

1 John: A Study

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The most helpful “glasses” I put on as I began this study came from a word picture out of David Jackman’s commentary. Regarding John’s style of writing he says,

“The links between ideas are not always clear and the transition is usually very gradual...I have found the image of a spiral staircase the most helpful. As you climb the central staircase in a large palace or stately home, you see the same objects or paintings from a different angle, often with a new appreciation of their beauty. It is rather like that with the great truths John is concerned to state and revisit in the letter. The view gets more wonderful as you climb and the heavenly light shines more and more clearly until you reach the top.” Page 18

This is the way I studied I John and in Lessons 4-6 the idea of the “spiral staircase” framed the structure of the lessons. Within those lessons and again in Lesson 7 you will see the “three tests” repeated. John offers these test as the way in which the church can answer their questions about themselves and those who have left.

Enjoy the climb! It is a book with depth and simplicity. Stay long enough to gaze as you work through the lessons. Do not rush or you might miss the opportunity to draw near to the Father, which is what I pray for everyone who jumps into I John. Go be with your Father who loved us first. Gaze at the Son who atoned for our sins. Finally, cry out for the Spirit to move our hearts and open our eyes.

“Father, unless You move us we will not be moved. Unless You come we will never be different. Give us You for that is all we long for!”

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Recommended Commentaries:

- David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters*, The Bible Speaks Today Series, InterVarsity Press

- John Stott, *The Letters of John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Homework Option #1

Reading the Bible with Theological Eyes

God gave us the Bible so that we could know Him. The main purpose of the Bible is to reveal God to us—through story, history, biography, poetry, prophecy, and the apostles' teachings. God is the true hero of the Bible, and we understand it best when we look first for Him.

Thoughtful Bible reading is essential for every Christian who is serious about her (or his) relationship with God. God doesn't want a one-sided relationship with us. He calls us to work at knowing Him by spending time in His Word and by wrestling to understand what He wants us to know.

But many of us don't know how to read or where to begin.

Here are some suggestions to help both the beginner and the seasoned reader dig deeper into God's Word.

Three simple questions transform our reading of the Bible from a hunt for some comforting morsel to get us through the day into an active enriching search for God:

1. What does this tell me about God?

This question focuses my thoughts on God first, rather than on myself. You'll be surprised at what you discover when you spend time trying to understand what God is revealing about Himself.

What does God say directly about Himself? What do God's prophets tell His people about God? How does God look through the eyes of Abraham, Ruth, David, or Peter?

2. What does this tell me about myself?

God knows everything about me—the good, the bad and the ugly. Yet He will never turn away or reject me. His intimate knowledge of me opens the door for me to be honest before Him about my sin, my weaknesses and failings, my hopes and fears. And it is in the light of His character that I will begin to see myself more clearly and learn in deeper ways how much I need Him and His redemptive work in my life.

3. What difference does it make?

God never reveals Himself simply to satisfy our curiosity or even simply to give us greater insight into ourselves. We are His image bearers, and He wants for us to be like Him. So I must always probe and ask *why* He wants me to know these things about Him and about me. What difference does this make in how I trust Him, how I see my circumstances and how I relate to others?

God is a revealing God. He does not hide in the Scriptures. He wants us to know Him. His Holy Spirit specializes in helping us understand and know God better through His Word. So

as you read and study the Bible, expect God to open your eyes and help you know Him better.

Resource form *The Whitby Forum* (www.whitbyforum.com)

Bible Reading Schedule for 1 John

- Lesson 1 I John 1:1-4
- Lesson 2 I John 1:5-2:11
- Lesson 3 I John 2:12-27
- Lesson 4 I John 2:28-3:3
- Lesson 5 I John 3:4-4:6
- Lesson 6 I John 4:7-21
- Lesson 7 I John 5:1-21
- Lesson 8 I John 1-5 Review

*AS you have time, read and re-read I John in one sitting so that as you are focusing on one section you are still able to keep the whole letter in mind.

Lesson One

Who's Who and What's What?

I John 1-5

“...before we can appreciate its (I John) message fully, or feel the force of its searching analysis in our lives, we need to know a little about why these letters came to be written and who their author was.” David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters*

Goal: To understand I John in its original historical context.

FIND IT

If we were to reconstruct the context of I John as a drama there are three main characters. The author and the recipients hold a starring role but there is another group written of that holds just as much weight.

Read through I John in its entirety noting every reference to the author, the recipients and the “other” group. There is a copy of the NIV version of I John located in the Appendix for your use. The space is provided for you to write down your insights.

- **The Author**
 1. What does the author tell you about himself?

 2. What's his relationship with the readers?

 3. Does he name himself?

 4. Can you discern where is he?

- **The Recipients**

1. Who are they?

2. What is their situation?

3. What do you learn about them?

- **The “Other Players”**

1. Who are they?

2. What names are used to describe them?

3. What insight do you get from the text that helps you paint a fuller picture of them?

4. What have they done or are doing?

1. Read the notes provided in the Appendix entitled “Historical Background.” Write down anything that helps you understand the historical setting and the people involved.
2. Read the Introduction section in the commentary of your choice regarding the historical background. Note anything that helps you see “their world” clearly.
3. In a paragraph or two, summarize this lesson by answering these two questions:
What did you learn about the author and his relationship with the recipients? What is going on at the church that received this letter?

APPLY IT

1. In our churches today how would I John be insightful? In what circumstances would we turn to John for help? These are questions to press home the context in which this letter was written.
2. What stood out to you as you read through I John this week?

TALK ABOUT IT

If your study only turns into an academic adventure you miss the opportunity to interact with your great God and Father. Each lesson gives you a place to respond to the input you get from the Holy Spirit via God's word. Study is meant to press us to dialogue. In fact, all study is a dialogue as we ask God to come in the fullness of His Spirit. With that in view, take 5-10 minutes to journal with your Father about the things you saw in this lesson.

Lesson Two

Why Write?

I John 1-5

“The internal evidence furnished by the letters discloses not only the diabolical origin and damaging activity of the false teachers, but to some extent the nature of the perverted system as well. John Stott, *The Letters of John*”

Goal: To understand why John wrote this letter. What were the questions he was answering and the issues he was addressing?

In the last lesson we gave our attention to the historical context that prompted this letter. This lesson focuses on the theological context of John’s writing. Theological means the things pertaining to the understanding of God. Begin to ask the question, “What truths were being assaulted with regards to Christianity that compelled John to put pen to paper?”

FIND IT

1. Read through I John in its entirety again. Note every place that John uses the word write/written/wrote. Using the space provided record your insight to why he sent the letter.

2. Repeated words can often be clues to discover the author’s main intent and in I John it is no different. When you locate the word ask yourself questions. Here are a few to “prime the pump.” What does John want them to know? Why does he want them to know? How can they know it? What do they already know that John is passionate to remind them?

Using the chart below list what you learn as you look at the word “know.”

What We Know	How We Know	Why We Know

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Read the article entitled “Gnosticism” found in the appendix. This will help you wrap your mind around the mindset of the group that had left this church and was confusing the believers who remained. Understanding what the different forms of Gnostics believed will sensitize you to how John addresses their thought directly and indirectly.

3. In light of the Gnostic article explain why John would write so much about what the church knows?
4. Reach for your commentary and read about the message of I John, located in the introduction section. Note any additional information you want to be sure and remember.
5. Just like the last lesson, write a paragraph or two synthesizing all you studied in this lesson. Explain why John wrote this letter. What was at stake?

TALK ABOUT IT

Take 5-10 minutes and talk with your Father about all you have seen in His word this lesson.

Lesson Three

The Word of Life

I John 1:1-4

“‘The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it...’
Here is the authentic apostolic witness to the reality of Christ’s
identity as the eternal Son, seen in his earthly life, guaranteed by their personal
experience.” David Jackson, *The Message of John’s Letters*

Goal: To see John’s contribution to our understanding of Christ and to understand why he would start out his letter in this manner.

FIND IT

1. Read I John 1:1-4. What was John proclaiming?
2. Note everything you learn about the one he is proclaiming.
3. What are the reasons John gives for why he is proclaiming the Word of Life?
4. What is the authority that John has for proclaiming Christ and, though not specifically said, writing this letter? Compare this passage with John 20:1-9, 19-31.
5. Read through the rest of I John listing everything you learn about Christ. Compile what you see on the chart located in the Appendix.

6. Read the Gospel of John 1:1-5 and compare it to I John 1:1-4. How are these passages similar and different? How do they compliment one another in giving us a rich picture of Christ?

7. Grab your commentary and read the section on this passage. Often it is entitled “The Prologue.” John has some interesting uses of Greek grammar in this section that brings richness to understanding his emphasis.

8. How would this passage of John’s letter directly confront the Gnostic view of Christ? Use the Gnostic article as a reference if you need to.

9. How would this passage encourage the believers?

APPLY IT

1. In an age where partnering with one another for the cause of Christ is so prolific, does it matter what the churches believe when deciding whether to work together? How would the letter from John affect your answer?
2. Why is it important that Jesus Christ is both divine and a physical person? Have you considered why that is significant in relation to you?
3. How is your confidence in the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? In what ways can John's letter give strength and resolve to your confidence?
4. In what ways were the "eyes of your heart" opened to the beauty of Christ in this letter?

TALK ABOUT IT

Take some time to journal your thoughts with your Father. This might also be an opportune time to spend a few moments worshiping Christ out of the truths in this book. We often jump into God's word and then because of business we fly right by those things that are meant to draw us near. Don't miss the opportunity right now.

- **The Obedience Test – 2:1-6**

3. Read 1 John 2:1-6, what is John's test for seeing if we know God?

4. According to verse 4 what claim and behavior cannot go together?

- **The Love Test – 2:7-11**

5. Read I John 2:7-11, what is to be evident if someone claims to be in the light?

- **The Belief Test – 2:18-27**

7. Read I John 2:18-27, what is the truth one must believe?

Here's a helpful piece of info. You may be asking what are "antichrists?" Given the context this is not referring to anything of an apocalyptic nature. Antichrists in this passage refer to those who have rejected what they once said they believed about Christ. Antichrist characterizes people who are radically opposed to the true doctrine about Christ and are therefore his opponents.

Now, having been unable to persuade the leaders of the church to follow their teaching, they have gone "out from us."

8. With that said, write down what you see about someone who is opposed to or against Christ.

15. Using the insight from this passage and the context of the letter answer this question:
How can we know who the children of God are?

APPLY IT

1. Since it is too easy to take something out of context and teach it as truth, explain why an individual could not use this passage of I John to argue for sinless perfection?
2. What is John's solution if we do sin?
3. What other solutions do you find yourself running to when you sin rather than John's solution?
4. If you look at how you think and behave, would you say you really believe I John 1:9?
5. What are ways you try to purify yourself other than through Christ?
6. If someone was wondering whether they were a child of God or not what could they think through from this passage to bring clarity to their mind and heart?

TALK ABOUT IT

Talk to your Father about all He has impressed on your heart in this lesson and how He has revealed His word to you.

Lesson Five

God is Righteous and His Children Do What is Right

1 John 2:28-4:6

“Likeness is the proof of the relationship.”
David Jackman, *The Message of John’s Letters*

Goal: To take our second turn on John’s “spiral staircase” seeing how he revisits the three tests again bringing clarity to who Christ is and who the children of God are.

FIND IT

John takes his second pass by the three tests in these verses so for simplicity’s sake we will study this section of God’s word wearing those “glasses.” Don’t miss how often the word “know” is repeated. John’s efforts to assure those he loves cannot be over emphasized.

- **The Obedience Test- 2:28-3:10**

1. Compare and contrast those born of God/children of God with children of the devil. Keep in mind these are behavioral categories not essence or being categories.

Children of God	Children of the Devil

John makes 4 statements about Christ that could be overlooked if you read fast. Go back to 2:29, 3:3, 3:5-6, and 3:7.

2. What are the truths about Christ that you see?

3. How do they impact or affect the one born of God?

- **The Love Test-3:11-18**

4. Again John uses comparison to illustrate a point he is trying to make. This time he employs the example of two different people. Compile what you learn.

Cain	Jesus Christ

5. What is the reservoir for us to love one another?

6. What does the practical expression of love look like?

- **The Belief Test-4:1-6**

7. Read I John 4:1-6. What is John's warning in this section?

8. John moves right into "here's how you can recognize." Compile the test into the chart so you can see how he compares the Spirit of God and the spirit of the antichrist.

Spirit of God	Spirit of the Antichrist

9. What note of encouragement does John write for the believers at this church?

10. Pick up your commentary to read the insights they have for you. Note anything you want to remember or any questions you have that need further study.

APPLY IT

It does not take long to scratch your head over a verse like “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.” (I John 3:6) One reads that and then ponders over their own Christian experience only to find that there is plenty of sin in their life to say, “How is this so?” There is a tension every Christian lives with until they see Jesus face to face. It is the tension that God says, “Sin is not done here in my family” and “God have mercy on me I do sin.”

1. Go read Romans 7 to hear Paul speak of his own struggle with sin. What do you see?
2. How do you see this tension lived out in your own life?
3. What is Paul’s answer to the question he states at the end of the chapter? In what ways does I John say the same thing? You may have to go back to chapters 1 and 2 to remind yourself.
4. What did you see about Christ in this lesson that opened your eyes to his beauty?
5. Have you ever wondered what love is? Look again at I John 3:16. Stay for a moment with this truth. Just sit here. How is this verse different from what TV, magazines, and the world declare is love?
6. In what ways are Christ and our loving one another connected?

TALK ABOUT IT

Take 5-10 minutes to dialogue with the Father. The rich truths of Christ leapt off the page as He was declared righteous, pure, and without sin, take some time to gaze on Him. Worship and praise him as the Righteous One. What an amazing thing that God would reveal love to us. Is that not the heart of a gracious Father. Draw near.

Lesson Six

God is Love and His Children Love One Another

1 John 4:7-21

“He (God) decides to manifest his love to those who do not love him and who do not want to love him, to enemies and rebels armed to the teeth against him, to a world of lost sinners. Let us acknowledge once and for all that if it were not for the fact that God is love, we would have no expectation of mercy or forgiveness, no hope and no future.”

David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters*

Goal: To take the third turn up John's “spiral staircase” seeing again how he uses the three tests to elaborate on who is born of God.

FIND IT

Read through 1 John 4:7-21.

- **The Love Test – 4:7-12**

1. Looking at vs. 7-12, write down what you see about God.
2. What is true of those who know God and are born of Him? What is John's reasoning?
3. What is the impetus for such actions?

- **The Love and Belief Tests Combined – 4:13-21**

4. As you read through v. 13-21 what additional insight can you gather about those who know God? What are you told with regards to what they believe and how they act toward one another?

5. Write down what you learn about God in this section.

6. What do you learn about love?

7. Look up these passages in the Gospel of John. Where do you see the similarities in what John has written in his gospel and in this letter?

John 13:34-35

John 14:15-31

John 15:9-17

8. Grab your commentary to gain additional insight. Note anything you want to be sure and remember.

9. Summarize this lesson by once again finishing this statement. Those who have been born of God and know Him...

APPLY IT

1. With this lesson as your resource, if you had the opportunity to share with another person about God and His love what would you tell them? Write it out.
2. Unpack why John links loving others with knowing God.
3. If you saw in yourself that you do not love well, why would looking at your personal knowledge of God be of value? What might you find?
4. Looking at v. 16, would you say your day to day life is characterized by knowing and relying on the love God has for you? Are there circumstances and relationships where you do and others where you do not? Describe one.
5. Take a few moments to think through v. 18. Write out your thoughts regarding the impact of perfect love on fear. What are the fears you have in your relationship with God?
6. What does John's letter point you to with regards to those fears?

7. Verse 20 is a mirror. Write your thoughts as you reflect on this verse in light of its context and then personally.

TALK ABOUT IT

This section of John's letter is definitely a mirror into our lives but the great thing is the deep truths about our Father's love. Apart from being a mirror it is also a springboard to rich worship as we see that love comes from God, that He is love, and that He showed that love among us in Christ as our sacrifice for sin. How can we not bask in the truth that His love is not based on us loving Him but on God loving us first!

Take 5-10 minutes to worship the Father of self-initiating love. Tell Him your struggles to believe and receive His love. Tell Him of your failures to love those around you. Finally, cry out for His Spirit to come and change you.

Lesson Seven

You Can Know

1 John 5:1-21

As we have been climbing the staircase of Christian reality, with the apostle John, we have become used to certain familiar themes and favorite subjects. Although perspectives are constantly changing, we have seen how the great themes of truth and love, belief and behavior, blend together, over and over again.
David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters*

Goal: To see John's final visit to his primary pastoral concerns.

If we had been in John's presence as he crafted this letter we might have heard something like this, "I must write to the church because they are in danger of becoming confused over who the real children of God are and who Jesus Christ is. This would only leave them unsure of all that is theirs in Christ."

Chapter 5 flows from such concerns. John states one last time, somewhat repetitively yet also elaborating, what the church can know about the children of God and their Savior. To know these truths produces a foundation of assurance.

FIND IT

Chapter 5 comes into clarity as you think of a pastor reiterating what he wants them to know. Almost as if he were to say, "Just in case you missed my emphasis on this, let me say it again."

To no surprise, these 21 verses are packed with thoughts regarding the true children of God, Jesus Christ and words of assurance. For the ease of study let us break this chapter down into 4 chunks.

- **The Children of God – 5:1-5**

1. Read through these verses, watching for how interconnected the three tests are. We have studied them individually in the past 3 lessons but for John they are always interwoven. Note what you see.

The Belief Test	The Love Test	The Obedience Test

2. What are the deeper elaborations from John on the tests?

3. What does John say about the commands of God? Would you say the same?

- **Jesus Christ - 5:6-12**

It might be helpful to know the word testimony means...

4. Who or what are the three that testify about Christ?

5. Who is giving the testimony? About what?

6. What is the testimony?

- **Assurance – 5:13-15**

7. What assurance does John write about regarding eternal life?
8. What assurance does he give with respect to prayer?
9. Can you use this passage for a “name it, claim it” position? Why or why not?

- **Sin – 5:16-17**

10. Write down any thoughts or questions you have from these verses.
11. Verses 16-17 are hard to understand. To do justice to the issues and questions that arise from this portion of chapter 5, reach for the experts to get their input.

- **Children of God/Jesus Christ – 5:18-21**

12. Because John uses the word “know” 4 times in 3 verses one cannot miss his emphasis. Write down what it is John wants them to know and why he wants them to know.

13. Does anything sound new? Are there any further elaborations on the Children of God or Jesus Christ that you should highlight?

14. What do you know about the false teachers and Gnosticism that would bring insight to the context of these final words?

15. Give some thought to why John finishes out his letter with the final encouragement of v. 21. How does this statement factor into all that you have seen in the whole letter?

Dr. D. A. Carson states, "Anything that sidesteps the truth of the gospel and the incarnation of Christ is idolatry."

APPLY IT

1. If someone were to ask you how someone could show love to God, what would be your answer?
2. Have you ever sat soberly with John's words that love for God is obedience to his commands? How is your hunger to obey God? Give some description.
3. How sure are you regarding eternal life? In what ways has this chapter brought insight for you and/or assurance?
4. John says, "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true." Do you know "him who is true?" What in this chapter did you see about Christ that caused you to stop and gaze?

TALK ABOUT IT

Journal your thoughts regarding this lesson for a few minutes. How incredible that there is assurance of eternal life in Christ! Numerous things in Chapter 5 can springboard you into a time of thanksgiving to the Father. He, His Son, and the Holy Spirit are amazing.

Lesson Eight

Stepping Back to Gaze at the View

I John 1-5

“...John is above all else a pastor, entrusted with the care of a group of local churches, and anxious to help their members to learn how to think and live Christianly. At the foundation of their Christian thinking must be a right grasp of the unique divine-human person of Jesus, and at the foundation of their Christian living a transparent integrity of righteousness and love.”

John Stott, *The Letters of John*

Goal: To put together the main emphasis of John’s message to their world and to understand how it unpacks itself in our world.

FIND IT and APPLY IT

1. Stepping back into the context, we will find John answering these questions: How can we know who is a child of God? How can we know if we are born of Him? Use all the insight you gathered about the three tests from Lessons 4, 5, and 6 to form a comprehensive answer in your own words.
2. In what church circumstances would John’s letter be of value today?
3. How is his input of significance for us individually not just corporately?
4. What is John’s contribution to our understanding of Christ with regard to his life, death, and resurrection?

5. What is the impact of Christ's work according to John?

6. What is John's contribution to our understanding of God's love and our love?

7. What assurance does John give for eternal life? How is that significant to you?

8. What are the truths that have continued to stick with you throughout this study?

TALK ABOUT IT

Take 5-10 minutes to pour out your thought to your Father. Write what you desire for Him to do in you because of what you have studied in this portion of His word. Ask Him to bury deep within your mind and heart His truths so that you would continue in Him and live out of the assurance of being His child.