaps you've heard that all religions head up the same mountain to the same peak. We're just taking different paths up to God.

This erroneous belief is exactly what the apostle John is addressing: some people have been deceived and are now making a different confession of who Jesus is and what he's done—the bedrock of faith and the determining factor between truth and error (4:6).

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁷

Lewis' point was this: Christ was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. There is no other option. Your answer means the difference between life and death.

Observation

1. Instead of believing every spirit, what does John instruct his readers to do? Why?
2. What does John say is the way to know the Spirit of God?
3. What is the spirit of the antichrist?
4. What is in the world already?
5. Who is greater than whom, according to this passage?
6. What do those who are from the world do?
7. By what do we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error?
8. What two ways does John use to address his readers?

Interpretation

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21. How are Paul's exhortations similar to John's?
2. What does John say are the two differing confessions regarding Jesus in vv. 2–3? Read Romans 10:9–10. What is the confession that saves mankind?

3. Read 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2, John 12:31, and John 14:30. What are the names given to Satan? Read John 16:25–33 and Romans 8:37–39. Why do we have confidence that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world?
4. Read John 14:15–17 and 17:17. Who is the Spirit of truth? Why is it important that we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error? What does Jesus call himself in John 14:6?
5. Count how many times John uses any form of the word *spirit*. Read Ephesians 6:10–12. What is Scripture saying about the spiritual world?

Application

1. Are you inclined to believe every spirit? How might God be calling you to greater discernment? Is he calling you to deeper study and understanding of his Word to better test the spirits?
2. There are two competing confessions evident in this passage: either Jesus is the perfect God-man who came down from heaven and died on a cross for us by grace and grace alone; or he wasn't and he didn't. Which have you confessed? Are there any areas of deception or error that have taken root regarding Jesus' identity?
3. Who in your life believes the spirit of error? How is God calling you to speak truth to them? Are you praying for opportunities to share the gospel with them?
4. Are there areas of sin, bondage, and defeat in your life, where you are not walking in the truth of Jesus' victory on your behalf?
5. To whom are you listening? Who are your closest friends? Are they from the world and speaking the world's "truth"? Do they know God?
6. In both 4:4 and 4:6, John says we are "from God." We often define ourselves by what kind of family, city or town, childhood, or economic class we're "from." Where do you tend to look to find your identity?
7. Twice John tells us plainly we're "from God." How does that truth change your perception of who you are?
8. Are you accessing the Spirit of truth in purposeful, private devotion time daily?

WEEK TEN

Read 1 John 4:7–21.

Love Is..., a single frame comic strip created in 1969 by Kim Casali, depicts a cherubic male and female in various vignettes of life. Each comic is a fill-in-the-blank exercise to the phrase “Love is...” Over the years, the comic strip has described love as “on the up when all is down,” “mourning the loss of a much-loved part of the family” (which happened to be pictured as a cat), “the day you stop looking back,” and “having the right chemistry.” The comic strip mirrors culture, which defines love from an individual human perspective.

And that’s where we get it wrong.

The apostle John challenges our definition of love by having us consider its Creator. A simple change in noun choice has profound implications. Love is not a fill-in-the-blank answer based on human emotions. God *is* love.

When we consider love from its origin or source, love defies human definition. Before we existed, love existed because God is love. More than a feeling, love displays action. Love became tangible, visible, and was manifested in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And John writes that love continues through us by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we love our Christian brothers and sisters.

John writes one of the richer descriptions of love for his readers to discern false prophets. How will they test the intentions of their teachers? By their love for other Christians. Only because God loves us can we ever love him back and love others. The hymn is true: “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

Observation

1. In 1 John 4:7–12, circle every mention of the word *love* in its various forms. How is love mentioned? What is learned about God from John’s use of the word?
2. John uses the phrase “love one another” three times in verses 7 to 12 in different ways. Match each of the following words individually to the specific instance it best describes: exhortation, hypothesis, or statement of duty.⁸
3. What does 1 John 4:7 say about those who love? What does 1 John 4:8 say about those who do not love?
4. How is God’s love made manifest, or visible, among us? What three purposes does John give for Christ’s death on the cross?
5. What does “propitiation” in 1 John 4:10 mean?
6. In 1 John 4:17–18, what is the relationship between fear and love?
7. In 1 John 4:20–21, circle every mention of *God* and *brother*. What does the interchange of these words in the passage tell us about love for God and love for fellow Christians?

Interpretation

1. What is the origin or source of love? (See verses 7, 10, and 19.) Why is this important? How does the primacy of God’s love impact our understanding of human love? How can it change our ability to love?
2. John describes Jesus in 1 John 4:9 as God’s “only Son.” He also uses this language in John 1:14. The Greek word used there, *monogenes*, is defined as “one of a kind, unique.”⁹ What is unique about Jesus? Why is his uniqueness important to understanding that God is love?

3. Compare 1 John 4:1–2 and 4:13–20. What are some additional tests or evidences John instructs his readers to look for that can identify false prophets?
4. In verse 12, what experience do all living humans share, whether saved or not? Using verses 13–16, why is our abiding in God and the love that results for others so important to our unseen God’s plan for the world?
5. Four times John uses a form of the word *perfect* to describe love (vv. 12, 17, 18). The Greek word can also be translated “mature” or “complete.” Where is God’s manifested (i.e., made visible) love completed? What is a result of this mature and completed love (v. 17)?
6. How do Romans 8:15 and 1 John 4:18 explain the role of the Holy Spirit’s effect on fear and love?

Application

1. List the many ways the world defines *love*. How does the Bible define it? (See John 15:13 and 1 John 4:9–10.) Why is the atoning death of Christ important to your understanding of genuine love? In what ways does your love for others conform to the world’s definition of love? What sin stands in the way of you loving more genuinely with biblical love?
2. First John 4:7–8 links love to knowledge of God. Knowing God is more than head knowledge and Bible study. John implies that knowing God is experiencing his love. How have you experienced God’s love? How has God specifically made his love known to you personally?
3. Amid the pain and suffering of this world, how can we answer the challenge from unbelievers when they ask, “Is God loving?” How does 1 John 4:10 help answer such a question?
4. According to Daniel Akin, “Love is characterized by fear when there is a doubt it will be returned.”¹⁰ What specific fears are jeopardizing your ability to love others more fully? How will your understanding of God’s perfect love destroy those fears?
5. Jesus yokes love for God and love for neighbor as the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:36–40; Luke 10:27). Love for God is mentioned first as the source of love for others. Jesus then describes love for people as a commandment, like love for God. How is your love for your brother, as mentioned in 1 John 4:20, *not* like your love for God? How do you limit your love for God, and what impact does that have on your love for others? What does this reveal about your understanding of God’s love for you?
6. Is it possible to be a believer and still live life with a flawed understanding of God’s love, which expresses itself in a lack of love for others?

WEEK ELEVEN

Read 1 John 5:1–5.

Before dawn at the boundary line between Morocco and Melilla, a group of women, known as “Mule Ladies,” line up to await the opening of the border. Melilla is a Spanish port city. Anything hand-carried from Spain into Morocco is considered luggage, and therefore duty-free. The women, who live in the adjoining Moroccan town, earn money by carrying loads on their backs, across the border and up the hill, many bearing burdens the size of a washing machine averaging between 150 and 175 pounds. The returns on this physically debilitating task are minimal; they are literally breaking their bodies to live.¹¹

In Matthew 23:4, Jesus speaks in the language of such heavy loads when he warns against the life commanded by the rule-driven Pharisees. “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders.” It was God who first gave commandments to his chosen people (Deut. 26:16–19), and yet, as the apostle Paul explains, the commandments bore “fruit for death” (Rom. 7:5). Groups like the Pharisees, no matter how they strived, could not breathe life into the commandments.

Why had God given the people these commandments? They were made to be a revelation of God. Wayne Grudem explains that God’s commandments are “a unified whole and reflect the moral purity and perfection of God himself.”¹² Humanity’s inability to follow God’s commands emphasized their total estrangement from God. It was Jesus’ obedience to the law that brought life and set the children of God free (Rom. 8:1–2). In Christ, God’s chosen people are able to do what they never before could (Rom. 8:3–11)—that is, abide in the love of the Father and his commandments (John 15:10).

The call to God’s commands is no longer a burden to bear but an aspect of new life in Christ (1 John 5:3). It is, in fact, “easy and light” (Matt. 11:28–30). Thus, part of the victory of 1 John 5:4–5 is the fruit of the faith of 5:1–3—the freedom to love God and obey his commandments.

Observation

1. What names does John use to refer to Jesus in this section of Scripture?
2. What qualifications must one possess to be called “born of God”?
3. What must those who love the Father love?
4. What is the evidence of this love?
5. How does the author define the love of God?
6. What victory have those “born of God” achieved? How?

Interpretation

1. Why does John refer to the believers as the “born of God”? (See John 1:12–13; Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 4:3–7; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; and 1 John 3:1.) What is the distinction between being merely “saved” versus “adopted”?
2. In 5:1–5, John is continuing his discussion of love for the believers, which is one of the major themes of his letter. Read 1 John 1:7; 2:9–11; and 4:19–20. How do these texts inform your understanding of 5:1–2?
3. In verse 2, John says the love of the believers is attained through loving the Father and obeying his commands. How is love of the children of God shown through obedience to God? (See Galatians 5:13–14 and 1 John 2:4–6.)

4. Why does John equate obedience to God's commands to the love of God? (See Deuteronomy 6:24–25, 10:12–15; Jeremiah 31:33–34; Matthew 11:28–30; and Romans 6:16–18.)
5. Read John 14:15–24. What help is there for the believer in keeping the commandments of God? What additional promise is there for those who keep the commandments of God? How does this impact your reading of 1 John 5:1–3?
6. Some version of the phrase “the world” is used 23 times in 1 John. Read 1 John 2:15–17; 3:1, 13; 4:3–5; and 5:19. What does John mean in 5:4 when he says our faith “is the victory that has overcome the world”? What exactly have the believers overcome?

Application

1. John uses the phrases “born of God” and “God's children” to refer to the faithful throughout his epistle. Above, we saw that we are not merely saved but adopted into the kingdom of God, made family with our fellow believers. How do God's commandments lead us to practically love the brothers? How does knowledge of God's commandments bring us into participation in the love of God's children?
2. In 1 John 5:3, we are instructed to “keep” God's commandments. This same word is used throughout Jesus' exhortation to the disciples in John 14:15–23. How do you practice “keeping” God's commandments?
3. In Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Bible, the psalmist declares, “For I find my delight in your commandments, which I love” (119:47). One commentator describes this as a psalm of “true piety; a love of God not desiccated by study but refreshed, informed and nourished by it.”¹³ What does it mean to delight in the commandments of the Lord? How do you pursue love for God's commands?
4. In John 16:33, Jesus tells his disciples, “But take heart; I have overcome the world.” The word used for “overcome” here, as in 1 John 5:4–5, is *nikao*, which means “to be victorious, to conquer, to overcome,”¹⁴ stressing the imagery of battle. Twice in verses 4 and 5, the verb uses a present tense, which emphasizes a continuous victory. Where in your day-to-day life do you feel defeated by the world? Where do you tell yourself it's a losing battle? When do you fight to believe the struggle is already won?
5. Because Jesus' victory is our victory, we are free to obey. Jesus promised in him our burdens would be light (Matt. 11:28–30). What heavy burdens do you believe you must bear? In light of Jesus' promise, how do you exchange your heavy load for his offer of relief?
6. Faith is defined by John as belief in Jesus the Christ and Son of God (5:1, 5). And while he speaks firmly of love of the body and obedience to God, these are but fruits of a living faith. In what ways are you still trying to earn the love of the Father? When do you look at the naked simplicity of faith and think, *Not enough!*

WEEK TWELVE

Read 1 John 5:6–13.

Fanny Crosby was born in Brewster, New York, in 1820. Within a few weeks after her birth, she went blind. Despite her blindness, she became a prolific poet and hymn writer, writing over 8,000 songs. Her greatest concern was that people meet Jesus in her songs, and she carefully recorded any stories she heard of God using her songs to win others to Christ. One of her most well-known hymns is “Blessed Assurance.” The first verse says,

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.*

John’s aim was to give his “dear children” this kind of blessed assurance in light of the false teaching that swirled all around them. He said, “I write these things to you who believe... that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). John was not just an apostle but also an apologist—someone who speaks or writes in defense of someone or something. As his letter drew to a close, his goal was to make the truth clear: Jesus was baptized, and the Spirit came down and gave his approval. Jesus’ blood was shed on the cross, and the Father gave his testimony. In fact, this testimony lives inside those who believe. After he lays out this testimony, John gives great assurance: those who have the Son have life, and it is possible to know this without a doubt.

Fanny was often asked if she wished she weren’t blind, but she was content with what God had intended for her, and assured of what God had for her in heaven. She once said, “When I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”

Observation

1. What three things testify to Jesus?
2. If one believes in Jesus, where does this testimony reside?
3. What have those who do not believe God’s testimony made him out to be? What do they lack if they don’t believe?
4. What is “the testimony”?
5. For what reason did John write these things?

Interpretation

1. Most commentators agree that John is referencing water and blood as separate things rather than as a mix that, for example, might be present at birth or that flowed from Jesus’ side on the cross. Read Matthew 3:13–17. What does Matthew help you understand about John’s reference to water? What does Matthew help you understand about the Spirit? What does God testify about his Son?
2. Read Leviticus 16:14–16 and Hebrews 9:11–14. Why did John emphasize blood as well as water?
3. Read John 15:26. What else do you learn about the Spirit?
4. Read 1 John 1:10. How is God made a liar according to this verse compared to how God is made a liar in 5:10? What do we need to understand about ourselves and about God from these verses?

5. Read John 20:31. Compare John's reason for writing his Gospel to his reason for writing this letter. Is his audience the same or different? Was the message they needed to hear the same or different?

Application

1. What does the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood teach you about Jesus? And how do you need to respond in light of this?
2. What circumstances in your life have caused you to doubt who Jesus is or his gift of eternal life? How does this passage reassure you?
3. How could you use John's argument to reassure someone else?
4. "Whoever has the Son has life" (1 John 5:12). The gospel really is this simple. What are some ways you tend to complicate or add to the gospel?
5. The truth about Jesus helps us believe and also persevere. How does the truth about Jesus help you daily?

WEEK THIRTEEN

Read 1 John 5:14–21.

It's often said, "It's not *what* you know but *who* you know that matters in life." While there is some truth to this, most people would not relate it to knowing Jesus, the One about whom John said, if you have him, you have life—if you don't have him, you don't have life. In this matter, Who you know is of first importance—what you know follows.

John has just assured his audience that they may know they have eternal life in Jesus—it's the reason he wrote this letter. From this assurance flows confidence in the believer's relationship with Jesus and in what they know. John uses the word *know* six times in verses 14 through 20. So what is it that those who are in Christ know?

If we are in Christ, we know God hears us. Prayer is the way believers communicate with God. It's conversation with the heavenly Father that helps submit one's own will to his will. If we ask according to God's will, he hears us and he hears our requests. This includes prayer for other people—especially a fellow believer in sin.

If we are in Christ, we know we have protection from sin. This protection comes from our new nature that we receive when we are born of God. It keeps us from a life that is predominantly characterized by sin and keeps Satan at a distance.

If we are in Christ, we belong to God. Although in his sovereignty God has allowed the evil one power over the world for a time, believers know they ultimately belong to God.

If we are in Christ, we know Jesus gives us understanding to know *who* is true, not just *what* is true. There are a lot of people setting themselves up against Jesus. There are a lot of competing truths out there, and John has already warned us in chapters 2 and 4 of the "antichrist." He closes with the solemn charge, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Observation

1. How do we know that we can't ask for and get just anything from God? In other words, what is the qualification John gives for the "anything"?
2. What are we to do if we see a "brother committing a sin not leading to death" (1 John 5:16)?
3. What does John suggest we should *not* pray for?
4. Who has given us understanding? And why has he given it to us?

Interpretation

1. Read Matthew 6:9–10, John 15:7 and 16:23–24, and Matthew 26:39. How do Jesus' words and example help you understand what John says about having what we ask of him?
2. Read Galatians 6:1–2. How does this confirm what John says about how we handle a brother committing sin? What is the warning in Galatians?
3. There is much debate about what John meant regarding the difference between "sin that leads to death" and "sin that does not lead to death" (1 John 5:16–17). A strong possibility is that he was referring to those who are in the body (he uses the word *brother*) and appear to be believers on the outside, but remain unrepentant on the inside. Discuss as a group the significance and possible meaning of these two verses.

4. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.” What does John mean by saying there is sin that does not lead to death? What sin does John imply *would* lead to death?
5. Are there different degrees of sin? In what sense are all sins the same, and in what sense is each sin different?
6. Read Romans 1:19–21 and Ephesians 4:18. How do these verses shed light on what John might have meant by “sin that leads to death”?
7. Read Matthew 13:24–30. What does this parable tell you about those in the Church who don’t know the truth? Who is ultimately responsible for discerning wheat and weeds?
8. Read Ephesians 4:20–24; Colossians 3:9–10; and 1 John 3:9. How do these verses help you understand what John means by the statement, “Everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning” (1 John 5:18)?
9. Read 1 John 3:9–10. What has John already said about how we know we are from God?
10. John makes a stark contrast between believers and the world who are from God, and the rest of the world, which lies in Satan’s power. Read Ephesians 6:12. How does this help you understand the nature of Satan’s power?
11. Read John 17:15–19. What is Jesus’ prayer for believers in the world?
12. Why would John bring in this last warning about idols?

Application

1. If you have more confidence toward God (v. 14), how does that affect how you live?
2. How can you grow in your prayers in the area of “asking according to his will”?
3. If there are differences in the kinds of sin we commit, some sins being worse than others, how should this change the way we approach our brother or sister who is sinning?

APPENDIX FOR LEADERS

Twenty Ways to Kick Off the Group

Choose a question from the list below (or come up with your own) to jump-start the conversation, make people feel more comfortable about sharing with the group, and introduce new participants.

1. Who has been the most influential person in your life and why?
2. What is your favorite childhood memory?
3. Do you have a favorite road trip?
4. Have you ever had an embarrassing clothing malfunction?
5. What is the first concert you ever attended?
6. What is something new, different, or inspiring you've recently learned from someone else?
7. What has been the most influential book you've read or movie you've watched? How did it influence you?
8. Share one thing about yourself that you think no one in the group would know.
9. What was your best and worst moment this past week?
10. What is one trait or characteristic you received from your parents that you'd like to keep?
11. Is there any day in your life that you'd like to relive? Describe it.
12. Describe a unique hidden talent you possess.
13. What was your favorite TV show growing up and why?
14. Describe an encounter you had with a celebrity. Who was it, and what did you do?
15. If you could write a book, what would it be about?
16. Which animal matches your personality?
17. Do you have a go-to karaoke song? What is it?
18. What is the most mischievous thing you did as a child?
19. Let's say it's your birthday and you get to pick the meal. What do you choose for dinner?
20. If you had a personal theme song, what would it be?

How to Use the Small Group Study

This study has been designed to help your small group discover the power of the Holy Spirit that enables his people to provide witness to the greatness of Jesus Christ. We all need the presence of a community to encourage us when inevitable opposition to the gospel arises, and also to spur one another on to good works (Heb. 10:24).

Each study begins with an introduction that serves as a springboard for conversation in your group. There's no need to read the introduction verbatim, if that feels stodgy. Just familiarize yourself with the content beforehand and give an overview of the Scripture passage, linking it with timely examples or testimonies of what God is up to in your own community.

After setting the stage for the week's Scripture reading, questions are provided so the group can dive into application. Use these as a way to stir up conversation. Some questions are simply opportunities to share testimonies, while others are offered as challenges for growth. Take some time beforehand to jot down notes regarding what questions are best suited for your specific group, and see where the Holy Spirit leads the conversation.

Last is a suggested prayer. It's common to leave little time for prayer, but be encouraged to provide a good amount of time for this. From prayers of praise to requests for help with life's common struggles, to petitions for healing, and everything in between, we need to be refreshed by God's presence and strength. Pray with the expectation that God will do great things in your community. He is a loving Father who loves to give good gifts to his children.

How to Use the Group Inductive Study

"Inductive study" refers to a particular type of analysis that uses the Bible as the primary tool for learning about God and receiving instruction about how to live a godly life. Our goals for this type of study are to observe the text, interpret its message as we listen to the Holy Spirit, and apply its meaning to our lives. The steps are simple. Begin by reading the introductory paragraphs about the assigned Scripture. Then read the passage and pray about what it is communicating, asking God to open your hearts and minds so you can learn more about him.

Next, examine the passage in light of the context in which it was written, with an eye toward the whole of Scripture. Then zero in on the words on the page. Good questions to ask as you study include *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how*? Here are some examples of how you might use these kinds of questions:

- Who was the writer's original audience?
- What issue was being addressed? What was being said?
- Where and when did this take place?
- Why was the message given?
- How was the message communicated?

Other helpful questions are listed under the "Observation" heading.

The "Interpretation" will come from the text that is before us, as guided by the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes and reveals what we need to see. Again, please pray that God will guide your mind as you examine the text. Keep in mind that as we study 1 John, it's important to follow the text and let it define the context and audience before jumping into our own life application. That's where the above-mentioned questions are so helpful.

Next, don't miss the "Application" questions. In the fourth section of the weekly study, questions that focus on practice are provided: How does each verse shed light into your life? In what ways does the Scripture show you your need for Jesus? What is your plan for change going forward?

Finally, pay attention to how God is stirring and convicting your heart. It's here at this intersection where we apply the Word to our lives. We become more like Christ, and our relationship with God is deepened.

¹ Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1048.

² Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 51.

³ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin, 1955), 173.

⁴ Robert S. Candlish, *The First Epistle of John* (Edinburgh: A & C Black, 1870), 20.

⁵ Jobes, 83.

⁶ *Schindler's List*, directed by Stephen Spielberg (1993; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Entertainment, 2004), DVD.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1952), 52.

⁸ This question has been adapted from Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, in *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 177.

⁹ Study Note from *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2020.

¹⁰ Akin, 187.

¹¹ Suzanne Daley, "A Borderline Where Women Bear the Weight," Europe (blog), *The New York Times*, March 30, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/03/31/world/europe/a-borderline-where-women-bear-the-weight.html.

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 501–02.

¹³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 455.

¹⁴ Bauer, et. al, 673.