


THE WAY

A STUDY OF 1 JOHN

October 4th -
December 20th

Rimrock Church
A community being
transformed by
Jesus Christ.

Rimrock Church

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1 John 1:1-4

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

The book of 1 John was most likely written by the Apostle John. The language similarities to the gospel of John and the fact that the author claims to have personally known and been with Jesus physically. In these opening verses, we are introduced to some major themes found throughout the book and given some of the major motivations of why John felt compelled to write this sermon down to be shared with the churches. Like the gospel of John, we are given a message about Jesus that parallels the Genesis account of creation and Jesus as the Word. In 1 John, He is recognized as the Word of Life who was “with” the Father.

In these first verses, we are also introduced to two of John’s motivations for writing. The first is to confront the false teaching of Gnosticism that denied the physical incarnation of Jesus and the goodness of God’s redemption of physical life as well as spiritual life. The second purpose is the joy of the personal union and relationship “with the Father” (v.3) available to believers in Jesus Christ. Love is the verb that resonates throughout this sermon as we walk in “the way” of life of Jesus.



Discussion questions:

1. Think about your closest relationships with family and friends. What makes them special? What role does physical presence and touch play in developing and maintaining that relationship?
2. Think about what brings you joy in life. What are some of these things and how many of them have a physical component to them? Why is that?
3. What is the significance of John’s having been in the physical presence of Jesus? How does this fact impact his witness of who Jesus Christ is?
4. What is the significance of the invitation in verse 3, “so that you also may have fellowship with us”? Who is the “us”? What is the fruit of this fellowship?

1 John 1:5-2:2

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

As people, we have always confused the nature of God and the nature of man. We have a tendency to try and make God into our image or we try to make ourselves into little gods. John makes a clear distinction between who God is and who human beings are. He says, "God is light; in him is no darkness at all" (vs. 5). He also makes clear that human beings are sinful, "if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (vs. 8). The contrast could not be clearer. God is holy and man is sinful.

So how can we have a personal union and relationship with the Father? This is one of John's main purposes for writing this sermon as we saw in verse 3. He answers the question in John 1:9 and 2:1-2. Though we are not like God, human beings have a wonderful purpose and calling to be in a relationship with God. John makes it very clear that our identity is not in sin, but as children. We can be in a relationship with the God of light because of the atonement of Jesus Christ our advocate!

The surprising message is that this atonement is not just for the children of God, but is being made available for the whole world to receive if they believe. God is up to something big!



Discussion questions:

1. Describe a time you have been in total darkness. What did you feel and experience? How does light impact the way we live?
2. What is the significance of God being light?
3. Why is it important for us to realize we are not gods? How does confession of sin help us?
4. How does our sin affect our relationship with God? How does His atonement, advocacy, and forgiveness change that relationship? Why is it important to recognize this?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 2:3-11

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

The word command can carry a lot of baggage for a lot of people. We usually associate a command with something negative. Many have experienced oppressive expectations that come with a threat of punishment. John’s use of the word command is very different. The foundation for his use of this word is “knowing”, “this is how we know we are in him” (v.6). The context for the word command, in 1 John is an invitation to the most intimate loving relationship, like what Jesus modeled in his life with the Heavenly Father.

A command without the life-giving relationship is dead and even worse in John’s mind, a lie. The command in the context of a deep relational union with Jesus is truth and light and leads to freedom and joy. The command of Jesus to love sacrificially and unconditionally is not burdensome, rather it is the fruit of a relationship with God. The practical obedience to the unconditional mandate of the sacrificial love of brothers and sisters in our lives is the concrete evidence of this union with Jesus.



Discussion questions:

1. What has been your experience with being “commanded” to do something? If it was a negative experience, why so? If a positive experience, why and what made it so?
2. How does being “known” change how we understand the word command? How does this speak to the essential need for human beings to be known?
3. What is the connection between being loved and known by God and loving other people we are in relationship with in our lives? How does this change our relationships?
4. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 2:12-14

¹² I am writing to you,
dear children,
because your sins
have been forgiven on
account of his name.

¹³ I am writing to you,
fathers,

because you know
him who is from the
beginning.

I am writing to you,
young men,

because you have
overcome the evil one.

¹⁴ I write to you, dear
children,

because you know
the Father.

I write to you, fathers,

because you know
him who is from the
beginning.

I write to you, young
men,

because you are
strong,

and the word of
God lives in you,

and you have
overcome the evil one.

One of the primary themes of the entire Bible story is God's desire and promise to dwell with His people. God's plan has always been focused on creating a new community, a new humanity that is not individualistic but rather dependent upon God at the center and upon each other as His family made in His image. As Americans, it is a great obstacle to overcome our cultural thinking of independence and individualism to see God's design and invitation to interdependence and community worship.

In these verses, John uses family language to describe the work of God in the community. His plan of redemption and transformation touches each part of the family personally but it ripples into each part of our relational identity with each other. Jesus is saving and making a new humanity!



Discussion questions:

1. Share a story or experience from belonging to a family or close-knit community. What about this experience was so life-giving? How does this point to God's vision for His church?
2. Read 1 Peter 2:4-10; Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. How do these passages help us understand God's plan to dwell at the center of His holy community, the Church?
3. What are the specific encouragements/truths John shares in these verses with the different people who make up the community of God?
4. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

If the greatest command is to Love God with all our heart, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves, then the greatest temptation is to love something else more than God and our neighbor.

This is a great battle for the human soul, mind, and body. John highlights this battle as a battle for our love which is a desire battle. What we desire reflects what we love and worship. It is important to examine the desires in our hearts. John invites us to reflect and look inward to see what we truly desire. Do we love the world system and its way more than God and His way?

John breaks up the evil, dark world system into three parts so we can better understand what he means. The lust of the flesh is the corrupted physiological desires outside of God such as food, comfort, sex, drink. The lust of the eyes is the pursuit of life in what we can temporarily see or experience like material possessions, money, comparing ourselves to others (social media), and outward appearance facade without inward transformation. The pride of life is looking for life outside of God in fame, power, influence over others, and using people and things for any glory outside of God.

John makes clear that though these things are real in their outward appeal, they are temporary and passing away and do not satisfy. Desiring God and His glory is the way to experience Eternal Life.



Discussion Questions:

1. Share a dream or desire that you had in the past that came to reality.
2. How would you explain the connection between love and desire? How does desire manifest itself in our lives?
3. Give some practical examples of what John is talking about in the love of the world v.16 (the temptation to desire outside of God).
4. What is the significance of these lesser desires passing away (temporary vs. eternal)?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 2:18-27

¹⁸ Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the anti-christ denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he promised us - eternal life. ²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

The reality is that there are some in the community of God, the church, and the body of Jesus Christ, who walk away. Even this past year we have seen some high-profile Christians who say they no longer believe and are rejecting Jesus and his people. John says we should not be surprised. In fact, Jesus warned about this reality that some would be led astray by the desires of this world to no longer remain in Jesus. John says this is evidence that they never belonged to Christ. The issue is not for us to judge (God judges) but rather, how do we who remain stay encouraged and not be discouraged? Just like in John's day, it is a gut punch when people we love and respect deny Jesus and walk away from the community of God and even become anti-Christ.

The encouragement for those who remain in Christ and in His church (family, community, body) is the fact that we are still believing and still participating in Jesus' way. This perseverance is the evidence of a real genuine faith and anointing because of the grace of God.



Discussion questions:

1. How does it feel to be abandoned? Share an experience where you felt abandoned by someone.
2. Read Matthew 24:9-14. How does Jesus prepare us for this reality? What is the connection between love and desire and turning away from Jesus? Why does John point out that some people in the church will turn away from Jesus and His community?
3. What encouragement does John give us in verses 24-25?
4. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 3:11-24

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

What does it mean to love others? John gives us one of the best Biblical definitions of love in these verses, "Jesus laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters". The definition of love is found in Jesus and it is characterized by sacrifice for the good of another. The contrast to love is hatred. Cain and Abel provide an origin story to the human condition of broken relationships.

Envy, pride, fear, anger, and violence all play out in this story to illustrate what John is talking about in describing sin as the "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" and its effect on human relationships.

This teaching is straight from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where the sinful condition of the human heart is exposed even in our thoughts of anger towards others. Before God, this anger and strife with others is the same as murder. So how can we live in God's kind of love? John is very clear on this point. It is the Spirit of God living in us! This truth frees us from the trap of asking what you can do for God. Rather we say, what can God do through us?



Discussion questions:

1. In your own words, give a definition of the kind of love God has and gives us. How is this definition different than the world's definition of love?
2. How practical and concrete is God's love? How practical should this be in our lives? Give some practical examples of what it would mean to love someone with God's kind of love?
3. Why is anger and hatred such an antithesis to God's kind of love? What does anger reveal about our own hearts?
4. What is the key to living out God's kind of love in our lives (see v.24)?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 4:1-6

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. ⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

In these verses, we find one of John's main purposes for sharing this inspired sermon from God. A false teaching had been spreading in the churches and continues to spread in today's church. The early church identified this false message as Gnosticism. This false understanding of Jesus continues to infiltrate many people's belief systems today. Gnosticism, at its root, is a denial of the goodness of God's creation and the goodness of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. Gnosticism distorts what is good and tries to create a super spirituality that denies the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all things. It is a compartmentalizing of good and bad things into categories that run contrary to who God is.

The true gospel is that Jesus came in the flesh (Incarnation = Christmas!) and is from God (v.2). Jesus confronted the Pharisee's super spirituality by eating and drinking with sinners. He came as a real-life human baby and touched people and modeled a relationship of love with people in action. This was also demonstrated in how he loved the heavenly Father by not doing his own will but the will of the Father. He was born in a physical body, He died a physical death on a physical cross and His resurrected body could be touched and seen by the apostles (1 John 1:1-2). This physical reality of God's good story in human history is foundational to the revelation of the goodness of God.

This is why John makes it very clear that those who belong to Jesus hear His voice and listen. The true gospel is one of eternal life that impacts every aspect of existence, including our physical bodies and everything we are and do right now!



Discussion questions:

1. Have you ever been tricked into believing something that was not true?
2. What is the process of deception in our minds? How do we end up listening to voices that don't speak truth?
3. What is the significance of Jesus defining absolute truth? Why is this important in our culture today?
4. What are some ways you have heard voice of Jesus? How do you recognize the voice of Jesus?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 4:7-21

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Love is a gift. In this Christmas season, we are reminded of how important gifts are. The reason we give gifts at Christmas time as Christians is not because we are consumers. No! The reason we give gifts is that we worship a gift-giving God. A gift always costs the giver something but costs the receiver nothing. In these verses, we are reminded that God gave the most valuable gift he could ever give us because He loved us. He gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice (v.10). In this way, God teaches us about love by demonstrating it first.

One of the greatest statements about God in the Bible is found in this chapter. God is Love.

This truth shapes all of existence and it shapes the destiny of human existence above all. John sees a direct correlation between the God of love who gives gifts to Christians and Christians who follow Jesus by being givers to others. This relational union of Christ in us, through the Holy Spirit, becomes a physical reality of the love of God in our world. This is why followers of Jesus have no fear in love. We have all the resources given to us in Jesus Christ to love others unconditionally. In this way, we are the light of the world!



Discussion questions:

1. Think and share about a special gift you have received in the past. What made the gift so special to you?
2. What is the significance of God's gift to humanity in Jesus Christ?
3. How does being known by God and loved by God change how we see God, ourselves, and the world around us?
4. Put verses 13-16 in your own words. How do these verses describe the relationship we have with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? What does this mean if this is the ultimate goal of the Christian life?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 5:1-12

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶This is the one who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Being in the birthing room when my three sons were born was an incredible experience. Words can't describe the miracle of birth. It is also a very physical experience. My wife's experience was much more painful than mine. In birth, there is lots of blood, water, and breath (spirit). John builds on these physical images to help us understand the reality of Jesus as God's son and the one who saves us through new birth into God's family. These can be confusing verses with so much imagery and references to different things but the context is clear. John is inviting us to believe that Jesus is truly the incarnation of God (He was physically born, physically baptized, physically crucified, and physically resurrected) to save us wholly (body, mind, spirit) from sin and death. How do we know if we are born into God's family? How do we know if we have this relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

John's answer is if we are obedient to Jesus' command to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This fruit and testimony reveal our true identity as children of God who possess eternal life. In birth, the most glorious moment is when the baby takes his or her first breath. This is the life that God gives. This breath is in us as we live, move, and have our being in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Discussion questions:

1. If you have children, what was the birthing experience like?
2. What is the significance of birth being used as an analogy of what God is doing in us and in all of creation?
3. How does Jesus' physical birth, death, and resurrection give testimony to the reality of God's plan of eternal life?
4. Verse 12 tells us clearly how we can know for certain we have life. What does it mean to have Jesus Christ? What does this look like in our daily lives?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

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5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?

1 John 5:13-21

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him.

¹⁶ If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. ¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. ¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. ²⁰ We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹ Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

How can we truly know that God exists and that He hears us and loves us? This is an important question and one that John is keen to answer and help us have assurance in the answer. He makes a bold statement in verse 13, “so that you may know that you have eternal life”. When John uses the phrase “eternal life” he is not talking about life after death, although that is true as well. He is emphasizing our lives right now with God. Jesus is the answer to the question! This is the significance of Christmas. God is with us and we can know him and see the power of His presence in our lives right now. The Christmas proclamation is Emmanuel: God with us! I like how Francis Schaeffer states this truth, “He is a God who is there and He is not silent”. God has spoken to us clearly in Jesus Christ. Will we receive the gift of eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?



Discussion questions:

1. Describe a time you felt truly known and accepted by some one. How did this affect your life?
2. What is the significance, for you, of being known by God and knowing God? How does this give us confidence and assurance in our relationships and life?
3. How does it change our faith to not see life after death as the goal, rather life with Jesus as the goal now and forever? If we possess eternal life now then there is nothing gained after death. We have everything we need right now. How will that change the way we live and die?
4. If God himself is the ultimate treasure, then how can idolatry affect our life and joy?
5. What do we learn about God in these verses? What do we learn about ourselves? Is there a command to obey or an invitation to respond to?