

1 John Bible Study

Overview of the Study

This Bible Study is an eight-week focus on the first letter of John. The outline provided is not all encompassing but is a good place for servant leaders to begin their preparation for their individual core groups. We strongly encourage you to tailor this to your specific core groups.

Throughout the first letter of John, we see the great love Jesus lavishes upon us, and learn how we can walk in a similar way. John gives a strong message while addressing the recipients compassionately as “dear children”. The goal is to challenge and encourage your core group to walk differently because of the work Christ has done.

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Week One: 1 John 1:1-2:6

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life, so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Question:

What does it mean to have fellowship with one another? What does it mean to have an advocate?

Body of this Week's Study:

A general overview for the letter will need to be given during this first week of study.

1) Historical context of the entire letter:

Most scholars agree that the author is John, the apostle and author of the Gospel of John. Despite its lack of an opening or signature, 1 John is a letter written to a specific church with a specific situation in mind. Its inclusion in the New Testament demonstrates that we have much to learn from the letter.

The letter addresses a situation in the church where a form of false teaching was being taught that denied Christ's incarnation. The people that held this belief had left the church (2:19).

Many scholars believe that the beliefs held by these persons were probably related to Gnosticism. Gnostics believed that anything relating to the Spirit was good, while all physical matter was evil. Therefore the human body would be seen as evil. From their perspectives, the goal of life was to release the spirit from our evil bodies (which could only be done through special knowledge, *gnosis*, and ritual).

2) Our Explanation:

We must keep sight of why John was writing as we do this bible study. John's intention was to help a broken church gain sight of who Jesus was and who they were in Christ. There are many different heresies and ideas that go against the true person of Christ in our culture as well, so we have much in common with this broken church! Like the church John addresses, we need to have a firm foundation and understanding of Christ in order to live a life pleasing to Him.

John 1:1-2:6 is the prologue and opening of the letter. John is reminding the church of what he and they have seen. He says, "...which *we* have heard, which *we* have seen with our eyes, which *we* looked at and *our* hands have touched—*this* we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1:1). It's important to remember your experiences with God; the times when He spoke, directed, or protected you.

John declares the message that had been given to all of them who had experienced Jesus. Through Jesus' blood, a new kind of relationship had begun between God and them (and us). We have been set free from sin. We still sin and mess up, but we have the assurance that we can be forgiven.

It's important to understand Jesus' role as our advocate; He's on our side. Because He took human form, He understands the temptations and hard times that we go through. Instead of accusing and withdrawing from us, He steps in and "speaks to the Father in our defense" (2:1). As we repent and begin to obey His commands, the Father restores us with His love. Not only does He restore, He then fills us with His love.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- Why do you think John opened the letter up this way (by calling them to *remembrance*)?
- What does the phrase “But if anyone obeys His word, God’s love is truly made complete in him” mean? (2:5)

Application Questions:

1. Is there a time in your life where God spoke that you have forgotten? How can we better remind ourselves of those times?
2. John makes a very bold statement in 2:4. Are all the areas of your life under His command? If not, what can you do to allow that?
3. Imagine out loud what Jesus’ role as advocate (2:1) might look like for you.
4. Do you feel loved by God? (2:5)

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

We don’t have to be perfect in order for God to love us. We just need to put ourselves under God’s authority and love. As Christians, we are filled with God’s love (2:5). Write on pieces of paper the most loving acts God has done in your life. Be specific, and then thank Him for them in prayer.

Memory Verse:

1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Week Two: 1 John 2:7-17

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Question:

What sort of metaphors have you heard about light and darkness? How have you heard them in connection with the gospel?

Body of this Week's Study:

Let's begin at the ending of last week's lesson. 1 John 2:6 says: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." Wait! As Jesus did? Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, taught crowds of people, and had 12 men following him around all the time so he could disciple them, I might be a brilliant student, but "walk as Jesus did"? Well, John goes on to tell us more of what walking like Jesus means.

Verse 9 says: "Anyone who claims to be in the light, but hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble." Sound easy? Just turn on the lights and love your brother, right? But what about when they offend you or hurt you? The lights seem hard to turn on then. Learning to walk as Jesus walked means learning how to walk it out in relationship with one another. Because it is not an easy task, we must learn to walk in the light in our relationship with Jesus and His Word. Apart from knowing Christ, our love is worthless (1 Cor. 13). Walking out our Christianity in community of others is where we learn to "walk in the light".

John goes on to tell them how to walk in the light and why they can walk in the light because of the work Christ has done.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- What do you think it means to be "walking in the light"?
- 1 John 2:8 says, this "new command I give to you." What is the new command? (John 13:34, 35) What will be the outcome of you obeying this command?
- In 1 John 2:12-14, what are the 6 reasons he writes to them?
- 1 John 2:16 describes the influences of the world. These influences are seen in what 3 areas?

Application Questions:

1. Does your relationship with God affect your relationships with other people? How?
2. Do you think our relationships with each other mean anything to those outside the Christian faith?
3. What are the influences of the world that try to affect your life? How do you deal with them?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

Think of one person in your life either within your core group or outside of your core group whom you can love. Write a prayer for them right now. Ask God to give you one practical way to love them. It might be giving them a phone call, writing them a note, including them in a social gathering, or giving them a big bear hug (maybe you know their love language and what would best communicate to them as an individual). God can give you creative ways to show love and it might be just what that person needed.

Memory Verse:

1 John 2:10 "Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."

Week Three: 1 John 2:18-29

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Question:

When do you find you are best able to hold to the truth of God? What activities, people, or verses help strengthen you?

Body of this Week's Study:

It's often difficult to figure out what is true and what is not true. Many things have a little truth in them. So how can we know what to believe and what not to believe? Don't you wish someone would just tell you? John is attempting to answer that question for the Church. He wants to remind them of the things they know for sure, and that is that Jesus was and is the Christ!

Don't get confused with some of the language that John uses in this passage. His usage of the term "antichrist" can be confusing, but the readers knew what he was talking about. During that age, there was widespread belief that there would be a great battle between good and evil at the end of time. In addition, Jesus prophesied and warned about people that would come and lead others away from Christ (Mark 13:22-23). Those false prophets were not to be believed. John is pointing this out to them.

It's easy to get sidetracked or overwhelmed by the world around us. Because of that, we must remind ourselves of the work that Christ has done in our lives. When we grasp the grace and hope that Christ has given, we will be able to connect with Him and remain in Him.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- John calls his readers "children" at the opening. By looking at this passage, what makes someone a child of God?
- Who are "they" in verse 19?
- According to this passage, who has the anointing of the Holy Spirit? And what does that mean to a follower of Christ?

Application Questions:

1. Is there something in your life that is leading (or trying to lead) you away from Christ?
2. What helps you to stay on course in your walk with Christ?
3. What is the Holy Spirit teaching or reminding you of?
4. In v. 27, we are told to "remain in him". How do we do that?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

It's difficult to recognize truth unless your relationship with Christ is close. As you draw close to Him, He will show you what is Him and what is not. Take a few moments to read this passage slowly.

“Teach me your way, O Lord,
And I will walk in your truth;
Give me an undivided heart,
That I may fear your name.”
-Psalm 86:11

Keeping this passage in mind, write down your thoughts and concerns to God. Think about ways that you have kept God's truth and ways you have forgotten it. Thank Him for the strength to keep His ways, and ask for His forgiveness for ways that you have deviated from Him.

Memory Verse:

1 John 2:24-25 “See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us- even eternal life.”

Week Four: 1 John 3:1-24

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Exercise:

What present (birthday, Christmas, graduation, anything) has made you feel the most loved? Why was that?

Body of this Week's Study:

1 John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" Lavished means "in great quantity and richness; given freely." Because of this great love we are changed both internally and externally. It has an impact on how we live our lives.

Chapter 3 is packed with things that we must understand and know about the love of God, and how that affects our relationships with God and others. If needed, focus in on a specific verse or thought in your study.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- What are the characteristics of the children of God described in this chapter?
Verse 6-
Verse 7-
Verse 9-
Verse 14 –
- What are the characteristics of someone who is not a child of God?
Verse 8 -
Verse 10-
Verse 15 –
- How does "being a child of God" affect your relationships with others?

Application Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that you are a child of God?
2. Do you have any areas in your life where you keep on sinning? (v. 6)
3. How does your relationship with God affect your relationships with others?
4. Read 1 John 3:16-18 and write it in your own words.
5. Who can you show God's love to this week?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

Verse 17 says: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother in need but has no pity on him how can the love of God be in him?" Think of a practical need your group can meet for someone in need and make an action plan.

Memory Verses:

1 John 3:16 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

Week Five: 1 John 4:1-6

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Exercise:

Has anyone ever played a trick on you? What habits or situations make us easily deceived?

Body of this Week's Study:

This week's passage can be difficult to understand. While difficult, it is one of the most practical parts of the letter. John was writing to strengthen the church, and to aid them in discerning what was truth and falsehood.

In order to do that, he commands believers to test those that claim to have Truth. Second, he tells them how to do that. Third, he encourages them by reminding them of who they are in Christ, and the implications of that.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- How do you discern a false prophet?
- How do you recognize "the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood"? (v. 6b)
- How should you respond if something is not of God?

Application Questions:

1. Why is it important that you be able to discern what is of God and what is not?
2. Has God been speaking to you about something that is not of Him in your life? If so, can you share?
3. How are you at figuring out what is of Christ, and what is not? Are there areas/things you'd like to work on?
4. If you had to summarize and share God's heart on these matters, what would you say?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

Dallas Willard, a theologian, says,

"Our lives are a result of what we have become in the depths of our being- what we call our spirit, will, or heart. From there we see our world and interpret reality. From there we make choices, break forth into action, and try to change our world. That is why the greatest need of collective humanity is the renovation of our heart" (Renovation of the Heart In Daily Practice, p. 15).

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

What would your life look like if you saw yourself and world in light of 1 John 4:4? What would change? What would stay the same? Write down a few thoughts, and have someone in your group pray with you. Pray that God would help you to understand 4:4 and that the knowledge of His presence in you would change you and the world.

Memory Verse:

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

Week Six: 1 John 4:7-21

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life, so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Exercise:

What would happen if the entire city was out of electricity? How would it affect your life?

Body of this Week's Study:

Just as electricity is the source of power, so God is the source of us living the Christian life. This chapter takes a bold look at what it looks like to really be plugged into our source. It will not only affect our relationship with God, but our relationship with others. There is one attribute of God that stands out in this chapter... love. When we really know the Source, He gives us power beyond ourselves to demonstrate this love. He is the power source.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- According to verse 9, what are the attributes of someone who loves?
- What is the one characteristic of someone who does not love? (verse 10)
- How did God demonstrate his love? (verse 9 & 10)?
- Because of this love shown to us by God, what has he empowered us to do? (verse 11)
- What are the results of us loving one another? (verse 12)

Application Questions:

1. Recently, how has someone shown you that they care about you?
2. As demonstrated by your actions, would others say you are plugged into source?
3. Is there someone in your life you could love better? If so, how?
4. What makes it difficult to love others? How do you overcome that?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

Demonstrate God's love to someone by reminding them what God had done for them, a character quality you appreciate about them, and something they have done that encourages you.

Memory Verse:

1 John 4:21 "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Week Seven: 1 John 5:1-12

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life, so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Exercise:

Spend some time as a group out loud thanking God the Father for the gift of His son Jesus Christ. We highly encourage you to not skimp here. Really dig down into the moment together and praise Him for the life-saving, life-transforming reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Body of this Week's Study:

This week is the heart of 1 John. Throughout the letter, John has been reminding people to hold to the truth they have been taught, to demonstrate that through their love, and to not be misled. The heart of the truth we are to hold to is this: Our victory over the world rests in Christ Jesus alone, and the sign of our love for God and His Son is obedience to the Lord's commands.

We believe that Jesus is the Son of God not from human testimony alone but the very testimony of God. This testimony is made evident through the trifold agreement of the water, the blood, and the Spirit. "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (v11).

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- Who are the three that testify (v7)? Talk about what this means.
- How do we overcome the world?
- What is love for God (v3)? What does it mean when they say it is not burdensome?

Application Questions:

1. Verse 5 says that only the one who believes in Jesus as the Son of God can overcome the world. How does this shape our responsibility to the lost of the world, as believers?
2. Obeying commands may not always feel like it is "not burdensome". What commands are hard for you to follow? How can you encourage one another in obedience?
3. How are you loving the children of God? How does your obedience help others?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

As a core group, pick a Christian song that you feel represents your victory over the world through Christ Jesus. Commit together to begin every morning by playing that song, and close every evening by playing it again. Live in the knowledge that you will overcome through Jesus! We are victorious in Him!

Memory Verse:

1 John 5:11 "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

Week Eight: 1 John 5:13-21

Objective: 1 John is a book about what matters. The author's objective is to destroy wrong assumptions about Jesus, and to declare that Jesus is the Word of life, so that all might have fellowship with each other and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1:1-4).

Opening Exercise:

Tell about a time God answered one of your prayers.

Body of this Week's Study:

John ends his letter with a few powerful statements, which you will discuss this week. Again, he confirms why he is writing. He wants to encourage and assure them of their salvation.

He begins this passage with comments on prayer. Why would he do this? Because he wants to make sure that they know that God hears the prayers of His children. He wants them to grow confidence in their relationships with God. Scripture tells us that we have not, because we ask not. However, John points out, that we must ask things in remembrance of and openness to God's will and plan.

As for verses 16 and 17, there are a variety of opinions by different scholars about what John meant. For more information about those opinions, check out a good commentary. What we do know (from 5:18 and 3:6) is that true Christians do not participate in habitual sin. They flee from sin.

Lastly, John ends the letter with several affirmations. He encourages them to know that they are from God, that Christ has given us understanding, and that we are in Christ.

Text Questions: *Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!*

- John writes several times about prayer throughout this letter. What else has he said about prayer and making our requests known? (3:21-22, 5:14-15, etc)
- Why do you think John makes such bold comments about prayer?
- What does John emphasize in this passage? Why?
- Why has John written this letter? What are his main points?

Application Questions:

1. Are there hindrances in your prayer life? Do you come to God with your requests and ask them with confidence?
2. Why do you think God answers our prayers?
3. What is God teaching you about Himself?
4. Verse 18 says that God protects us. Do you feel protected? Why or why not?

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:

Take some time this week to meditate on John's closing comments (or perhaps a passage in 1 John that stuck out to you). In her book "From the Heart of a Woman" (Navpress, out of print), Carole Mayhall suggests using the letters AEIOU for systematic meditation.

Write out your own paraphrase

Ask questions – Ask questions regarding the phrases or words in the verse.

Emphasize words – Repeat a verse or phrase (slowly) emphasizing different words.

Illustrate – Draw a picture of the verse.

Other scriptures – What else does the Bible say about this?

Use – How can I apply this verse to my life?

Walk through these steps as you read your chosen passage.

Memory Verse:

1 John 5:13-15 "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."