

A  
MESSAGE  
FROM  
GOD

LIGHT LIVING IN DARK DAYS

LEADER'S GUIDE

PAM GILLASPIE

# A MESSAGE FROM GOD

LIGHT LIVING IN DARK DAYS

## LEADER'S GUIDE

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#### **A Message from God**

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# WEEK ONE

## The Message from God

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	10 min.	Class Basics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions</li> <li>• Ground Rules</li> <li>• How to Use this Study</li> </ul>
Segment 2:	5 min.	Inductive Study Basics
Segment 3:	5 min.	The Prevailing Winds of Culture
Segment 4:	10 min.	READ 1 JOHN 1 Overview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who's writing? To whom?</li> <li>• Why did John write?</li> </ul> (5 W/H, People, Key Words)
Segment 5:	15 min.	1 John 1:1-4 Cross-Reference: John 1:1-5 John 1:9-14, 17-18
Segment 6:	15 min.	1 John 1:5-10

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**BEFORE YOU START****HOW TO LEAD THIS STUDY:****The Basics**

Well here you are! You've either been called, appointed, or dragged into leading a Bible study. Regardless, here is some good news—this study is designed to be flexible to both students and teachers alike, to give newer teachers the help they need, and to give more seasoned teachers wings to grow their gifting. With this in mind, please use the Leader's Guide to help you prepare to lead. Always remember that it's a guide, not a strict set of step-by-step rules and edicts.

Although presented as a 7-week study with weekly homework, *A Message From God* can be stretched over a longer period of time with "homework" sections done either at home or during class time. If class time is limited, as is often the case for Sunday School, leaders may choose to work through smaller portions of a lesson together. Thus, it is possible for this 7-week Bible study to flex and expand to fill a 12-week session or more depending on how deep you and your students want to go.

For those who have ample time and are running a 7-week study, consider adding an additional week or two for a technology day or a guest speaker on a topic of interest. This person can be a pastor, local Bible professor, or someone well-versed on a particular topic in the text. With the advance of technology, it's now possible to bring in people from other parts of the country or the world to talk to your class via tools like Skype. Additional people and material mix things up and keep the class on its toes. This additional week gives you the flexibility to match the class length to the needs of things like, say, the church calendar. Hey, it's reality!

Some of you who are reading this Leader Guide are thrilled to be leading because you have the spiritual gift of teaching. You may find that you don't even use this guide—that's fine! If God has gifted you to teach and you like doing your own research and prep, that is great!! Praise God! Go entrust to the faithful who will be able to teach others also! Others of you, undoubtedly, have been dragged in kicking and screaming. (That was me for a few years while I was still resisting my gifting!) Somebody had to lead and you were drafted. It is my deep hope that you will find help in this guide to make your leading experience not only less traumatic but also filled with great joy!

Small groups or Sunday School classes may decide to simply talk through the questions that are in the lesson but study groups will benefit from additional talk points and material.

\* Skype is a free service that allows you to use the internet to video conference in guest speakers or those who just want to listen in to your class. Learn more at [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com).

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**Starting Simple**

If this is your first time leading or if you don't have anyone in the group who wants to take full responsibility for leading the group, you can simply read through and discuss the questions and answers from each week's lesson. This approach can work especially well with small groups or if you're doing the study with a friend.

**About the Leader Guide**

This leader guide is a basic outline, a road map of one way to go in a class discussion. Just like there are many ways from Chicago to Chattanooga, there are different ways to run a class.

Each week we'll suggest a time frame for running the class. You'll find background information and sample discussion questions. Always look for opportunities to help your students move from Observation and Interpretation to Application. We want them to learn the truths of Scripture not so they can win at Bible trivia but so that their thinking will be renewed and their actions will more and more reflect the One they belong to (Romans 12:1-2).

You may look at the material and think, "There is no way that I can cover all this in the allotted time!" If that's the case, you can pick and choose from the elements to craft your lesson.

**Starting on Time**

One way to start on time every week is to read through the week's main text(s) at the beginning of class. In doing this you will reinforce the importance of continually being in the text of Scripture itself. As odd as it may sound, when we study deeply the temptation to stray away from the text and toward commentaries can be intense. By reading the text every week and starting promptly (even if it is just you and your most prompt student!), you will reinforce the importance of the text and gain the added bonus of training stragglers to arrive on time.

**START CLASS HERE****SEGMENT #1: CLASS BASICS****Introductions and Ground Rules**

- **Introduce yourself**
- **Have class members introduce themselves**
- **Set boundaries (see below)**

Make sure you allocate adequate time the first week of class for general introductions and ground rules. If you're teaching men or a mixed group, estimate based on the size of your class. If you're teaching women, take the time you think this will

require and double it. Asking everyone to share their name and respond to a specific question will help keep things moving. If you ask for “a little bit about yourself,” you’re sure to get more than a little bit! Start out by introducing yourself in a concise manner to set the tone. Feel free to use an icebreaker game or other ideas you have to help people connect.

You’ll also want to establish ground rules during Week One. The time to set effective boundaries in any relationship is the first meeting. A boundary can always be relaxed, but it is very difficult to establish or strengthen one if you do not set it properly at the start. This applies to both how you will lead your class discussions and how you will let your class interact with you throughout the week. Depending on your situation, you may ask them to contact you primarily by e-mail and make certain times of the day off-limits. My classes know I rarely answer the phone when my kids are home from school. That is my boundary. When they are home, my primary job is being their mom. Your class will respect this and perhaps even learn the importance of proper boundaries in their own lives from your example.

Let your class know that it is your job as the teacher/facilitator to keep the discussion on track and that you may from time to time have to reel a person in, stop a rabbit trail, or discontinue until after class an interesting but off-topic discussion. Also let them know that you do not have all the answers. No one has all the answers, even those who have studied a lifetime. While acknowledging your limitations may seem uncomfortable at first, you’ll find it is freeing for everyone! If someone asks a question you can’t answer, either look into it further yourself or (preferably) assign it to the questioner for further study. This will draw out future teachers—who come back with it answered and prepared to share. Assigning questions also helps people begin discerning what makes a germane question.

Encouraging your class to ask questions and helping them learn how to ask right questions is a huge part of your job as a teacher. Still, as important as questions are, more questions can be asked than we have biblical answers for. Sometimes you will simply have to answer with an honest, “I don’t know.”

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

### Basics of the study guide and philosophy

- **WEEKLY STUDY material**
- **FYI boxes**
- **ONE STEP FURTHER and other sidebar boxes**
- **DIGGING DEEPER boxes**

While the study is self-explanatory, reinforce its flexibility with your students. Direct them to the “How to use this study” page of their books and encourage them to find a level of study that brings joy and not guilt. They can do more one week, less the next; they can mix and match and find the fit that is right. You may have students who are overburdened and overbooked. Piling on and guiltting them with a ton of homework will not fix the problem. Rather, help them find the joy and sweetness of God’s Word and ask His Spirit to begin healing through the power of the Word. Take some time to read the “How to use the study” page (prior to Week One) with them and let them know you believe in them and their ability to use this material.

## CROWD BREAKER

In the book of Hebrews, we’re told that Abraham “when he was called . . . went out, not knowing where he was going.”

Where is the most interesting place God has had you live so far?

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Take special care in stressing the flexibility to long-time *Precept-Upon-Precept*® students as many have a finish-every-question-at-all-cost mentality. Such discipline in studying God's Word is beautiful. The every-last-question mind set, however, can throw people off with a flexible study. Because the material is designed to flex to more advanced students, the volume of material can overwhelm people who force themselves through every question and sidebar. Assure your class that most students won't finish every question every week by design. Some weeks they will, but probably not every week. If every student finished every week, the study would not be flexing to meet the needs of the most advanced students. The goal in allowing the material to flex is not to have people study less; it is to have each person take the next appropriate step from where they currently are and to study and apply more as they are continually drawn into deeper relationship with Jesus.

## **SEGMENT #2: INDUCTIVE STUDY BASICS**

### **Observation | Interpretation | Application**

If your students are unfamiliar with inductive Bible study, be sure to take some time to give them the basics. They will catch up and catch on as we go, but giving them an overview will help put them in context! You'll want to impress on your students that inductive Bible study simply means the Bible is our main source of truth. Before looking for insights from people and commentaries about the Bible, we get into the Word of God itself. We go to the primary source and learn to discover truth for ourselves. Inductive Bible study involves three basic components: observation, interpretation, and application.

#### **1 Observation**

This is a very interactive process, well worth the time because the truths you discover for yourself will be accurate and profound. It begins by asking the five W and H questions.

*Who is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? Who is the author speaking to?*

*What subjects and/or events are covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, the events, and the teachings from the text? What instructions are given?*

*When did or will the events recorded occur?*

*Where did or will this happen? Where was it said?*

*Why is something said? Why will an event occur? Why this time, person, and/or place?*

*How will it happen? How will it be done? How is it illustrated?*

Careful observation leads to interpretation—discovering what the text means.

One important part of observing the text involves identifying key words. A key word helps to “unlock” the meaning of the text. It is vital to understanding the text and is often repeated.

**2 Interpretation**

The more you observe, the greater you'll understand God's Word. Since Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture we'll be looking at contexts and cross-references to help us understand God's message that was communicated to the original audience. Observation and interpretation lead to application.

**3 Application**

After we've observed the text and discovered the meaning, we need to think and live accordingly. Although the text of Scripture has one interpretation—what God inspired the author to write to his original readers—we can have numerous applications. The result is a transformed life—the more you and I are in the Word of God and adjusting our thinking and behavior to its precepts for life, the more we are changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ! He is the living Word of God who became flesh, the Savior of the world, our coming King of kings!

It is exciting to learn and know about the faith of others. It is transforming to live what we have learned!

**SEGMENT #3: The Prevailing Winds of Culture**

If you have enough people in your class to break into small groups, do so and have the groups discuss some of the cultural views of Christianity.

If you've broken into groups, after about 5 minutes or so pull them back together to see what each one discussed. If you're not sure if they've had enough time, ask them! This is not an exact science. Some classes will need more time to discuss, others will want less.

Let them discuss and remind them that as we go to the Scriptures, we'll let God's Word speak for itself to define what a real Christian is.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

If you have a large group, let your students discuss these questions around tables and then bring it back for a large group summary discussion. I suggest giving them one set of questions at a time.

*According to our culture, is anything truly "knowable"? Can you know anything for sure? Explain.*

*How does our culture define a Christian?*

**SEGMENT #4: Overview of the Letter**

- Key Talk Point:**
- Apostle John is writing to his children in the faith.
  - He writes about the Word of Life.
  - He writes so that they may *know* that they have eternal life (5:13).

**Overview**

Although the letter makes no internal claim to authorship by name, 1 John's author unreservedly asserts that he is an eyewitness and close companion of Jesus Christ—one who saw, heard, and touched the incarnate Lord. These claims, along with similarities to John's Gospel, are the underpinnings of the traditional view that the Apostle John penned this letter. Conservative scholarship commonly holds that John wrote the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation.

John writes about the Word of Life—Jesus Christ—to those who have already believed. Unlike his Gospel account which was written *so that* people would believe (“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name,” John 20:30-31), this letter was written *so that believers* might *know* that they have eternal life (“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life,” 1 John 5:13). Likely the letter was meant to be generally passed around, hence no specific addressees.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

If you have a large group, let your students discuss these questions around tables and then bring it back for a large group summary discussion. I suggest giving them one set of questions at a time.

*Who wrote this letter? Why do you think this?*

*Who is it written to? What is the evidence?*

*What is the main reason this letter was written?*

*Have you (or anyone you've known) struggled with knowing whether or not you have eternal life? What kind of struggles does this wake up? How big of a deal is it to be able to answer this for yourself? To be able to help others answer it?*

**SEGMENT #5a: 1 John 1:1-4, Eyewitness Accounts**

- Key Talk Point:**
- John was an eye witness.
  - In Jesus, God became “knowable”—Jesus is the Word of Life.
  - The Gospel restores relationships vertically and horizontally.

**Context/Comments:**

Against a backdrop that seemed to be calling into question the incarnation of Jesus Christ, John begins his letter with his own corroborated eyewitness account of Jesus in the flesh. The “What” that your students marked is quickly defined as the Word of Life. It may be helpful to have your students compile a simple list about “the Word of Life,” either in small groups or together on a white board. This will synthesize a few of the answers they have recorded in their homework.

**Facts about the Word of Life they should observe include that the Word was/is:**

- from the beginning (v. 1)
- physical—they heard it, saw it, touched it (v. 1)
- manifested, revealed, not something hidden (v. 2)
- eternal life (v. 2)
- with the Father (v. 2)
- the basis of fellowship with one another and God (v. 3)

Make sure your students can see in the text that the Word of Life is Jesus.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How important is an eyewitness account today? Why do you think an eyewitness account was important for John to record and for his recipients to read?*

*How does John’s message differ from “spiritual” messages today?*

*Why was John so eager to proclaim his message? Are you as eager? Why/why not?*

**SEGMENT #5b: Cross-Referencing—John 1:1-5, 9-14, 17-18****Key Talk Points:** • The Word is God.

- Scripture interprets Scripture.

**Context/Comments:**

Take the opportunity to remind your students that cross-referencing is an inductive tool that helps us interpret the text. By seeing what the same writer says about the same topic in another location, we can gather more information to help us understand our current text.

Not only does John's Gospel contain common terminology, his Gospel and first epistle have a similar opening as John talks about the Word from the beginning. In the Gospel account you'll find additional information about the Word. You may want to compare these facts with the ones you've already compiled on 1 John.

**The Word . . .**

- was in the beginning, v. 1
- was with God, v. 1
- was God, v. 1
- is Creator, "all things came into being through Him," v. 3
- has life in Him that was the Light of men, v. 4
- is the Light that shines in the darkness, v. 5
- was testified about by John, v. 7
- gave the right to be children of God to those who received Him, v. 12
- became flesh and dwelt among us, v. 14
- has glory as of the only begotten of the Father, v. 14
- is full of grace and truth, v. 14

Take your time talking the text's teachings on the Word—Jesus. This is foundational to solid Christology.

**Make sure your class sees that:**

- the Word is Jesus
- He is pre-existent with the Father
- the entire Gospel message hangs on whether or not Jesus is who He says He is
- Jesus, the Word incarnate, explains the Father who no one has ever seen

**Other helpful cross-reference you may want to explore with your class are:**

**Acts 4:12** – *And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

**John 14:6** – *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."*

**Galatians 1:8-9** – *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*What do you know about Jesus Christ? How would you respond to someone who asked: Who is Jesus and why does He matter? (As you answer, consider the three texts above.)*

*Looking at both 1 John and John, what did you learn about the relationship of light to darkness? (Remember, identifying and learning from contrasts is another inductive tool.)*

*What's your memory key for this section? Your hashtag? Your tweet?*

## SEGMENT #6: 1 John 1:5-10–The Message and Fellowship

- Key Talk Points:**
- The message: “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.”
  - Fellowship is contingent on being in the light.
  - Claiming to have no sin, proves sinfulness.

### Context/Comments:

In this section, John spells out the message (Greek: *aggelia*) he and the other disciples have from God: “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” It’s interesting that the Greek word translated “message” is from the same root as the word for angel. Indeed throughout biblical history, angels often brought God’s message to His people, but now with Jesus, God Himself has spoken. The partial message spoken “to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways” was completed when God spoke in His Son (Hebrews 1:1).

Jesus is better than the angels—a better Messenger with a better Message; He is better than Moses; He’s a better priest who offers a better sacrifice with better blood and mediates a better covenant.

As the author of Hebrews explains to his readers in Hebrews 2, “if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable” then the word of the Lord Jesus is of paramount importance. Jesus brings a message that must be heard and obeyed.

As John unpacks the message, he makes use of a number of all-or-nothing, black-and-white statements:

- in Him [God] there is **no darkness at all** – an overwhelmingly consistent nature
- the blood of Jesus **cleanses us from all sin** – a thorough salvation
- He [God] is faithful and righteous . . . to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness** – a complete and reliable justice

In a culture that parses every word, it's critical to remember that truth claims with contradictory actions are lies.

Here's how John explains it . . .

What we say	What we do	What is true
I have fellowship with Him	but I walk in darkness	I'm lying
		I'm not "doing" truth
I have fellowship with Him	I walk in the light	I have confessed my sins
		Jesus' blood has cleansed my sin
		God has forgiven my sins
		I have fellowship with God
		I have fellowship with believers
I have no sin		I have deceived myself
		I don't have truth in me
I have not sinned		I accuse God of lying
		His Word is not in me

As you talk through this section, help your students identify the core truths about who God is and who we are.

**God is:** Light, holy, relational, truth, faithful, righteous, sacrificing, forgiving

**We are:** sinful and in need of cleansing; apt to lie to ourselves about ourselves and God.

Also help them see the pattern in 1 John 1 of hearing the message and in turn becoming messengers who know it and in turn share it with others.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How does the message jive with today's culture and its messages?*

*What is fellowship? How can you get it?*

*What does John say about sin?*

*What about those who don't think they're sinners?*

**Wrap-Up Questions:**

*What is your key take-away point this week?*

*How are you remembering 1 John 1?*

*How will you live it out?*

**A Note on the Extra Section . . .**

What you do with the **Extra** section is dependent on what kind of class you have.

"#Hashtags" essentially ask people to identify key words.

Composing a "Tweet" will help them think through the section's "theme."

This is nothing new, just a reframing of terms that may be less intimidating to some students. For those who don't know what a hashtag or tweet is . . . there is no need to try to educate them in the area of social media. These exercises are designed for those who *already think* in those terms.

# WEEK TWO

## Walk this Way

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review basic concepts
Segment 2:	25 min.	1 John 2:1-6
Segment 3:	25 min.	1 John 2:7-14
Segment 4:	5 min.	Wrap-Up/Extras Section

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**START CLASS HERE****SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Basic Concepts**

A little review each week will cement the basics and give your class a framework for study. Although we'll focus on specific inductive tools each week, keeping the basic components of OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION, and APPLICATION in front of your class consistently will equip them for a lifetime of handling God's Word. Always remind them that the goal is transformation! We don't learn for the sake of learning; we learn because God uses His Word to transform us and conform us more and more into the image of His Son. Familiarity with the basics will give your students confidence to work through their homework and begin applying and living the texts.

**Review Questions:**

*What are the components of inductive Bible study?*

*What is **Observation** and why is it important? What question does it answer?*

*How is **Interpretation** different from **Observation**?*

*What do we need for proper **Application**?*

Application needs to be grounded in the single God-intended meaning of the text, its interpretation.

Be aware that at this point you can run into two distinct problems:

1. Some people do not want to apply. They seek knowledge but bristle at application.
2. Others want to apply the text without dealing first with what God said to the original hearers. They want to know "What this means to me" before "What God said."

It is important for you to continually guide your class toward application that comes from the text. When discussions veer toward speculation or issues that do not promote life-change, redirect them to consider what the Author intends.

For those who gravitate toward opinions and ungrounded applications, gently direct them with questions like “Where do you see that in the text?” Continually point them to the text and appropriate application. It may take some repetition, but they will learn. Always be gentle in your approach remembering Proverbs 16:21b that the “sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.”

### Review Questions:

*If you had to hashtag 1 John 1, what words would you use?*

*How would you explain 1 John 1 to someone unfamiliar with the letter?*

*How did you apply the Word of God in your life last week?*

## SEGMENT #2: 1 John 2:1-6—Jesus our Advocate and Propitiation

**Key Talk Points:** • If you know Jesus, you'll keep His commandments.

- Jesus is our Advocate and propitiation.

### Context/Comments:

John begins chapter 2 addressing his readers as “my little children” (Greek: *teknion*), which is a term of endearment. Think of how you address those you love. Often it depends on where we live and what gender we are, but we all (or at least most of us) use idioms that express parental love. (One of mine is “sweetheart”; you may have others.) Clearly John loves his readers and believes them to be children in the faith.

Not only this but John also appears to feel a responsibility toward them. He addresses them as “*My* little children” (emphasis added). He then speaks to them in solidarity; it is not “If you sin, you have an Advocate”; rather he says “...if *anyone* sins, we have an Advocate” and Jesus is the propitiation for “*our* sins” (again, emphases added). He believes that the little children are in true relationship with the Father and that he is, as we saw in 1 John 1, in fellowship with them.

John clearly says why he is writing, using the Greek *grapho* (“I write”) eleven times in 1 John 2 alone, nine of those within the span of verses 1-14. In verses 1-2, John lays out truths about the children and about Jesus that they need to know and remember:

- The little children are not to sin
- Sinners need an Advocate with the Father (and John's little children will sin)
- Jesus is that Advocate and the propitiation for sins

John has already talked at length about sin in the first chapter. You may want to review the following points:

- The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1:7)
- Everyone has sin and has sinned (1:8, 10)
- In claiming sinlessness, people deceive themselves, call God a liar, and show that the word is not in them.
- If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive and to cleanse us (1:9).

John writes so that his little children will not sin, but he tells them God has made provision for when they will. When they do, Jesus is their Advocate and propitiation. While the person who knows God still needs advocacy and propitiation, his life will align with God's commands according to 1 John 2:3: "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." Claiming to know God doesn't mean knowing Him. Those who do know Him:

- keep His commandments (2:3)
- keep His word (2:5)
- walk the way Jesus walked (2:6)

Let's face it, church people often have a sheep-like naïveté and quote verses like "Love believes all things" to mean that we should take whatever a person says at face value. Jesus, though, told His disciples to be not only as innocent as doves but also as wise as serpents. And Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 13 may be better translated "Love always believes." Love does not lose faith in what is true, but certainly it doesn't believe what is patently false. Nor does talk about God prove the new birth into God's new family of love in Christ.

Before we can truly walk like Jesus, we have to know Him. When we do walk in the light it is solely because He has cleansed us from our sin. We can't work our way to Him. This is the key. When we stumble, we have both a propitiation and an Advocate with the Father. Those who know God keep His commandments because the truth is in them and they abide in Jesus.

In the end, abiding makes all the difference—those who know God abide in Christ and Christ abides in them. You may at this point want to take your class to John 15 for a further discussion on what it means to abide.

### **Sample Discussion Questions:**

Again, if you have a large group let them discuss each question around tables and then bring it back for a large group summary discussion. I suggest giving them one set of questions at a time.

*What does John teach about sin in 1 John 2:1-6? How would you explain this to a new believer? An unbeliever?*

*According to John how do we know that we have come to know Jesus? What is behind and driving the behavior?*

**SEGMENT #3: 1 John 2:7-14–The New Commandment**

- Key Talk Points:**
- The old commandment was to love.
  - The new commandment is to love like Jesus loves!

**Context/Comments:**

In this section, John calls his readers “beloved” and then goes on to address what may appear to be three specific sub-groups: children, fathers, and young men. Likely, though, because of his previous usage the reference to “little children” (v. 12) and “children” (v. 13) are general terms referring to everyone while the “fathers” and “young men” are specific sub-groups he wants to speak to. “Beloved” is the same term that is used with reference to God’s view of Jesus as the “beloved [Greek: *agapetos*] Son” (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22).

It’s notable that John is referred to as “the beloved disciple” in John 13:23 (“There was reclining on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved”). Certainly, he knew he was loved by Jesus and in turn loved others the same way. John’s readers are like beloved children to him as he was to Jesus.

In verse 7, when John refers to a new commandment which is actually an old one, he is almost certainly referencing Jesus’ teaching in John 13:33-35. Help your students see how helpful cross-references can be to interpretation by examining this text as well as John 15:12-13. These verses will help us identify the “new commandment” while Leviticus and Deuteronomy will help us identify the old one he refers to.

**John 13:33-35**

33 *“Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’*

34 *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

35 *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

**John 15:12-13**

12 *“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.*

13 *“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

It’s clear from Leviticus 19:18, 34 and Deuteronomy 6:5 that the Jews already had the commandment to love both their neighbor and the stranger. As we see from John’s writings, though, Jesus takes this old command to a new level making Himself the standard. The new commandment is not only to love, but to love *as Jesus loved* His disciples, who(m) He loved unto death.

This new commandment “is true in Him [Jesus] and in you [the readers], because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining” (1 John 2:8). In 1 John 1:5 we saw that God is Light. Here in 1 John 2, though, the main subject and the antecedent of the personal pronouns is Jesus. Tracing the pronouns from 1 John 2:1 through 2:7 shows that “the true Light” referred to here is Jesus. Referencing both God the Father and Jesus as “the Light” again points to Jesus as God incarnate.

Take your class to John 8:12 for Jesus' self-proclamation: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." Again, we have Scripture interpreting Scripture.

John continues to drive home the truth that you can't live both in light and darkness. If you hate your brother, you are not in the light. The one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness (2:9, 11). It's the walk that matters, not the talk. Anyone can claim to walk in the Light, and many do, but that doesn't mean they are in the Light. I can claim anything but claiming something doesn't make it so.

Your class should have made a short list this week to summarize what the text teaches about darkness. It is often helpful to review those as a group either by talking through it or recording the points on a white board.

### **The Darkness**

- The darkness is passing away (2:8).
- The one who says he's in the light but hates brother is in the darkness (2:9).
- Those in darkness don't know where they are going because darkness has blinded their eyes (2:11).
- People stumble in it (2:10).

For all of the darkness talk, it's clear that John thinks the best of his readers—his little children—and he goes on to both encourage and commend them.

In verses 12-14 he addresses different segments of the believers and commends them in various ways saying . . .

- their sins have been forgiven (2:12)
- they know Him who was from the beginning (2:13)
- they have overcome the evil one (2:13)
- they know the Father (2:13)
- they are strong (2:14)
- the word of God abides in them (2:14)

Although the darkness is still in the world, John offers great hope! We can walk in the Light because the true Light is already shining. Jesus has come and His Gospel is dispelling the darkness. The new commandment is shown to be true by Jesus and the disciples. As they show Gospel love, the darkness is going away. It's still around, but it's leaving.

### **Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How would you explain the difference between the old and new commandment? How are they the same, yet different?*

*How would you explain the way a person can walk in the Light and overcome the evil one to a person who is struggling with living in a dark world?*

## **SEGMENT #4: Wrap-Up/Extras Section**

- Key Talk Points:**
- Tweets are summary statements or themes.
  - Hastags are key words.

### **Comments:**

Take some time to discuss how the Extra section is working with your class. This can be a time for them to encourage one another.

Depending on how long they need to discuss, you may also want to take time today to use a computer to show them how to do an online word study using Blue Letter Bible.

### **Sample Discussion Question:**

*If you've been using the Extra section, what has been working for you? How have you been using it?*

### **Wrap-Up Questions:**

*What is your key take-away point this week?*

*How will you live it out?*

# WEEK THREE

## 1 John 2b: Abide in Him

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	10 min.	1 John 2:15-17
Segment 3:	20 min.	1 John 2:18-23
Segment 4:	20 min.	1 John 2:24-29

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**START CLASS HERE****SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Questions:**

*What are the components of inductive Bible study? How do they function together?*

*Explain 1 John 1 to each other. (Makes sure they key in on eyewitness words: message, fellowship, etc.)*

*Explain 1 John 2:1-14 to each other. (Make sure they address advocate and propitiation and the key phrase "I am writing these things . . .")*

**SEGMENT #2: 1 John 2:15-17–Don't Love the World**

**Key Talk Points:**

- The world is in opposition to God.
- The world is passing away.

**Context/Comments:**

John has already told his readers in 2:8 that the darkness is "passing away" (Greek: *parago*). Now he builds on that saying "the world is passing away and also its lusts" (2:17). John contrasts the ephemeral nature of what is against God to that which abides (Greek: *meno*). *Meno* is a rich word that is often translated "abide," "remain," or "dwell." The NASB translates it "live" in 2:17 ("the one who does the will of God lives forever"). So while we often see it used to convey the idea of remaining in something (e.g. abiding in the vine, John 15), it also has the idea of lasting as we see in 2:17 where the one who does the will of God abides (NASB: lives) forever.

Earlier in this chapter John affirmed that loving brothers is the hallmark sign of walking in the Light. Now he says Christians are *not* to love the world (Greek: *kosmos*) or the things in the world and further describes the things in the world in 2:16 as:

- the lust (Greek: *epithymia*) of the flesh
- the lust of the eyes
- the boastful pride of life

Make sure to discuss with your class how the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life show up in people's lives today.

Set in opposition here are man's lusts and God's will. Pick one and the consequences that go with it, but you can't have them both as the love of the Father is absent from the one who loves the world.

As you talk through the text, address John 3:16 and the truth that because God loved (Greek: *agape*) the world—specifically people—He sent Jesus. His love for the world acted in such a way as to redeem and heal it, not perpetuate its sinfulness. It is a loving-the-world-as-it-is attitude, a clinging to the world, that John is writing against. It is clear from 1 John 1 that John also has God's heart for the people of the world Jesus came to save.

John declares the message that God is Light, that we can confess our sins and God will forgive us and cleanse us through the blood of Jesus. He and the other disciples all faced enormous persecution and most death because of their dedication to their Lord, His Gospel, and the people they brought the Good News to. What faithful examples they gave us of lives that please God and bring His message of Light in the darkness to a world that desperately needs the Gospel.

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*Do we ever blur the lines between "the world" we're supposed to love because God "so loved the world" and "the world" that we are not to love? How do we keep these straight? What are the challenges?*

*Based on what we've seen so far in 1 John, how does someone in our culture live in a way that is pleasing to God? What practical considerations come up? (Make sure that "abiding" shows up somewhere during the response time.)*

*You may want to use the One Step Further on John 3 as an in-class assignment, asking your class to break into small groups and address the question: How would you explain John 3 to someone who has never heard the Gospel message? Make sure that they consider the 5Ws and H, especially: **W**hy did God send Jesus? and **H**ow can a person be born again?*

**SEGMENT #3: 1 John 2:18-23—Antichrists in the Last Hour**

- Key Talk Points:**
- Truth stands or falls on the person of Jesus.
  - Not everyone who is with us is one of us.

**Context/Comments:**

John continues to speak warmly toward his readers, now calling them “children.” He introduces “us/them” contrasts but clearly sees his readers in the “us” that has remained and knows God. He affirms that they have “an anointing from the Holy One” and that they know the truth.

As is pointed out in the workbook, anointing during biblical times was done with oil and typically signified that a person was set apart for a specific task. The prophet Samuel, for example, anointed both Saul and David to be kings of Israel. As in the parable of the five wise virgins the oil probably represents “wisdom,” in the case of kings wisdom to rule (the task) wisely. John supports this by turning “anointing” into a gerund (*chrisma*, a verbal noun), equating this in the context to “teaching” (doctrine), and then finally identifying “the Spirit” with “the truth” in 1 John 5:6b. (See also Acts 10:38 and John 16:13.)

The Greek in this paragraph seems to drive the use of the rare word *chrisma* (in the New Testament used only here and twice in v. 27). Remember that the title Christ (Greek: *christos*) means “anointed one” and antichrist (Greek: *antichristos*; a compound of *anti* [against or opposed to] and *christos*) literally is one against the anointed one. True believers are those who have received the anointing from the anointed one—they know Him, they have His Spirit abiding in them, and they know the truth. They are not of those who “went out.”

The contrast between the true and the false permeates this section of the text. Talk your class through the differences in the people John so vividly describes.

Us	Them
Children	Antichrist/antichrists
remained	went out
know the truth	lie
confess that Jesus is the Christ	deny Jesus is the Christ
has the Father and the Son	has neither the Father nor the Son
<b>Bottom line:</b>	
Believers	Pretenders

While the term “antichrist” often brings to mind Satan and one of John’s other writings, the book of Revelation, his use of the word in this epistle has more the sense of antichrist with the small “a” instead of the capital “A.” He talks about “many antichrists.” John’s definition of antichrist: “This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” From this definition, any religion, philosophy, science, or private opinion that denies Jesus is the Messiah is antichrist. John found himself on the isle of Patmos late in the first century AD according to Revelation 1:9 “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” His views would not be any more welcomed in today’s culture than they were in his own.

To John's thinking, antichrist is also anti-truth. Essentially John says there is no such thing as a white lie—"no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2:22). He bores into the specific truth that Jesus is the Christ. The implications of this on common thought are many. Very basically we can go with this: all roads do not lead to God. Anything that says otherwise is a lie and no lie is of the truth. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching about Satan as the father of lies.

If you have time, take your students to John 8:44 to hear first-hand what Jesus said about the devil and lying.

**John 8:44**

*"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

John specifically describes the liar in verse 22 this way: "This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son."

At this point you may want to help your class summarize what they've learned so far in 1 John 1-2 about the Father and the Son.

## The Father:

- was with eternal life, 1:2
- fellowships with us, 1:3
- has a Son, 1:3, 7
- is Light, 1:5
- is faithful and righteous to forgive sins and cleanse from all unrighteousness, 1:10
- can be known, 2:13
- word abides in people, 2:14
- love is not in those who love the word, 2:15
- has a will, 2:17

## The Son:

- from the beginning, 1:1
- heard, seen, touched, testified about, 1:1-2
- Word of life, 1:1
- the eternal life, 1:2
- was with the Father, 1:2
- was manifested to John and disciples, 1:2
- the Son of God, 1:3, 2:22
- the Christ, 1:3, 2:22
- can have fellowship with us, 1:3
- His blood cleanses all sin, 1:7
- Advocate with the Father, 2:1
- the propitiation for sins, 2:2
- can be known, 2:3
- gives commandments, 2:3
- can be abided in, 2:6, 24
- walked on earth, 2:6
- promised eternal life, 2:25
- gives an anointing, 2:27

- is coming and will appear, 2:28
- is righteous, 2:29
- regenerates (re-births), 2:29

Make sure that your class is clear on the truth that there is only one way to have a relationship with the Father and that is to believe and confess His Son (see also Romans 10:9). You'll also want to take your class to John 1:18: "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

If you have time, a great corollary to this text is 2 Timothy 4:1-8 that talks in more depth about those who go out, who want their ears tickled and won't put up with sound doctrine.

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*In small groups, read 2 Timothy 4:1-8 and compare the groups of people that Paul talks about with those John describes.*

*How would you describe the dangers that both John and Paul warn of? How can we stand in the face of them?*

*How would you discuss the Gospel with a person who thinks there is no such thing as absolute truth? Reason from Scripture.*

## SEGMENT #4: 1 John 2:24-29—The Promise is Eternal Life

- Key Talk Points:**
- God's promise to us is eternal life.
  - In the face of deceivers, we are to abide.

### Context/Comments:

In the face of antichrists and deceivers, John tells his readers that what they heard from the beginning should abide in them. "From the beginning" is a big phrase in 1 John (1x chapter 1; 5x chapter 2; 2x chapter 3). According to 3:11, the message they had heard from the beginning was that they should love one another: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another . . ." This is the second reference to "message" in the book, the first coming in 1 John 1:5's "God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all."

John now references the promise we have from God: eternal life (Greek: *ho aionios*

*ho zoe*). It's important to note that in 1 John 1:2, Jesus Himself is called the eternal life (*ho aionios zoe*). Jesus both *is* eternal life and *gives* eternal life.

While the promise stands firm, the world still abounds with deceivers. What is particularly concerning is that antichrists are confirmed when *they go out from the church!!* Believers need to know and stand on truth so they can recognize them earlier before they do damage and deceive more. Trust levels within the walls tend to be very high, leaving people ripe for false teaching and deception.

In the face of this threat, John's repeats the command to abide: abide in what you heard from the beginning (v. 24), abide in Christ (v. 27, 28). When we abide we have confidence at His coming.

While deceivers are on the prowl, believers do not need to fear because they know "who's who." We can know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. If it doesn't look like a duck and quack like a duck . . . it's not a duck! The only way people can truly do righteousness is if they are born of God.

The term "anointing" appears again in this section. Be aware that your class may be split on whether this is referring to the Word or the Spirit. Let them know that the rest of the letter will help us understand this better. Also direct them to John 6:63 where Jesus says the His words are both spirit and life: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." There is no Word that is not Spirit and vice versa.

As you discuss, bring both parties back to the context which is abiding in the face of deceivers and antichrists. It is by knowing the Word through the Spirit that we are able to stand. Believers do not need anything the deceivers are offering—they already know the truth and the Spirit in them will help them to discern truth from error.

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*What difference does the promise of eternal life make? How would you explain that difference to a friend or neighbor?*

*How can we practically live with confidence?*

### Wrap-Up Questions:

*What have been your biggest takeaways this week?*

*How is the truth you're learning changing the way you think and act?*

# WEEK FOUR

## 1 John 3:1-10 Children of God

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	15 min.	1 John 3:1-3
Segment 3:	15 min.	1 John 3:4-6
Segment 4:	15 min.	1 John 3:7-10
Segment 5:	10 min.	Wrap Up and Extras

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**START CLASS HERE**

**SEGMENT #1: Review**

**Review Questions:**

*What are the components of inductive Bible study?*

*What is the most important thing you've learned or been reminded of up to this point?*

*How would you explain the basics of 1 John 1 to a friend?*

*How would you explain the basics of 1 John 2?*

**SEGMENT #2: 1 John 3:1-3—Children of God**

- Key Talk Points:**
- We are children of God.
  - We fix our eyes on Jesus and watch for His appearing.

**Context/Comments:**

Being called “children of God” results directly from the Father bestowing great love on us. This love demonstrates His favorable disposition toward us and the phrase is more than a mere title. We as Christians have been adopted into God’s family and while we are not yet what we will be when we see Jesus, we already are children of God.

While this new reality is based on God’s reconciling us to Himself and to other believers, it sets us at odds with the world. The world does not “know” believers because it did not know Jesus. There is something different about you if you’re a Christian. Believers often *feel like* aliens because they *are* strangers and aliens (1 Peter 2:11-12) looking for the city which is to come (Hebrews 11).

Whether or not we’re aware of it, this alien status creates profound tension in the life of a person who walks like Jesus walks. Perhaps the best way to deal with this is simply acknowledging that this world is not our home as the believers recorded in

Hebrews 11 did. Take your students to Hebrews 11:13-16 to help them see some examples of the faithful living in the midst in this tension.

### **Hebrews 11:13-16**

*13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*

*14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.*

*15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

*16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*

The Old Testament saints looked to God's promises and while these did not give a complete vision of the future, Jesus made them clearer by giving us more revelation.

But even with this as we look forward we don't know specifically what to expect. We do know that we will be like Jesus "because we will see Him just as He is" (3:2). If you have time, take your class to Romans 8:28-29 to show them that in all things God is working to conform us into the image of His Son and that He will complete the work that He has begun (Philippians 1:6). In the meantime we fix our hope and our eyes on Jesus.

### **Sample Discussion Questions:**

*What are "children of God"? What implications does it have for how you will live in and interact with the world?*

*How would you explain to someone the difference between the world's typical view that "everyone is a child of God" and John's teaching?*

## **SEGMENT #3: 1 John 3:4-6—Jesus Takes Away Sin**

**Key Talk Points:**

- Jesus appeared to take away sin.
- If you practice sin you don't know Him.

### **1 John 3:4-6**

There's no such thing as "a little sin." John says that sin is lawlessness, rebellion against God. Jesus appeared "in order to" (Greek: *hina*) take away (Greek: *airo*) sins—not to minimize, not to neutralize, but to take away. In Him there is *no* sin.

No one who abides in Him sins as these are mutually exclusive behaviors. A person

who continually and joyfully sins with no remorse, with no fight against it, hasn't seen Him and doesn't know Him. Because there is no sin in Jesus, you can't live in Jesus and sin anymore than you can live simultaneously in Illinois and Texas.

Help your class talk through the implications of this teaching.

### **Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How would you explain to someone why Jesus appeared according to 1 John 3:5? Remember, in explaining to someone you need to put them in context, not quote an isolated word or phrase from a text.*

*Explain how this ties in with 1 John 2:1 and our need for an Advocate and a propitiation.*

## **SEGMENT #4: 1 John 3:7-10—God's Children are Obvious**

- Key Talk Points:**
- Don't be deceived.
  - God's children are characterized by righteousness and love.

### **Context/Comments:**

In the midst of difficult words of warning, John again uses the term "little children" (Greek: *teknion*). This repeated term of endearment shows his love and overall tenderness toward his readers. Though addressing hard topics, he loves his readers and thinks the best of them. He is not unlike the author of Hebrews writing in Hebrews 6:9: after issuing some scary warnings he says "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way."

This encouragement, this "belief in" his readers certainly helped them accept his counsel. When trust is present, defenses relax. When trust is lacking, defenses go up. You may want to take your class to Proverbs 4:23 and discuss the importance of wisely guarding the heart.

Help your class learn from John's approach. Most of them will probably be familiar with Paul's exhortation to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Help them to see that John gives us the prime example of how it is done!! He can affirm and warn without compromising either.

John's warning in this section focuses on those who deceive, claiming they are righteous and know God, but not living a life that matches. Essentially it is a review of what he's already discussed: people who say they know God and yet walk in the darkness. This practice certainly did not end with the early Church. There are still

“hypocrites” in the Church today. And there are false converts who have been sold a bill of goods but have never been introduced to the Lord and Savior.

John also makes it clear that people are deceived by a personal arch-deceiver called the devil, who he elsewhere defines as Satan himself. Writing in Revelation 12:9, John says, “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

**In 1 John 3 we learn the following from marking references to the devil:**

- he sinned from the beginning, 3:8
- he empowers those who practice sin, 3:8
- his works are destroyed by the Son of God, 3:8

Many people today don't believe the devil is an objective person. By denying the existence of an enemy who prowls around seeking to devour, they make themselves easy prey (1 Peter 5:8). Rejecting the truth that Satan appears as an angel of light, they listen to him intently all the while thinking they are listening to God. Sobering. The family resemblance between the father of lies and his minions is seen in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15:

*13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*

*14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*

*15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.*

As driven as the deceiver is, John reaffirms that we can tell the righteous from the unrighteous: the one who practices righteousness is righteous. By simply looking at two people who claim to be baseball players, it might be difficult to know who is telling the truth. Put them each on a field, though, and the real player will be obvious. The same is true when it comes to doing righteousness. The righteous live righteously . . . included in that is loving the brethren. Their righteousness comes from God who has birthed them and whose seed abides in them (3:9).

In a world that parses and redefines words and looks for loopholes for just about everything, it's helpful to see how simple John makes things. He says that if you don't love your brother, it's obvious who you belong to. No amount of arguing or wrangling will change what is true and clear. The Son of God appeared not only “in order to take away sins” (3:5), but also “to destroy (Greek: *luo*, also untie, loosen) the works of the devil” (3:8). This gives hope to those who are bound in sin that Jesus can set them free.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*What deceptions does John warn about? How do his warnings apply today?*

*Explain how the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. How would you be able to tell the difference today? What kind of information would you need?*

**Wrap-Up Questions:**

*What have been your biggest takeaways this week?*

*How are these truths changing the way you're thinking and acting?*

# WEEK FIVE

## 1 John 3:11-24 Believe in Jesus!

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	10 min.	1 John 3:11-12
Segment 3:	15 min.	1 John 3:13-15
Segment 4:	15 min.	1 John 3:16-22
Segment 5:	15 min.	1 John 3:23-24

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**START CLASS HERE****SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Questions:**

*What are the components of inductive Bible study and why is each important?*

*What key words (or hashtags) would you use for 1 John 1 and 2?*

*What key words (or hashtags) do you associate with the first half of 1 John 3?  
Why?*

**SEGMENT #2: 1 John 3:11-12—Love One Another**

- Key Talk Points:**
- We are to love one another.
  - Cain is an example of what *not* to be and do.

**Context/Comments:**

John reminds his readers of the message they've "heard from the beginning" (the beginning of Jesus' teaching) that they should love one another. In teaching this he refers back to the account of Cain and Abel. Depending on your class's collective background, spend as much time as you need helping them understand the example by going back to Genesis.

Cain, of course, is the bad example. He was "of the evil one and slew his brother." The reason Cain killed Abel was because Abel's deeds were righteous while his own were evil. Again, you'll find helpful cross-references about Cain in Genesis 4 (also Hebrews 11:4, Jude 11).

It's one thing to exceed the low bar of not killing your brother; it's another to show intentional love. If your class isn't forthcoming with discussion on the question of how we can practically show love for one another, give an example or two from your life to help them get started. Remember that showing your vulnerability *to* and active struggle *against* sin and *for* righteousness will often help them open up. If they think you're perfect and that any struggles you had died before you were old enough to vote they'll be less likely to talk candidly about their own shortcomings. Again, this is a great time to let them discuss in small groups first.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How can we show love for one another in practical ways?*

*What are some practical ways people have shown love to you?*

**SEGMENT #3: 1 John 3:13-15—Out of Death Into Life**

- Key Talk Points:**
- The world will not only not know us; it will also hate us.
  - Those who don't love abide in death.
  - Believers have passed out of death into life and they love as a result.

**Context/Comments:**

In verse 13 John warns his readers about the world by trying to set their expectations correctly. Not only do they need to realize that the world won't "know" them (3:1). Now he ups his warning. They also shouldn't be surprised when they're hated. No, they should expect it, knowing the example of Cain's hatred of Abel.

We don't have to like this reality but we need to know truth in order to live wisely. We also need to prepare. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus tells His disciples to be as shrewd (Greek: *phronimos*) as serpents and as innocent (Greek: *akeraios*, without deceit) as doves. Knowing what "the world" is will help us identify it when we see its characteristics.

Living as shrewdly as a serpent is not terribly hard if you cut corners on truth and love, but this is not an option for Christ's followers. In fact, according to verse 14, love is a key indicator of having "passed out of death into love." If you're not loving, you're abiding in death. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-26) Jesus links anger with murder. John takes a similar approach saying that the one who hates his brother is a murderer. This is serious stuff.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How can we live wisely? What thinking and acting does this involve?*

*Why is hate such a red flag? Does John's teaching remind you of anything Jesus taught? (Hint: Think about the Sermon on the Mount.)*

**SEGMENT #4: 1 John 3:16-22—Lay-Down-Your-Life Love****Key Talk Points:** • Real love acts.

- Active love assures our hearts.

**Context/Comments:**

Our culture typically defines love emotionally and erotically. Look up “love” and the word “feel” is almost always associated with it. There’s no wonder we have a hard time understanding a biblical love that acts.

Jesus, though, taught us about true love when He went to the cross. God the Father taught us about true love when He sent His Son (John 3:16). John tells us that we know love because Jesus laid down His life for us and “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). In this teaching, John follows Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse (John 15:13—“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”)

We learn that love is far more than a warm feeling or an emotional high. *Agape* acts for the good of another. Christ’s followers are able to do this because of Him. Through Christ, the love of God abides in believers. This is the way we can love like Jesus loves. (See also Galatians 2:20.)

When we love in deed and truth (3:18) now, we “will know” by these actions that we are of the truth and will assure our hearts. We will be able to remember what we have done, how God has empowered us to obey, and we will assure our hearts not by our own efforts but by the work of God we have seen in our own lives.

Still, the father of lies is at war with us and sometimes we listen to him. When we have listened to the lying voice, we need to remember the truth that God is greater than our hearts and even if they ache and condemn us, God’s salvation is greater still.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How would you explain the difference between love as the world typically defines it and love as the Bible defines it?*

*How can you know you are of the truth and have assurance?*

**SEGMENT #5: 1 John 3:23-24—*The Command***

**Key Talk Points:** • God's command: Believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.

- His Spirit abides in us.

**Context/Comments:**

God commands us to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and to love one another just as Jesus commanded us. True belief in Jesus necessitates listening to and following Him. It is the root from which everything else grows. There is no love if there is no faith and authentic faith begins with God's self-revelation. The author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 11:6 that "he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"—both God-revealed truths.

Simply put, keeping God's commands proves the relationship: "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him" (3:24a). The other way we know "we are children of God" is that His Spirit testifies this truth with our spirit. You'll want to take your class to Romans 8 to cross-reference, focusing on Romans 8:16 but picking up the context of the whole first half of the chapter.

It is entirely because His Spirit abides in us that we can keep His commands at all. Man can't meet the commands of the Law unempowered. The heart is deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and ALL have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), but when we receive God's gift in Jesus He makes us new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Because sanctification is a process, remind your students that growth sometimes seems slow, but as we look back over the weeks, months, and years we should be able to see the changes God has been making in our lives.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*Explain how belief and obedience are related.*

*If knowing Jesus were a punishable offense, what evidence could the prosecution bring forward to convict you?*

**Wrap-Up Questions:**

*What have been your biggest takeaways this week?*

*How is the truth you're learning changing the way you're thinking and acting?*

# WEEK SIX

## 1 John 4: Getting Past “Really?”

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	15 min.	1 John 4:1-6
Segment 3:	15 min.	1 John 4:7-12
Segment 4:	5 min.	1 John 4:13-16
Segment 5:	20 min.	1 John 4:17-21

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**START CLASS HERE****SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Questions:**

*What were the main topics from 1 John 1? What was your biggest application from 1 John 1.*

*What were the main topics from 1 John 2? What was your biggest application from 1 John 2.*

*What were the main topics from 1 John 3? What was your biggest application from 1 John 3.*

**SEGMENT #2: 1 John 4:1-6—Don’t Just Believe, Test!**

- Key Talk Points:**
- Don’t believe everything you hear or read!
  - Those who know God pay attention to His Word and His servants who teach it faithfully.

**Context/Comments:**

In 1 John 3:23, John reminds his readers of the commandments to believe in the name of Jesus and love one another. He opens the next chapter with two more commands (both imperative plurals) in 4:1: **don’t believe** every spirit; rather **test** the spirits. He’s not commanding the elite or pastors or elders only. No, even rank-and-file believers are not to believe everything; they’re to discern teachings.

This is an especially important command in our information-saturated world. There are *so many* teachings and prophets that each one of us needs to be able to discern. Falsehood—be it a simple lie or a false teaching—can spread quickly and quietly like liquid spilled and political correctness fosters falsehood when it finds even semi-fertile ground.

Discernment has never been more difficult or needed than today because of both the speed and mass of information we process. Add to this our culture’s relativism and intolerance of everything that is not relativistic where, as in the days of the judges, every man does what is right in his own eyes, and we have a recipe for deception.

When John speaks about testing the spirits, he is almost certainly referring to teachings. We test teachings. We hold teaching up to the plumb line of Scripture. Teachings do not arise in a vacuum; they come *from somewhere, from someone*. False prophets are driven by antichrist spirits to teach things that oppose truth.

While we need to be diligent to not believe everything we hear and to test teachings we encounter, we don't have to fear because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. We have overcome because of Jesus (4:4).

The world listens to false prophets and antichrists (ear-ticklers) but those who belong to God pay attention to His revealed Word and obey it. Those who belong to God test the spirits; they test teachings to see what they say about Jesus Christ. Do they acknowledge that He came in the flesh and is the Messiah? Do they line up? We test to see if they are subject to the revealed word of God.

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*Where have you needed help in knowing the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error?*

*Explain simply from the text how you can know this difference.*

### SEGMENT #3: 1 John 4:7-12—God is Love

**Key Talk Points:**

- 1 John 4 is the other “Love chapter.”
- God is love and is the source of love.

### Context/Comments:

First John 4 has as much to say about love as 1 Corinthians 13! It tells us a great deal about God and how *He* loves. Take some time to talk through everything your class learned about *God* in 1 John 4:7-12.

### God:

- is the source of love, v. 7
- is love, v. 8
- sent His only begotten Son for us, v. 9, 10
- loved us, v. 10
- is invisible, v. 12
- abides in us if we love one another, v. 12

John says that God *is* love. He has shown His love by sending His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Now talk through everything we learn from marking *love*.

**Love:**

- John twice addresses his readers in this section as “Beloved,” v. 7, 11
- We are to love one another, v. 7
- Love is from God, v. 7
- Everyone who loves is born of God, v. 7
- God is love, v. 8
- God’s love was made manifest among us (ESV) in sending His Son, v. 9
- God loved us and sent His Son, v. 10
- Because God loved us, we are to love one another, v. 11
- If we love one another, God abides in us, v. 12
- If we love one another, God’s love is perfected in us, v. 12

God’s love gives (God sent Jesus for us); God’s love also empowers and transforms. Those who are loved are, in turn, to love others with a love (*agape*) that seeks God’s best for the other person. Thus, we are to love because He loved us. Again, God empowers us because He abides in us.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How should a Christian’s love reflect God’s love?*

*What truth about “God” or “love” challenged you most this week? Explain.*

**SEGMENT #4: 1 John 4:13-16–We Have the Spirit**

- Key Talk Points:**
- True believers confess that Jesus is the Son of God.
  - True believers have the Spirit.

**Context/Comments:**

Up to this point in his letter, John has been telling his readers different ways they can know that they have come to know God.

**The one who knows God will:**

- keep His commandments, 2:3
- walk the way Jesus walked, 2:6
- love his brother, 2:10
- practice righteousness and love brother, 3:10, 14; 4:7

Now, in 4:13, he says we can know we abide in Him because He has given us of His Spirit. (See also Romans 8:16 where Paul talks about the Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are children of God.) Those who have the Spirit will testify that the Father sent the Son to save the world and that Jesus is the Son of God (vv. 14-15).

We have assurance because perfect love casts out fear. We no longer need to be afraid of judgment because Jesus’ blood has cleansed us from our sin (1:9).

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*If you encountered people who were not sure if they knew Christ, what would you say to them based on 1 John?*

*How would you go about explaining what you believe about Jesus to someone who doesn't know Him?*

**SEGMENT #5: 1 John 4:17-21—Love God, Love God's People**

- Key Talk Points:**
- We can have confidence; perfect love casts out fear.
  - The only reason we can love is because He loved us first.
  - If we love God, we need to love His people, too.

**Context/Comments:**

Continue to lead your class in talking through what 1 John 4 says about love in verses 17-21.

**Love:**

- Love is perfected with us (when God abides in us), v. 17
- Perfect love casts out fear, v. 18
- There is no fear in love, v. 18
- God loved first, v. 19
- We love because God first loved us, v. 19
- It's impossible to love God and hate a brother, v. 20
- Those who love God are commanded to love the brother also, v. 21

Love is “perfected” (Greek: *teleioo*) or “completed” in us through abiding. When we abide in God and God abides in us, our love is perfected. Our love (*agape*) is God's work in us. This perfected love produces confidence (Greek: *parresia*) and casts out fear. Perfect love and fear cannot co-exist because fear involves punishment. A mature love will not fear that because Jesus has paid the price. The only reason we're able to love at all is because God first loved us!

Love may involve talk, but it can never be *only* talk. If you say you love the unseen God and don't love the brother in the room with you—you're lying about actually loving God. It's simple, at times frustratingly simple.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How are you doing at Jesus' command in verse 21?*

*Give an example, if you can, of someone you think is doing a great job at it.*

**Wrap-Up Questions:**

*What have been your biggest takeaways this week?*

*How is the truth you're learning changing the way you're thinking and acting?*

# WEEK SEVEN

## 1 John 5: So You May Know!

### Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	10 min.	1 John 5:1-6
Segment 3:	15 min.	1 John 5:7-12
Segment 4:	10 min.	1 John 5:13-17
Segment 5:	20 min.	1 John 5:18-21

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**START CLASS HERE****SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Basic Concepts**

*How would you explain inductive Bible study?*

*Give a brief overview of the highlights of 1 John.*

**SEGMENT #2: 1 John 5:1-5—Overcomers**

**Key Talk Points:**

- We are overcomers because we are born of God.
- God's commandments are not burdensome.

**Context/Comments:**

While the world sings that we're all God's children, John says the one who is born of God believes that Jesus (Greek: *Iesous*—a transliteration of the Hebrew *Yehoshua*, meaning "Yah[weh] saves) is the Christ (Greek: *Christos*, anointed one, messiah [Hebrew]; 5:1).

Belief in Jesus and a relationship with Him isn't a private party. It shows that we are born of God and that we love God. This vertical relationship plays out horizontally, too. If we love the Father, we will love his children and we will keep His commandments. The rub in all this, of course, is that we don't keep them perfectly, nor do the other children . . . which can lead to it all being harder as is the case with most things in a fallen world. Instead of fixing our eyes on Jesus, it's easier to look at our brother who has just fallen in the mud and point or to look at a brother who is doing really well and desire what he has.

While keeping God's commandments can seem hard . . . and while sometimes for fallen human beings it is hard, John reminds us that His commands are not burdensome because we are born of God. The law? The law, particularly as beefed up by the religious leaders, *was* burdensome (Greek: *barys*), but God's commandments in Jesus are not because we are yoked together with Him. (See also Matthew 11:30.)

The bad news is that the world is broken and fallen, but the good news is that whatever is born of God overcomes the world. Specifically, the victory that overcomes the world is "our faith." It's interesting that it is "our faith" that is born of God. We didn't even bring to fruition "our" own faith. Oh, the grace that has been poured out on us!

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*How does John's characterization of God's commandments square with your typical view of a commandment?*

*Are you living like an overcomer? Why/why not? If not, what truths do you need to be paying attention to and living out?*

**SEGMENT #3: 1 John 5:6-12—The Testimony of God**

- Key Talk Points:**
- Jesus came as a real human being.
  - God, Himself, has testified about Jesus.
  - To not accept God's testimony is to reject it—there is no middle ground.

**Context/Comments:**

The text tells us that Jesus came by water and blood which is simple to observe but provides some interpretive challenges. I think the “water” refers to Jesus' baptism at the outset of His public ministry; others have associated it either with His physical birth . . . or death, when His body issued “blood and water” (John 19:34). *Every one of these interpretations entails a real human being, an empirical history.*

Don't let your students go off on a rabbit trail here. They can discuss, certainly, but bring them back to the core truth that John is driving home—the historicity of Jesus' life, ministry, and death.

John goes on to say that the three that testify are the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Take some time to discuss the cross-references from Matthew and Romans to help shed some additional light on the phrase.

In **Matthew 3:13-17** Jesus comes down from the region of Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan River in the more southern area of Judea. John initially refuses, but relents when Jesus says, “Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” After John baptizes Jesus, the heavens open and John sees “the Spirit of God descending as a dove.” He also hears a voice testify: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” We see here at the very least the Father testifying to who Jesus is.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:16-17 that the Spirit also testifies to our sonship: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.”

The first half of **Matthew 27** recounts Judas's remorse over selling out Jesus and Jesus' standing before Pilate. "Blood" is a key word here.

- Judas sinned by betraying innocent blood, v. 4
- The money he received was the price of blood, v. 6
- The field eventually purchased with the money was called the Field of Blood, vv. 7-8
- Pilate washed his hands saying he was "innocent of this Man's blood," v. 24
- The Jews said "His blood shall be on us and on our children," v. 25

It's critical to remember that the guilt of crucifying Jesus is not washed away except by His blood. Since He died for the sins of all men, every person who has ever lived is guilty of His blood. Those who fall away after receiving truth actually re-crucify to themselves the Son of God (Hebrews 6:6).

According to John, God also testifies that He has given eternal life in His Son. If you have the Son, you have life; if you don't have the Son, you don't have life. Why is this testimony so great? Because God is testifying and He can swear by no one greater than Himself. (See Hebrews 6:13; Genesis 22:16.)

To this testimony, people either believe God is true resulting in life, or they reject God as liar resulting in death. This is a biggie. To not accept is to reject. To not believe God is to call God a liar—two options, no fence.

The only way to have "the life" (v. 12) is by believing the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*How would you explain God's testimony concerning His Son to someone who doesn't know Jesus?*

*How would you respond to this statement: There are many roads that all lead to the same God!?! (Remember . . . you have to respond in grace and truth!)*

## SEGMENT #4: 1 John 5:13-17—So You May Know

- Key Talk Points:**
- You can know you have eternal life!
  - 1 John 5:13 is John's reason for writing.

### Context/Comments:

John has been writing to fellow believers—those who believe in the name of the Son of God—to assure them that they have eternal life. He doesn't offer false assurance or fire insurance but a heart diagnostic that they can use to remind themselves of what they already know.

Believers also have the confidence that God hears His people's prayers when they ask according to His will. This is not a phrase we add before "in Jesus' name, amen." Prayer is aligning our will with His. This is one of the reasons that praying scripturally is so effective . . . we know for sure what His will is!

Your class may want to discuss what "the sin leading to death" is. It is certainly not a main point John is making, but it certainly raises interest. I believe the sin leading to death is unbelief. The "brother," then, who commits this is not really a brother at all. We have to pray for his salvation so that he will accept and confess the finished work of Christ on his behalf.

We are moved from death to life only by believing in the name of the Son of God. To remain in death is to remain in unbelief. To not decide *for* Jesus is to reject and decide *against* Him; as He put it: "He who is not with Me is against Me; and He who does not gather with Me scatters" (John 12:30). It's that simple!

### Sample Discussion Questions:

*How can you know that you have eternal life?*

*How can you help others struggling with doubt over whether or not they have eternal life?*

## SEGMENT #5: 1 John 5:18-21—More of What We Know

**Key Talk Points:**

- Jesus keeps us!
- Jesus is the true God and eternal life!

### Context/Comments:

John keeps writing about what believers can know all the way to the end of his letter.

### We know that:

- no one born of God sins, v. 18
- we are of God, v. 19
- the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, v. 19
- the Son of God has come, v. 20
- God and His Son Jesus Christ, the true God and eternal life, v. 20

Although the ongoing condition of the world is not neutral—it lies in Satan's power—Jesus keeps the one who is born God and protects him from the evil one (5:18). What comfort this should bring to those who know that Satan prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). In Christ, believers are not only beloved as John has repeatedly said, they are also called and kept (Jude 1). (See also John 17:11 and 1 Peter 1:5.)

Remind your class that while believers are kept (Greek: *tereo*) from the evil one, we still have a responsibility to guard (Greek: *phyllasso*) ourselves from idols.

As you conclude the discussion time, make sure to remind your class that the one and only way we can know God is through Jesus Christ!

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

*What final things does John want us to know that we can know? Why do they matter?*

*When you are tempted and scared and otherwise troubled by this world, what truth from 1 John 5 can help you? What warning do we need to keep in mind?*

*If people ask you how they can have a relationship with God, how will you answer?*

**Final Wrap-Up Questions:**

*What has been your biggest takeaway from studying God's Word these past weeks? How is it changing the way you think and act? How will you remember it and live it out?*

*What's your next step in the Word as this study is coming to a close?*

