

You're looking at a

1 John

Weekday Study

with weekly Bible studies for

April 23 - July 9.



4.23 Weekday Study: 1 John 1:1-4

Main focus: We're turning to 1 John to grow in joyful fellowship with the Triune God and with his people.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Read 1 John 1:1-4. How would you summarize what happens here?

This week we began our newest sermon series in 1 John, and you'll notice we're moving through it quite slowly and reading every verse. The entirety of God's word is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it's all equally important (2 Tim. 3:16). So, in starting a new series on John 1 this week, we want to start on a slow note with the beginning of John's first letter as a way to grow in joy and accord with the Triune God and fellow Christians.

Towards the end of the New Testament you'll find three little letters, 1, 2, and 3 John, and those along with the Gospel of John and Revelation were all most likely written by the apostle John, one of Jesus's closest friends and disciples. For a deeper dive into 1 John, check out this 9-minute video from The Bible Project in the QR code over there →.

Throughout the letter, John is writing to Christians and urging them to believe in the Son (1:3), obey his commandments (3:24), and love their brothers and sisters in Christ (2:10). You'll notice those three things highlighted throughout our sermon series.

1 John isn't a letter to a single church but most likely a letter to a collection of churches and church leaders across what is now Turkey. John seems to have had two general purposes for the writing of this letter: 1. to refute and combat false doctrine



that Jesus was not fully God and 2. to encourage and edify those who believe, commune with, and worship Christ. John begins this letter almost poetically with verses 1 and 2, reminding the believers that the amazing things they've seen—miracles, signals and wonders, and the works of his apostles—are all because of Jesus, God incarnate. The beginning of this letter also has a similar thematic parallel to the beginning of the Gospel of John, emphasizing Jesus as the "Word of life."

Take a moment to go read John 1:1-14. How does this passage describe how Jesus has revealed himself to mankind?

Think about how Jesus has revealed himself to you personally. What emotions does John 1:1-14 stir up in you, and how might this direct your response to Jesus today?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking Jesus for who he is, for his word, and asking him to reveal himself to you more fully.

4.30 Weekday Study: 1 John 1:5-10

Main focus: Walking with God in the goodness of his light requires confession.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 1:5-10. In one sentence, how would you summarize what John is talking about here?

This week we continue with our introduction to John's first epistle, and we'll see some continuity with our discussion last week. In verses 1-4, John talks about what he has seen and heard and is now testifying about, and here in verse 5 he tells us what that message is, that God is light which, for John, is a rich word-picture of God's goodness, wisdom, holiness, and perfection. But we also read this huge implication of that message, that because God is light, for us to be with him and walk with him through life we must walk in his light. That will require of us a number of things, chief among them confession.

But before we get too much further into 1 John, you'll notice that John reiterates things. A lot. But each time he revisits an idea he doesn't just repeat himself, he adds something to it. Our passage for this week is a good example—verses 6, 8, and 10 all talk about the deception of sin, though not all the exact same way, while verses 7 and 9 both speak about the practice of renouncing our sins, though verse 9 adds in the concept of confession. You're going to see this sort of reiteration and addition over and over (and over and over) in 1 John, but be patient with the letter. John is doing this intentionally to reinforce our understanding, to lay a groundwork and then add to it with further knowledge, and above all, to make sure we can't possibly finish the letter and forget his big points.

In 1 John 1:5, John tells us that God is light, and you can hear some parallels with his Gospel here, especially a scene out of John 8.

Go read John 8:12 & 8:31-38. What does Jesus say life is like when we walk with him and “abide” in his word?

Back to 1 John 1:5-10, John tells us (a couple times) that to be where God is requires recognizing the darkness we walk in, renouncing that darkness, and repeatedly seeking his light. Because there is no darkness (i.e. sin) in God, we cannot pretend to have fellowship with him while we ourselves walk in darkness (i.e. sin). And don't miss the language John puts around sin, the language of deception (v.6, 8, 10). If we say we walk with God while we really walk in sin, we lie. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar. Clinging to our sinful ways while claiming to be a follower of Jesus will inevitably lead us into duplicity, dishonesty, and deception. Worse still, sin naturally has an obscuring, blinding effect on us (Jer 17:9; 2 Cor 4:4).

But also, that word “walk” is very helpful. John isn't saying any slip into sin reveals we aren't actually followers of Jesus; remember, he says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves”! John is saying that the correct response to sin is confession, and a lack of confession, particularly continuing to living with your sin or “walk along with it,” is incompatible with a life lived (or walked) with God.

On top of that, the very heart of the gospel is prepared for us to deal with sin. Our gut reaction to sin is usually something like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:8-13: we hide and convince ourselves that it's not really a problem or it's someone else's fault. But in the hope of the gospel we can run to God rather than from him. John reassures us that God isn't surprised or confounded by sin in his children. Based on 1 John 1:5-10, quite clearly he's ready and able to forgive us of our sin if we come to him in confession. And that's because we have an advocate, Jesus, ready and able to make a way for our forgiveness (v. 7, 9). This practice also reminds us of what actually saves us, not our being good enough or remembering to confess every little sin, but Jesus's death on our behalf.

In conclusion, Jesus promises us that those who follow him will have the light of life and that the truth will set them free. What in your life do you know you still need to bring into his light? Or, if there's a sin that keeps deceiving you, what would it mean for you to be set free by Jesus's truth?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking Jesus for his word and asking him to fulfill it in your life today.

5.7 Weekday Study: 1 John 2:1-6

Main focus: Walking with Jesus means knowing and keeping his commandments.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 2:1-6. How would you summarize this section?

Last week we read about how the goodness of God draws us into confession, and community groups elaborated on that by discussing how that leads to the confession of sins to one another. Now, as we read the promptings of John this week, he writes that "whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected" (v5).

Seeing the word "perfect" in there might be daunting, but throughout 1 John (and the Bible) we are taught that obedience to God's commands are not the *means* of salvation but the proof and an outward *sign* of salvation. The entirety of Scripture tells us that God's grace and mercy saves, not anything that we can or can't do. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians that it's "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Scripture continually tells us that salvation in Christ, and Christ's work, is a gift to us, not anything we deserve or earn by doing (John 3:16, Act. 4:12, Rom. 6:23).

Go read John 3:16, Acts 4:12, and Romans 6:23. What do these verses say about the “gift of God”? Write out anything you notice about these verses and what they have in common.

So if there's nothing we can or can't do to earn salvation, where does that leave our daily actions? Because we've been saved, does that mean we're exempt from obeying God and free to sin? "By no means!" Paul tells us. "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" he continues (Rom. 6:1-2). This is what John is getting at when he says that we "ought to walk in the same way in which [Jesus] walked" (v6). Christ called us to pick up our cross and follow him (Matt. 8:34), and this is exactly what that means: to deny ourselves and seek to live like Jesus.

This is where walking as Jesus did and obeying his commands intersect. Christ called us to follow and remain in step with him. The primary part of following Christ is believing in him and his working power to save and redeem the lost, and the other part is acting in loving obedience to his commands, as "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17).

It is not enough to only believe in God, James continues. Even the demons believe in God (and fear him), but this does not pardon them (James 2:19). This is why John says that "whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn, 2:4). Someone's professing faith and relationship with Christ is a sham if there is no genuine heart change and, in turn, actions that are an overflow. But if we quickly go back to verse 1, we see that John tells us these things not to scare us or cause us to fear but so that we wouldn't continue to habitually sin. John says that "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." John tells us here that God, our advocate, presented Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

To summarize, John is telling us that keeping Christ's commands is a joyful response because of our faith in Jesus because our salvation isn't riding on our performance, but the finished work of Christ. What are some ways you can love and honor Jesus this week by walking in obedience?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for the gift of Jesus, asking him to build your faith today.

5.14 Weekday Study: 1 John 2:7-11

Main focus: Walking with Jesus means living in the light and acting out of love toward one another.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 2:7-11. How would you summarize this section?

Here we are, a month into our series, and we find out John doesn't have anything new to say. At least, according to 1 John 2:7, "Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment." As we've already seen, John is connecting true belief in Jesus with lived obedience to Jesus, and in our section for this week he links this to something incredibly important that Jesus said to him and the other disciples the night before his death. In short, if true belief in Jesus leads to lived obedience to Jesus, one of the first places this will show up is in love for others.

John says, "I am writing you no new commandment but an old commandment you had from the beginning." This is likely a reference to the Jewish scriptures, particularly the Mosaic Law, and don't miss John's nod to the coherence between the Old Testament and New Testament. In our era, we're inclined to treat the Old Testament like the confusing, weird, incomplete part of the Bible, but for the earliest Christian churches it was the whole Bible, at least before the rest of the New Testament canon was filled out. Further still, Jesus used the Old Testament to reveal his full gospel (Luke 24:27) and Paul confirmed to Timothy that the Old Testament writings are able to make someone "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 3:15).

So John points out that what he's about to talk about, love of neighbor, is native to the entirety of the Bible. This is in essence what Jesus told the questioning scribe, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:37-40) All along, God has been teaching his people that his highest aim for them is to love him and their neighbor; this is what it means for the love of God to be perfected in us (1 John 2:5). John further describes this in terms of light and darkness, that our obedience to God, made highly visible by our outward love for others, is one way in which God's truth and light breaks into the world.

So John revisits an old commandment, and yet confusingly he also calls it a "new commandment." That language is meant to hyperlink us back to a scene on the consequential night before Jesus's death. There in the upper room, moments after Judas left to betray him, Jesus told John and the ten other disciples, "a new commandment I give you, that you love one another" (John 13:34). This is a topic that he discussed quite a bit that night; you see it pop up again and again from John 13-17.

Turn to John 15:1-17 to see more on this command to love. How does Jesus describe the source, character, and effects of this love?

According to Jesus, love is the identifying mark of a Christian. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Of course this is not just any old love, but Jesus's love, love as he defines it and has demonstrated it. Jesus gives no high calling that he himself did not perfectly fulfill in our place. This is a sacrificial, death-defying, category-shifting love, and we can only rightly judge how countercultural such a love is if we rightly recognize the scandal of the gospel, that a holy, just, righteous God would love and give his life for sinners such as us.

To close, when you consider Jesus's love for you, what does that stir up in you? Be willing to explore this; don't search for "right" answers but honest ones. In what way do you hope to grow in your experience of and response to his love?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his love in Jesus Christ and asking him to perfect his love in you.

5.21 Weekday Study: 1 John 2:12-17

Main focus: Loving Jesus grants us an eternal hope and rightly dethrones our love for fleeting things.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 2:12-17. How would you summarize this section?

We're now in week five of our walkthrough of 1 John together, and we've begun to see some patterns crop up in John's writing. Throughout this letter, John is urging Christians to live a life of abounding love and holiness for and with one another and God, and here we get both a reason for this pattern and a warning in subsequent verses. Verses 12-14 give us a little more insight into this letter's original audience(s). John is writing here to Christians who are likely matured and have grown some measure in their faith, so he makes a clear point; no one is beyond the reach of temptation and sin.

John says, "I am writing to you...since your sins have been forgiven...[and] because you have come to know the Father." John writes this as a reminder that professing Christians are those who have tasted and seen the goodness of God, those who are a part of the living body of Christ (2:3-6). John concludes this stanza with the words, "I have written to you...because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one" (2:14).

Reading this, we can easily scratch our heads and wonder what it means for *us* to "conquer the evil one," but Paul's words can help chop that thought off at the knees, reminding the church in Philippi (and us) that *God* is the source of our strength, not

anything we can muster up on our own (Philippians 4:13). So this conquering of the evil one is by Christ's finished work, not any labor we can eke out for the Kingdom of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18 and 1 Peter 5:8-9. Write down any thoughts you have and any connections you see between these two passages and this week's reading from 1 John.

Now returning to 1 John, he shifts to a warning, cautioning us about our world. John writes that we are not to love this world or things in the world. In Scripture, we're frequently presented with a *contrast*, having both a positive and negative message in the same passage and thought. Paul utilizes this in many of his letters, including to the church of Rome. He writes,

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

In this passage, we see Paul give positive ("present your bodies as a living sacrifice") and negative ("do not be conformed to this age") instructions. He does this, allowing one to emphasize another, making them stand out. John does this, reminding Christians who they are and what they have experienced (v12-14), and compares it to the world and its many indulgences (v15-17).

In verse 15, he writes, "Do not love the world or the things in the world." Pretty straight to the point, right? John clearly distinguishes that sin destroys, and those who repeatedly and habitually choose the temporary over the eternal have staked their allegiance with the world rather than the Father. As this was likely written towards the end of John's life, it's also possible that he was just over the niceties and didn't want to beat around the bush. Sin destroys, and no one is out of temptation's reach.

Take a moment to pause and reflect. What are some ways you might be “conformed to this age” or loving “the things in the world”? This is not meant to be a guilt trip, but an opportunity for confession, allowing Jesus to work in your life.

Here, John draws a line in the sand, saying that those who choose "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions" are not of the Father but of the world (2:16). As a quick detour, when we read "the world" in Scripture, particularly in the epistles (such as Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, and 1-3 John), the authors do not mean the physical earth, but the *ways of the world* that are contradictory to the Lord (Rom 12:2 ESV, John 15:18, James 4:4). John urges us not to get swept up in the temporal but to keep our eyes on Jesus, whose existence is eternal. Our comfort and peace lie in Christ's unchanging and never-ending nature. How beautiful is knowing that the rule of the God we serve will never change?

In closing this week, turn to Ephesians 1:7-8. How does this passage encourage you? What are some ways you can seek Jesus this week as your redeemer?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his love in Jesus Christ and asking him to perfect his love in you.

5.28 Weekday Study: 1 John 2:18-29

Main focus: Abiding in Jesus bears the fruit of faithfulness and steadfastness—if you want to make it to the finish, cling to him.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 2:18-29. How would you summarize this section?

Steel yourself; this week's passage talks about the antichrist. Not that you should be worried—the passage is pretty straightforward—but people get kinda squirrely when you drop “antichrist” in a sentence. John uses it here in a kind of unique way, which we'll get to in a moment, but in summary, John is warning us against the pitfalls of deception and driving us towards the source of all truth and eternal security: Jesus.

Let's take a moment to remember the flow of John's letter thus far. In chapter 1 through 2:17 he's been demonstrating the incompatibility between following Jesus and following the way of the world. We can't walk in darkness and light at the same time, we can't say we know Jesus if we don't walk in his ways, and we can't love the Father if we are infatuated with the world.

John tells us here that truth and lies are distinct and incompatible, yet we have confidence in the face of deception because we belong to Jesus. When he brings up these lies and deception, he does so with this specific term, “antichrist.” Note that John says next to nothing about The Antichrist (and neither does the New Testament for that matter; let's not major on the minors, folks). Also, aside from verse 18, John uses that term here in a way we typically don't, in the plural, to describe specifically those who had recently left the faith (2:19) and generally those who deny that Jesus is the Son of God (2:22). Once again, John is deploying polarizing language to show the clear

distinction between those who belong to Jesus and those who don't. You're either pro-Christ or anti-Christ; there's no in-between.

Reading 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, we see the “man of lawlessness.” How does this help clarify what John means when he says “antichrist” in this weeks passage? Write down any thoughts or questions you have.

Now this passage is especially helpful and important, and it's worth noting that the emphasis of the passage in 1 John *isn't* on antichrist(s) but on the broader threat of deception and confidence through Jesus. This helps explain the very serious language John uses to describe these folks that have left the church and deny Jesus—John is connecting them to the anti-Jesus kingpin, Satan himself, the “father of lies.” John intends to warn his Christian readers against those who would persuade them to join their departure from the faith (2:26). But immediately after this John reassures them with the confidence we have in Jesus, “But the anointing [i.e. the Holy Spirit] that you received from him abides in you” (2:27). What shall we do in the face of forces in this world that would seek to lampoon our savior and hamstring our faith? We don't wage our own war or retaliate with the same weapons. Instead, we simply abide.

In closing, look at 1 John 2:28-29 again. How does this passage encourage you in knowing that you're in him? What are some ways you can do “what is right” this week where you work, play, and live?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his love in Jesus Christ and asking him to perfect his love in you.

6.4 Weekday Study: 1 John 3:1-15

Main focus: Being a child of God means walking in Jesus's righteousness instead of walking in sin.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 3:1-15. How would you summarize this section?

John's words in this passage are certainly not minced or intended to be subtle. In several places in his letters, he gets straight to the point and tells us what he (and, more importantly, God) thinks about sin. This passage is a bit longer than those in the rest of this series so we're presented with a lot of content. Within these verses there's a lot of good stuff from John, but the main takeaway is that we should choose righteousness instead of sin. We should desire God over the world. Because of Christ's finished work, we can freely walk with him rather than being bound to sin.

Verses 1 through 15 splits into two parts. In verses 1 to 10, John addresses the "children of God," warning them of counterfeit Christians who talk as if they know God and have seen him but don't live accordingly. In verses 11-15, John cites *love* as a fundamental part of following Christ, writing that "we have passed from death to life *because we love our brothers and sisters*" (3:14). In verses 7-8, John proceeds to give a warning, saying, "let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil." Here, he draws a line in the sand, telling Christians that some merely *claim* to be followers of Christ but do not live in alignment with their profession.

John gives harsh (sounding) but sobering language to describe these people, calling them "of the devil" in verse 8. But what does it mean to "make a practice of sinning"? If we're all sinners (Rom. 3:23), how do we differentiate between those who

sin and are of the Father and those who are not? The answer lies in verse 6, where John writes, "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning" (ESV). It's a little murky now but stick with me.

Read 1 Peter 5:6-9. What are some connections you see between this passage and this week's reading in 1 John? Write down any thoughts or questions you have below.

John carries on this pattern of repetition so we can see and understand it. In 1:8-9, he writes, "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Remaining in Christ means we're to continually have our minds and hearts postured towards him. Claiming to be without sin is a lie, but remaining in him is how we're instructed to fight temptation and focus on our Lord.

If you've ever tried to run, especially in a race, it's awfully hard to do when looking back. That's why Paul wrote to his colleague, Timothy, telling him that he has "finished the race" (2 Tim. 4:7). This is another one of the overarching messages of God's word to us; you can't follow and serve God while being infatuated with the world.

What this means for us is that living a life of continual, unrepentant sin is a pretty good litmus test for genuine heart change or salvation. Ultimately, only God knows people's hearts, but we can look to the fruit (or absence of it) to see if sanctification is genuinely taking place.

Returning to the rest of the passage, we see this healthy division made between those who are actually of God and those who are not. John then tells us that there is a thread that has run all through Scripture and that God desires for us; to love one another (3:11). This is the mark of the Christian, one who loves people well, even their enemies (1 John 3:13, Gal. 5:22, Matt. 5:43-45a).

This is the heart of what John is getting at in his letter. There is no expectation that we are perfect, as that's impossible, but we're called to walk in step with Jesus and seek to love him and one another, as our love for the Lord *informs* our love for one another. This is where John says that love is the evidence and assurance of our faith. He says that "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers

and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death" (3:14). Love and faith go hand in hand all through the New Testament, as Paul writes that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision," that is, outward obedience to the law, "counts for anything, but only faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

All throughout the epistles (letters in the New Testament), individual authors tell us that love is the banner and signifier of faith and new life in Christ. Here, John reminds us that we can know we have been born again in God when love is our natural disposition (3:14). It is because of the "great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children" (3:1). It is by this assurance of identity as his children that we love others.

To close, read 1 John 3:1-15 again. What are some habits, routines, or tendencies that collide with this command to love others? Spend a moment in prayer, asking God to reveal to you ways in which you can grow in awareness of and in love for others this week. Write down your thoughts and questions below.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his love in Jesus Christ and asking him to perfect his love in you.

6.11 Weekday Study: 1 John 3:16-24

Main focus: Abiding in Jesus means loving one another with Jesus's love.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 3:16-24. How would you summarize this section?

As you read the passage for this week, it'd be helpful to read back up to 3:11—remember, this is a letter, and as much as we chop it into chunks for preaching and discussion, John's writing has some flow to it. Back in verse 11 he introduced a new section that goes through to 3:24 (and connects to the sections before and after), all of which covers the true life of a child of God. Interestingly, 3:23-24 is a surprisingly succinct summary of the entire book, so first off in discussion we'll use that as an opportunity to reflect on the past seven weeks or so of discussion. To be even more succinct, this week is all about "love one another, just as he has commanded us" (3:23b).

But here's one of the crucial things we need to ask ourselves when we're reading 1 John: what do we mean by love? This is no mere philosophical speculation, or an excuse to conjure the 1993 hit "What Is Love" (well, maybe it is). In a chapter, the question will speak to the very nature of God. If "God is love" as 1 John 4:16 describes, what we mean by the word love has gargantuan implications for how we read the Bible.

Thankfully, John gives us a definition right here in our passage. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for others" (3:16). John is a master of double entendre, and "by this we know love" is a prime example: not only is Jesus's death the example of love, as in "in his death we observe love at work," but Jesus's death is also the avenue of love, as in "through his death in our place we come to understand love." Jesus's death in

our place is the definitive statement of love par excellence; pour through all of history, journey to the farthest reaches of the galaxy, and you'll find no greater love than this. But it's not simply an example we follow; Jesus's death wins salvation for us, making us recipients of God's gracious love. Read "know" in that passage with the fullest understanding of the word in mind—through Jesus's death we are invited to come know Love himself.

How do you typically define love? How is that different from how Scripture describes love and God's character? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Of course, Scripture has a whole different definition of love than most of us are walking around with today and you likely answered accordingly. But that's okay because we're all in the same boat. That's why defining love is a crucial step in reading 1 John; while we use "love" in a common way, and frequently make stipulations about what can and cannot be considered "love," we need to see just how much the Bible wants to discombobulate our earthly ways of thinking. Love himself gets to define what love is and is not; it is our job not to make pronouncements about love but to listen with regenerated hearts, to be repeatedly melted down and recast in a new mold.

The question, "Why do you think Jesus wants us to love people like he has loved us?" is naturally asked in churchy conversations (like community group), and you might immediately resort to a quick retort, "because the Bible says so." But dig into the reasoning here. Followers of Jesus are "born of God" (3:9), our perfect and loving Father wants his love to abide in us (3:17), our elder brother Jesus commanded our love for one another (3:23), and God is deeply interested in destroying the works of the evil one through his Son (3:8). God taught us love through Jesus and wants us to walk in his ways because we are his children now—he's teaching us the family way.

Throughout 1 John we've seen passages like this one that call us to obedience, which might leave us ready to muscle up and figure out how to achieve a better Christian performance record. Simply put, this is an exercise of unbelief—when we fall prey to this thinking, we're forgetting what actually saves us and opting for a DIY

approach to salvation (spoiler: it doesn't work). But on the flip side, these same passages might leave you feeling defeated, all too aware of how often you fall short of this record. We'll touch on verse 20 to address this pitfall and the immense source of comfort we find in God's acceptance of us in Jesus; how precious is this truth, that God is greater than our hearts?

Quickly turn to Romans 5:8. Thinking back through your life, what are some times that it's seemed impossible to love someone or respond with love? How does Jesus' example make you rethink how you're to love others as he did? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking Jesus for his sacrificial love and asking him to stir up this same love for others in you.

6.18 Weekday Study: 1 John 4:1-6

Main focus: Abiding in Jesus requires practicing hopeful discernment between truth and lie.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 4:1-6. How would you summarize this section?

This week, we're opening our Bibles to chapter 4 to continue our progression through the book of 1 John. There are loads of beautiful and hard truths in this book so far, and we hope it's been an encouraging and filling time for you.

In reading this passage, some buzzwords here might bring some less-than-pleasant images to mind. As we talked about a few weeks ago, when we read "antichrist," we might recoil and think of the *Left Behind* movies or World War 3, but it's not as cataclysmic as we think. John paints a clearer picture for us here, eliminating a lot of presuppositions.

A few weeks ago, we talked about how the plural "antichrists" are those who recently left the faith. Now John is also roping in those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, writing that "the spirit of the antichrist" is the one that "that does not confess Jesus" as God the Son in the flesh. He goes on to say that "even now [the antichrist] is already in the world" (4:3). With this in mind, we can hopefully breathe a little easier and not be as tense when hearing of the antichrist.

As we're working through this passage, we see less language of fear of the antichrist and more of hopeful victory over the lies of the enemy. John writes that "you

are from God, little children, and you have conquered them because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (4:4). This is again a point that John wants to drive home in this letter: while there are enemies out there, abiding in Jesus means repeatedly practicing discernment between truth and lies.

This is why John tells us not to "believe every spirit," but "test the spirits" to see if they are from God (4:1). But what does it mean to "test the spirits"? In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul gives us a little bit of a clue to this, writing that "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:4, 7). He continues, citing several gifts, including "the ability to *distinguish* between spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10).

This passage talks about the Spirit of God being truth and providing discernment. What are some times it's been hard to tell God's truth from the world's lie? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Now, this doesn't let us off the hook by saying, "Well, I just don't have that gift." John is quite clear in his instructions not to believe everything we are told, as some people are "false prophets" (v1). But how do we test them? By bringing them up against Scripture. If someone were to say, "Jesus is not the Son of God," we can test that against various Scriptures and discern that it is a false witness, as there are many passages that refute it (Matt. 3:17, John 5:26, 1 Cor. 15:28, 1 John 4:10, etc.). The same is also true with other aspects of the gospel. Claims against the need of salvation can be responded with Ephesians 2:1-9, where Paul tells us that we were dead in our sins, but were "*saved by grace through faith.*" Testing claims about the world and Scripture is a necessary and valuable part of following the Lord. We're to keep the faith and discern, with Scripture, truth from lies.

This is part of the discernment that the Spirit gives us. One aspect of being born again is God opening your eyes to the truth of his word (Luke 24:45, Acts 26:12-18). The

beauty of having such easy access to God's word is that we can, at nearly any point in our day, check and discern the lies of the world with the truth of Scripture.

In this passage, John wants us to understand that some will speak false teaching and lies about Jesus, his deity, and many other truths clearly taught in God's word. The further warning is that these false prophets are already here in this world. These false prophets will continually try to combat the truth of Scripture with lies from the world, causing us to stray from right doctrine and our faith in Christ. The solution? We're to cling to Jesus, steep ourselves in the Word, and test everything against the unchanging truth of Scripture. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth," (John 16:13). An aspect of the beauty and goodness of God is that he's not going to pull the old switcheroo on us. He is constant and forever the same, and so is his word.

What are some ways that God's unchanging nature and truth have provided comfort for you? Take some time to pray that the Lord would give you discernment and wisdom. Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his unchanging love and asking him to grow you in discernment and wisdom in telling truth from lie.

6.25 Weekday Study: 1 John 4:7-21

Main focus: Here's a good summary for all of 1 John—walking with Jesus necessitates God's love living through us.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 4:7-21. How would you summarize this section?

We've finally arrived at the most famous passage out of 1 John, "God is love." As you might have expected, and sort of like we did two weeks ago, we'll take this opportunity to poke and prod our own understandings of love. If "God is love," what we mean by the word love has gargantuan implications for how we read the Bible and put this passage into practice. But more than an exercise in semantics, such an assessment will help us arrive at this conclusion: since God is the author and source of love, if we hope to love then we must let God define what this means and then let his love live through us.

Much like 1 John 3:16-24, this passage gives us a definition of love set by the person and work of Jesus Christ (4:9-10). But this passage takes it a step further and reveals that God himself is love. To be quite clear, what that doesn't mean is that God is only love, nor that love is God. Instead, this roots love in God's uncreated, perfect, and holy nature; all things that are right and good have God as their ultimate source. To put it another way, God's nature is such that you can call him love without wrongly identifying him because love is such a predominant aspect of his character, while

simultaneously recognizing that this description doesn't capture everything there is to know about God. Another example of this is when Jesus is called the Lamb or the Lion of Judah—both capture his identity without seeking to exhaustively identify him.

As the author and source of love, God has the authority to rightly define love. In discussion we'll touch on this, which might make the anti-authority or authority-suspicious Americans in your group a little squeamish. But turning to God as the ultimate authority on love and submitting to his authority on the matter is really the only way for a conversation like this to move forward. However, this is not a heavy-handed, dictatorial sort of authority. This is more like the speed of light, a universal constant; the only proper definition of love is one that has God as its primary reference point. And of course, God has skin in the game—the primary defining act of love, by which we have come to know love (3:16), involved his own gruesome death. As if he didn't already have it, Jesus earned the right to define love.

One of God's predominant characteristics is love. Do you think this is accurate? Is this different from how you have experienced him through culture or other believers? Take a moment to pray, asking God to reveal his loving nature to you. Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

This is what John has in mind in verse 7 when he says, "whoever loves has been born of God." That verse might sound like universalism, like anyone who has warm and cozy feelings for another person automatically gets saved from their sin. However, when John uses the word love he means love proper, love as God defines it through Jesus. Think of God's love like the industry standard—whoever truly loves must be born of God because that's the only place they can get such a love.

Now, that's not to say that we won't see anything that remotely looks like love within people who don't follow Jesus. It makes sense that love, being a part of God's nature, would show up in humans who are made in his image just like his other attributes do (ex. creativity, intelligence, communal nature). But just like there's a

difference between someone who is dead in their sin and someone who is made alive together with Christ (Eph 2:1-5), there's a difference between an unregenerate, dead-in-sin love and a regenerate, resurrected-with-Christ love.

And how do we observe this difference? Well, according to John, it's whether or not you love your brother. Again, this is love as God defines it, the kind of love that lays down oneself for the sake of the other (1 John 3:16). Note that neither hate nor neutrality are options: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." This is God's love alive in us; if it doesn't radically change the way we relate to others, bringing us out of hate an apathetic neutrality, how can we say it's of God and not the old, unregenerate "love" we exercise apart from him? There's so much more to be said about verse 12 and God's love being "perfected in us," particularly on what it means for God's love to live and grow within us. In such a conversation we should rightly observe our need for God's help in this. However, God doesn't offer it begrudgingly; this is all a part of God's economy of love: "We love because God first loved us." (4:19).

How do you think growing in fully understanding God's love for you could impact your daily walk and relationship with him? How could it impact how you love and relate to others? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his constant love and asking him to grow you in love for him and others.

7.2 Weekday Study: 1 John 5:1-12

Main focus: Faith in the Son is the way to life and the way of life.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 5:1-12. How would you summarize this section?

We're now in the last few weeks of our progression through the book of John and have seen several recurring themes crop up. Some of the major ones thus far are rejection of sin/world (1:5-10, 2:12-17) and keeping watch (2:18-29, 4:1-6). Throughout the letter, John repeatedly encourages Christians to remain in Christ and to abide in him. The overarching message of this letter from John is clear: believe Jesus, obey his commandments, and love your brothers and sisters in Christ. This encouragement is intertwined with warnings of those who oppose the doctrine we hold about Jesus' person. This is again the line in the sand between those who are of God and those who are not.

This passage says that to love God is to keep his commands, and that “his commands are not a burden.” What are some of of God’s commands that feel like a burden to you? Take a moment to reflect and pray that God would reveal these things to you and that he would grow your heart to love his commands.

As a quick digression, let's jump to verses 6-8 since they're a little funky and we don't want their murkiness to cloud the lens through which we read this passage. Here we read that water, blood, and the Spirit all testify and are in agreement regarding Jesus, but what does that mean? Quickly recapping, this book was written while there was a heretic running amok named Cerinthus. Cerinthus was in modern-day Turkey and believed and taught that Jesus was just a man upon whom the divinity of Christ *descended* at his baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). Cerinthus also taught that Jesus' divinity *left* him just before his crucifixion, effectively allowing him to die.

This dangerous heresy refutes Jesus' place in the Trinity and his divinity as the Son of God. John writes this to warn and refute false doctrines, telling us that Jesus "came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood" (5:6a). The phrase "came by water and blood" refer to Jesus' confirmation as the Son of God at his baptism (Matt. 3:17) and his very real death as a man (Matt. 27:45-54). John seeks to continually clarify that Jesus was and is both fully God and fully man. The Spirit's testifying is John's way of describing the prophetic witnesses from all of Scripture, such as Daniel and even John the Baptist. John writes this in this passage to tell us that through his prophets, God confirmed that Jesus was and is the Christ. His earthly ministry, from baptism (water) to death (blood) and resurrection, were ordained, approved, and set into motion by God (Spirit). *The Message* gives us a great summary of verses 6-8.

"Jesus—the Divine Christ! He experienced a life-giving birth and a death-killing death. Not only birth from the womb, but baptismal birth of his ministry and sacrificial death. And all the while the Spirit is confirming the truth, the reality of God's presence at Jesus' baptism and crucifixion, bringing those occasions alive for us. A triple testimony: the Spirit, the Baptism, the Crucifixion. And the three in perfect agreement."

The three testimonies of the Spirit, water (baptism), and blood (death and resurrection) all confirm and provide evidence for Jesus' deity. How does this encourage you to know that your debt is paid by God himself? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Returning to the rest of the passage, John tells us that to love God is to love his children, fellow believers. This is a reminder of 1 John 1, where he writes, "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1:7). John gives us this continual pattern of "if/then" phrases, not as verification (if you do, you'll be saved), but as an indication (if you are truly saved, this is evidence). If you are genuinely born again and of God, there will be outward signs and external fruits signifying that transformation. Jesus talks of this regarding false prophets, but it applies to all who claim allegiance with Christ. In Matthew 17, Jesus said that we would recognize them (believers) by their fruits (v15-19).

Continuing on past v6-8, we read John's words that "The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself" (v10a); those who genuinely believe and follow Jesus have this internal confirmation through the Spirit. Verse 9 says, "If we accept human testimony, God's testimony is greater." Here, John tells readers that if they find human testimony acceptable enough, they have all the more reason to accept God's testimony because his word and truth should carry far more weight in our hearts. Furthermore, believing and following God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, places this testimony within us (v10a). We want to make this distinction: Jesus as our Savior is the way *to* life, while Jesus as Lord changes and impacts our way *of* life.

What are some external habits and routines (fruits) in your life that contradict God's commands and his Kingdom? What are some fruits that honor and please God? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking Jesus for providing life through his death, asking him to grow you in your love for his ways.

7.9 Weekday Study: 1 John 5:13-21

Main focus: Faith in the Son gives us confidence in our standing and walk with him.

Silence

Start by taking two minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind, to meet with the Lord. Be attentive to his love and care for you.

Study

Take a moment to read 1 John 5:13-21. How would you summarize this section?

Well, this is the last week in our church-wide study of the book of 1 John. John is a pretty straightforward writer, and his words can sometimes be a bit too on-the-nose for our liking, but this series has been filled with exercises that grow our love and faith in the Lord. Our hope and prayers are that this time together has proven useful, refining, and faith-building.

This week, we open to 1 John 5:13-21. This passage opens with a reminder of John's purpose in writing, that Christians would know that their salvation and eternity rest in Christ. It's their belief in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and his finished work which saves, not any act of obedience or rule-keeping (although those certainly are fruits of a life of faith). John puts it plainly, saying that those who believe can "know that [they] have eternal life" (5:13). He restates the doctrine taught all through the gospels and epistles that we are "saved by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).

How does it provide comfort for you to read that we can be certain of eternal life by faith in Jesus? If you struggle with believing this, how could you pray that God would grow you in this way? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Now verses 14-17 are a little tricky when we first read them, but as we'll see, John's exhortation is not to pray about *some* things and not others but that we can and should recognize our own lives as bearing fruit for Christ. As we read, John writes that some sins do and some that do not lead to death. Kind of confusing, right? What this means is that while all sins ultimately *lead* to death, there is a difference between the sins of those who *do not* belong to God, making a practice of sinning (1 John 1:6), and those who *do* belong to him but still sin (because that's part of our fallen nature). God still views all sin the same, whether you follow Christ or not, but for those who do believe, sin no longer condemns you because you were paid for by Jesus at the cross.

Here, John prompts us to pray for one another's sins that "do not lead to death" (v16). He says we should pray for one another's sins that lead to death because they are the fruits of a life given over to sin rather than a life dedicated to the Lord. The Message helpfully paraphrases this passage, giving us an idea of what John means by sins that do or don't lead to death.

"For instance, if we see a Christian believer sinning (clearly I'm not talking about those who make a practice of sin in a way that is "fatal," leading to eternal death), we ask for God's help and he gladly gives it, gives life to the sinner whose sin is not fatal. There is such a thing as a fatal sin, and I'm not urging you to pray about that. Everything we do wrong is sin, but not all sin is fatal" (1 John 5:16-17, MSG).

Here's an important distinction: God doesn't view sin differently based on who does it (those who believe and those who do not). All sin is abhorrent to God (Habakkuk 1:13, CBS). The difference is that those who *make a practice of sinning* do not have Christ in them (1 John 3:4-6). At the risk of being repetitive, everyone, born-again follower of Christ or not, is capable of and will sin. Christ's presence in us means that our lives do not belong to sin, and there is no sin within us. Even though we do sin (Rom. 3:23), we are not associated with sin because Jesus paid the price for us.

This is the key to unlocking the following passage where John writes that "everyone who has been born of God does not sin" (5:18). Out of the context of the rest of this passage, it can seem heretical. Of course we sin. In John's words, he intends to

tell us that those born of God (followers of Christ) cannot sin in ways that lead to death. John tells us that because we're born again, our sin no longer leads to eternal death and separation from God. It feels like semantics, but it is worth noting as this can shift the theological ground we're standing on when reading God's word and relating to him. How we see sin in our own lives radically impacts how we respond to and live out the good news of Christ.

Read Romans 1:1-14. If we're to not "make a practice of sinning," how does this passage inform how we should treat sin in our lives- even those that "do not lead to death"? Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

John continues, nudging us, saying that our faith is our reminder that we are of God and our debt is paid. Our faith in Christ as the risen son of God is our assurance for eternity. And how do we know that we have faith? Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22-25 that there are fruits- or actions or results- of the Spirit living within us. He goes on to say that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" and, "if we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:24-25). Jesus is the answer to our hearts' questions and the uncertainty we feel regarding our eternal trajectory. Faith and its fruits in our own lives are how we see and know that our eternity is secure in him.

John concludes this letter by warning us to guard ourselves against idols. It's easy to think of idols as these physical objects of pagan worship (I think of the awesome scene in Indiana Jones with the golden idol where he's chased by the boulder). But the Lord knows that many more things, often good things, try to usurp his place in our hearts. He knows that our hearts, even though we follow Christ, are easily led astray and distracted by the things of this world that demand our attention and things that try to take God's place in our hearts.

This week we want to talk less about the threat of idols and focus more on our confidence and security in Christ's finished work. John tells us that we *know* that our

eternity rests in God. John writes the phrase "we know" seven times in this passage alone, so it must be important. With all the uncertainty and unexpected that we experience here on earth, it's pretty comforting to *know* that we belong to the Most High.

This week's passage in John is more concerned with things that distract and cause us to forget our eternal security in Christ. What are some things that cause you to doubt God or forget that he chose to save you? There's no wrong answers, and this is a time for you to talk with God and hear from him. Write any thoughts or questions you have below.

Prayer

Close your time in prayer, thanking Jesus for providing eternal security in him, asking him to grow you in your love for his Kingdom and his people.

This is the end of the 1 John Weekday Study

You made it to the end! We want to say thank you for taking the time to go through this study with us. We put a lot of work into it and hope and pray that it was an enriching time for you with God in the Word. We hope that you're able to see the ways in which you grew in your love for God and reading the Scriptures.