

HE IS

**STUDIES IN
1 JOHN 1-3**

STUDY GUIDE
St John's Southbourne

Series Introduction

Welcome to the first letter of John, the apostle. Written by John in his later years, this isn't a dry theological treatise; it is a warm, passionate letter. John writes to believing communities facing confusion, false teaching, and division, seeking to anchor them in what is real, historical, and unchanging about Jesus our Saviour. Who 'He is'. Throughout this series, we will look at who Jesus is and how he can radically reshape our daily lives. John often presents stark contrasts: light and darkness, truth and lies, love and hatred. In the hope that it will strengthen the contrast that knowing Jesus makes in life. As we read through, I believe we will find assurance, deepen our fellowship, and discover what it truly means to walk with the one who is the loving word of life.

1: He Is The Word of Life

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-4

Introduction

1 John begins without greeting cards or pleasantries. Instead, John launches into a powerful declaration of the Incarnation; God becoming flesh. Writing against early false teachers who claimed Jesus didn't have a real physical body, John asserts his eyewitness credentials. He has heard, seen, and physically touched the Word of Life.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does John place such heavy emphasis on physical senses (heard, seen, touched) in verse 1? Why does the physical reality of Jesus matter?
2. John says he shares this "Word of Life" so that we may have "fellowship" with him and with God (v. 3). How would you define true, Christian fellowship compared to ordinary social friendship?
3. Verse 4 says John writes these things "so that our joy may be complete." Where do you typically look for joy, and how does knowing Jesus offer a "complete" joy that the world can't mimic?
4. What are some ways we can accidentally treat Jesus as a distant, abstract idea rather than a living, tangible person in our daily routines?

Living It Out & Prayer

- Walking with Jesus in the real world: Spend a few moments of quiet reflection. Ask group members to identify one area of their life where Jesus feels "theoretical" rather than real.
- Prayer Prompt: Lead into prayer by thanking God that He did not stay distant but came close in Jesus. Pray that the Holy Spirit would make the reality of the "Word of Life" tangible in your homes, workplaces, and relationships this week.

2: He Is The Saving Light

Scripture: 1 John 1:5 - 2:2

Introduction

John introduces one of the primary metaphors of his letter: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." This creates a practical tension. If God is pure light, how can we—imperfect, messy people—have fellowship with Him? John warns us against pretending we are perfect, pointing us instead to the beautiful path of honest confession and the advocacy and sacrifice of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the metaphor "God is light" tell us about His character, purity, and truth?
2. In verse 6, John challenges those who "claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness." What does it look like in modern life to walk in darkness while claiming to be close to God?
3. Verse 8 warns us against claiming we are without sin. How can self-deception and pretending to "have it all together" be harmful to Christian community?
4. According to verse 9, what is God's promise when we confess our sins? How does this promise bring relief rather than fear?
5. Chapter 2, verse 1 describes Jesus as our "advocate" (like a defense lawyer) who speaks up on our behalf. How does picturing Jesus as your advocate change how you handle your past mistakes?
6. What difference does it make to our everyday life to know that Jesus has made an 'atoning sacrifice' for our sins?

Living It Out & Prayer

- **Stepping Into the Light:** Create a safe space for silence. Encourage everyone to silently bring one area of struggle, guilt, or hidden compromise before God, claiming the promise of 1 John 1:9.
- **Prayer Prompt:** Pray together, thanking Jesus that He is both our saving light and our righteous advocate. Ask Him for the courage to live transparent, honest lives before Him and one another.

3: He Is The Way of Truth

Scripture: 1 John 2:3-11

Introduction

John is deeply practical. He argues that true Christian faith is never just about what we say we believe; it must be visible in how we behave. In this passage, he links knowing God directly to two tests: the test of obedience (keeping His commands) and the relational test (loving our brothers and sisters).

Discussion Questions

1. Verse 4 uses incredibly strong language: "Whoever says 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar." Why are obedience and relationship with God so inseparable?
2. John speaks of a command that is both "old" and "new" (vv. 7–8). Read John 13:34–35. In what way did Jesus make the old command to "love your neighbor" entirely new?
3. What is the difference between simply "not hating" someone and actively walking in love toward them?
4. Verse 9 says that anyone who hates their brother or sister is still in the darkness. Who is the "brother or sister" that you find hardest to love right now and how might God be helping your heart to change towards them? - perhaps for personal rather than group reflection!
5. How does holding onto bitterness or resentment cloud our spiritual vision and cause us to "stumble" (v. 11)?

Living It Out & Prayer

- **Activating Love:** Challenge the group to think of one concrete, practical act of love they can show this week to someone they struggle to get along with.
- **Prayer Prompt:** Pray for a supernatural softening of hearts. Ask the Holy Spirit to root out hidden grudges, envy, or indifference, and to empower you to walk in the "way of truth" by loving one another deeply.

4: He Is God Who We Can Know

Scripture: 1 John 2:12-17

Introduction

John pauses to address his readers directly, speaking to different stages of spiritual maturity—children, fathers, and young men. We can fairly assume that were he writing in our context, he would address both sexes. He reminds them all of their core identity: they are forgiven, they know the Father, and they have overcome the evil one. He then issues a sharp warning: do not love the temporary, passing cravings of this world, because we are made for eternity.

Discussion Questions

1. Look at the repetitions in verses 12–14. What are the encouraging truths John wants his readers to grasp about their identity?
2. Why does John address different life stages (children, youth, parents)? How do our spiritual needs and battles change as we grow older?
3. Verse 15 famously commands us: "Do not love the world or anything in the world." What does "the world" mean in this context? (Hint: See verse 16).
4. How do the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (v. 16) show up in our modern culture (e.g., social media, career, consumerism)?
5. John contrasts the world, which is passing away, with the person who "does the will of God," who lives forever (v. 17). How does an eternal perspective help us say "no" to temporary worldly distractions?
6. How can our new status before God help us to go on getting to know him better?

Living It Out & Prayer

- Evaluating Our Loves: Take a quiet minute to ask: What is currently competing with my love for God?
- Prayer Prompt: Pray for a realignment of desires. Ask God to make Himself more attractive to you than the fleeting pleasures of this world, and pray for the strength to stand firm in your true identity as His children.

5: He Is Eternal Life

Scripture: 1 John 2:18-27

Introduction

John informs his readers that they are living in the "last hour" - a period in the salvation story that stretches from the coming of the Holy Spirit to the return of Christ. False teachers ("antichrists") have left the community, trying to deceive the believers about who Jesus is. John comforts the church by reminding them that they have received an "anointing" - the Holy Spirit - who guides them in the truth of eternal life, keeping them protected against deception.

Discussion Questions

1. John mentions people who "went out from us, but they did not really belong to us" (v. 19). Can a departure from all Christian fellowship ever be a good decision?
2. What are some of the subtle ways culture tries to "deny the Son" (v. 22) or redefine who Jesus is today?
3. John points to the "anointing" (the Holy Spirit) that believers have received (v. 20, 27). How does the Holy Spirit help us discern truth from falsehood in a world full of conflicting voices?
4. Verse 24 urges them to let what they heard "from the beginning" remain in them. How do we ensure we stay anchored in the foundational truths of the gospel instead of chasing after new spiritual trends?
5. Is there a difference between those John describes in strong terms here, and those we know who have wandered from God and we pray will come back?
6. Look at the ultimate promise in verse 25: eternal life. How does the promise of eternal life bring stability when the world around us feels chaotic or deceptive?

Living It Out & Prayer

- Remaining Anchored: Discuss as a group what spiritual habits help you "remain" in Christ when life gets busy or confusing. Commit to protecting those habits this week.
- Prayer Prompt: Pray for spiritual discernment. Ask the Holy Spirit to guard the minds of group members against deception, and pray that the foundational truth of Jesus would remain deeply rooted in your hearts.

6: He Is Our Loving Father

Scripture: 1 John 2:28–3:3

Introduction

John breaks out into a cry of sheer wonder: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" This is not a distant, transactional relationship. We are brought into God's family. This secure identity as beloved children is what motivates us to live pure lives as we look forward to the day we see Jesus face to face.

Discussion Questions

1. Look at the word "lavished" (or "bestowed") in verse 1. What does this word suggest about the nature of God's love for us?
2. How does being called a "child of God" reshape your sense of self-worth compared to the labels the world gives you (e.g., job title, relationship status, successes, failures)?
3. John notes that the world "does not know us" because it did not know Jesus (v. 1). Have you ever felt like an outsider or misunderstood because of your faith? How does this passage comfort you in those moments?
4. Verse 2 admits that "what we will be has not yet been made known," but promises we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. What excites you most about this future hope?
5. How does having this future hope of purity and restoration motivate us to "purify" ourselves in the present (v. 3)?

Living It Out & Prayer

- Receiving Fatherly Love: Spend a few minutes meditating on the phrase: "And that is what we are!" (v. 1). Let the reality of your adoption sink in.
- Prayer Prompt: Pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our Loving Father. Thank Him for adopting you into His family, and pray that this secure identity would drive away any fear, shame, or need for performance this week.

7: He Is Freedom from Sin

Scripture: 1 John 3:4-10

Introduction

John paints a stark contrast between living a life of sin and living a life of righteousness. He reminds us of Jesus' primary mission: He appeared to take away our sins and to destroy the devil's work. To continue in a lifestyle of habitual, unrepentant sin is completely incompatible with knowing Him who has set us free.

Discussion Questions

1. In verse 4, sin is defined as "lawlessness." Why is defining sin this way helpful in a culture that prefers to view sin as just "making mistakes"?
2. Verse 5 states that Jesus appeared "so that he might take away our sins." How does remembering this purpose help us fight temptation when it arises?
3. John uses very absolute language in verse 6 and verse 9 (e.g., "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning"). How do we balance this absolute language with John's earlier teaching in 1:9 about confessing our sins when we do stumble?
4. What is the difference between a believer who struggles with sin but repents, and someone who "makes a practice" of sinning (v. 8)?
5. John says the reason the Son of God appeared was "to destroy the devil's work" (v. 8). Where do you see the "devil's work" active in our world, and how does Jesus' victory bring you hope?

Living It Out & Prayer

- **Breaking Chains:** Identify one persistent, habitual attitude or habit (such as gossip, pride, worry, or lust) that you want to walk in freedom from.
- **Prayer Prompt:** Pray for deliverance and daily victory. Thank Jesus for destroying the power of sin on the cross. Pray that the group would experience the active power of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to walk in the freedom and righteousness that belongs to the children of God.