

1 JOHN





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- › gain new knowledge about what the Bible teaches;
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EXPLORE THE BIBLE: 1 John

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➤ ABOUT THIS STUDY

YOUR LIFE REFLECTS YOUR BELIEF.

God is _____. People try to fill in that blank in different ways. There's no shortage of opinions about God. Our world is full of ideas about spirituality and morality. But our culture encourages people to mix and match various religions and philosophies to create their own customized worldview.

So does it matter what you believe? Is your life changed by what you believe?

Yes. Without question—yes. What you believe matters.

The Book of 1 John provides simple yet profound teaching on what it means to know God and to live in relationship with Him. Christians are challenged to hold tightly to the truth and live in a way that reflects the love of Jesus.

Explore the Bible: 1 John helps you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT: This page explains the original context of each passage and begins relating the primary themes to your life today.

EXPLORE THE TEXT: These pages walk you through Scripture, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

OBEY THE TEXT: This page helps you apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

LEADER GUIDE: This final section provides optional discussion starters and suggested questions to help anyone lead a group in reviewing each section of the personal study.



For help on how to use *Explore the Bible*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit:
www.ministrygrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.

➤ GROUP COMMITMENT

As you begin this study, it's important that everyone agrees to key group values. Clearly establishing the purpose of your time together will foster healthy expectations and help ease any uncertainties. The goal is to ensure that everyone has a positive experience leading to spiritual growth and true community. Initial each value as you discuss the following with your group.

❑ PRIORITY

Life is busy, but we value this time with one another and with God's Word. We choose to make being together a priority.

❑ PARTICIPATION

We're a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one dominates.

❑ RESPECT

Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions. All questions are encouraged and respected.

❑ TRUST

Each person humbly seeks truth through time in prayer and in the Bible. We trust God as the loving authority in our lives.

❑ CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything said in our meetings is never repeated outside the group without the permission of everyone involved. This commitment is vital in creating an environment of trust and openness.

❑ SUPPORT

Everyone can count on anyone in this group. Permission is given to call on one another at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group provides care for every member.

❑ ACCOUNTABILITY

We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in the loving ways we decide on. Questions are always welcome. Unsolicited advice, however, isn't permitted.

I agree to all the commitments.

Date

➤ GENERAL EDITOR



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THE TRUTH PRESENTED

No one can have true fellowship with God the Father and His church without also acknowledging His incarnate Son.



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➤ ABOUT 1 JOHN

AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

Conservative Bible scholars generally agree that John wrote the fourth Gospel, the three Letters of John, and Revelation. John was a fisherman by trade, along with his brother, James, and their father, Zebedee. Together with Simon Peter, another former fisherman, John and James constituted an inner circle whom Jesus took with Him on significant occasions (see Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:32-33). From the cross Jesus placed His mother in John's tender care (see John 19:26). He was a leader in the Jerusalem church until the Roman army destroyed that city and its temple around A.D. 70. John then moved to Ephesus, where he continued his pastoral ministry and began to write the works of Scripture for which he is known. The Letters of John could have been written at any time between A.D. 70. and the early 90s.

PURPOSE

John stated five explicit purposes for writing his first letter that are still relevant for believers today. First, he wanted believers to have fellowship (see 1 John 1:3). Second, John wanted believers to have joy (see 1:4). Third, he wanted believers not to sin (see 2:1-2). John explained that although Jesus has already paid the penalty for a Christian's sin, we can have victory over sin in daily life and experience unhindered communion with Christ.

John's fourth purpose was his desire for believers to overcome error (see 2:26). Some false teachers were claiming that Christ didn't come in the flesh but only appeared to be a real man. They also said knowing truth was more important than living truth, and only a spiritual few could understand spiritual truth. But John countered all that, testifying that Jesus had a real body and experienced a real death. He said it's not enough to say what we believe; we must back it up with our lives. And he said all Christians—not just a select few—have an anointing from God that makes it possible for them to know His truth. John's fifth and final purpose for writing was his desire for believers to have assurance of eternal life (see 5:13). His Gospel shows us how to be saved, but his first letter shows us how to be sure we're saved.

**"OUR COMMUNITY
CONSISTS SOLELY
IN WHAT CHRIST HAS
DONE TO BOTH OF US."
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

➤ 1 JOHN 1:1-4

Think About It

Circle all the phrases in which the word we is used in these verses.

To whom might the word we refer? How does this reference strengthen John's testimony about Jesus?

What was John's purpose for testifying about Jesus?

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—

2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—

3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

The opening passage of 1 John is one eyewitness's personal account of what was seen, heard, and experienced of Jesus Christ. John the apostle wrote late in the first century about his relationship with Jesus. He testified that he and others shared in experiencing Jesus as a real person in history. John's testimony is significant for the Christian faith because of the importance it places on the incarnation of Jesus—that He was fully God and also completely human.

Teachers in the time of John's ministry were spreading false information that was grounded in several erroneous beliefs. Among those heresies were: (1) Salvation is obtained through a mystical spiritual knowledge, not by the atoning work of Christ on the cross. (2) Spirit and matter (flesh) are separate from each other and can't coexist, because spirit is good and flesh is evil. (3) Because spirit and flesh are independent of each other, a person can live an immoral lifestyle and still claim to be a spiritual person. (4) Jesus didn't have an authentic physical body but only seemed to be human; therefore, He couldn't have really died on the cross for the sins of humankind. Collectively, these heretical teachings denied the reality of the incarnation—that God came in flesh, the physical death and resurrection of Jesus, and salvation by faith in the work of Christ on the cross.

To combat such erroneous teachings, John began his first epistle with an emphatic prologue that declared the reality of who Jesus was and testified of his personal experience with Jesus. John vividly presented Jesus as a real person who preexisted in heaven before He appeared on earth. John's use of the personal pronouns *we*, *our*, and *us* professed that he and his contemporaries had seen, heard, touched, and beheld Jesus during His earthly ministry. John's language in 1 John 1:1-4 identified Jesus' uniqueness as the only way to experience eternal salvation. John explained that his purpose in writing was for his readers to have fellowship with believers, which comes from a proper understanding of a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.





➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

WITNESSED BY MANY (*1 John 1:1*)

¹ What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—

First John 1:1 reflects the truths declared in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. John was aware that Jesus preexisted in heaven prior to His incarnation on earth, a belief that's foundational to the framework of Christianity. John followed this declaration about the preexistence of Christ with several statements that assert the reality of Jesus in human flesh, indicating that John was focusing more on Christ Himself rather than just the proclamation of the gospel message.

John stated that he and his contemporaries had heard Jesus speak with their own ears, had seen Him with their own eyes, and had touched Him with their own hands. The One who existed with God before creation came to earth as a human to identify with other humans. These collective statements not only emphasize John's firsthand experience with Jesus but also proclaim that Jesus had an actual physical body and wasn't a mysterious being, as false teachers suggested.

John described Jesus as "the Word of life." This unique phrase could be a title, or it could mean that the message of life is contained in the person and work of Christ. John seemed to have in mind the eternal purpose of God that's revealed in Christ. Jesus is God in human form, who gives everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

John described his own personal experience with Jesus. In what ways have you experienced the reality of Jesus Christ in your life?

Why is it important that Jesus' humanity has been established by many witnesses?

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God.

REVEALED AS LIFE (1 John 1:2)

²That life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.

Scripture records that God takes the initiative to reveal Himself to humankind. In the Old Testament God revealed Himself to Moses through a burning bush and revealed His expectations for His people with the Ten Commandments. In the person of Christ, God has made Himself known to humanity. God the Father didn't present His Son, Jesus, as an abstract concept, nor did He disclose salvation in a mystical, mysterious way, as the false teachers of John's day claimed. Rather, Jesus came to earth as God in the flesh to reveal God's plan of salvation for humankind.

At least two significant truths for the Christian faith are found in John's statement that Jesus is eternal life. First, being eternal, Jesus is unending and isn't bound by the restrictions of time and space. Second, Jesus' entry into the human race revealed Him as the source of eternal life available to all who would believe in Him. John affirmed that eternal life isn't just experienced by believers in heaven but is also a present reality on earth as Jesus changes the quality of believers' lives.

BIBLE SKILL

Use another Scripture to understand a Bible passage.

The prologue of 1 John, the core passage for this session, is similar to the prologue of the Gospel of John (see John 1:1-14). Read both passages and compare what each passage teaches about Jesus. Note the following terms.

1. Word
2. Beginning
3. Life
4. We have seen
5. Testify

Where do these terms occur in each prologue? What do they teach about who Jesus is? How do these passages differ?

What special terms are found in only one of the passages? (Hint: consider light, glory, joy, and fellowship.) How do the two prologues give a clear picture of Jesus?

Why is each of the following important to the Christian faith?

Jesus' humanity:

Jesus' preexistence with God before creation:

PROVIDED TRUE FELLOWSHIP

(1 John 1:3-4)

³What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

For the third time John informed readers that he didn't merely hear someone else teach about Christ; rather, he was an eyewitness of Jesus' incarnation, a firsthand experience that gave him the authority to proclaim truths about Jesus. John stated that his purpose in proclaiming Christ was so that believers could maintain ongoing fellowship with one another. John testified that fellowship among believers is made possible by their fellowship with the Father and the Son. If believers are unsure about who Jesus is and doubt their salvation, their fellowship with God is negatively impacted. A lack of fellowship with God leads to a lack of true fellowship with other believers.

How would you respond to a person who believes we can have Christian fellowship without being in right fellowship with God?

⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

In the closing verse of the prologue, John connected his joy to that of his readers. John stated that he had written these truths about Jesus Christ so that his readers' joy would be complete, not lacking anything. The message of false teachers had led to doubt and confusion in the minds of some people, causing them to be unsure of their faith and adversely affecting their fellowship. What John had written to this point was meant to clear up any confusion about the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the results would be unity and fellowship among believers.

The source of joy John described is a vital union with Jesus Christ that he had personally experienced. John was so concerned with the spiritual welfare of his readers that he couldn't experience true joy while they were confused in their faith. His repeated emphasis on the person and work of Christ in the opening verses of this epistle gave his readers what they needed for spiritual renewal: a right understanding of Jesus Christ.

In what ways does being in a community of other believers bring a sense of joy to your life?



➤ OBEY THE TEXT

John's eyewitness statements about the person and work of Jesus Christ are important to the Christian faith. Authentic believers affirm both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, and these beliefs enable us to share in fellowship with God and with one another. No one can have true fellowship with God the Father and His church without acknowledging His incarnate Son.

How would you describe the importance of affirming Jesus' humanity and deity? What portions of this passage could you point to that would help you explain it to someone who rejects this truth?

How is your relationship with believers an extension of your relationship with God? List steps you need to take to build your relationship with God and with other believers.

In what ways can your Bible-study group strengthen Christian fellowship in your church? List practical steps your Bible-study group can take to make fellowship with one another a higher priority.



MEMORIZE

“What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you will put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

