

## Background to 1 John

### Who wrote it?

The apostle John wrote this letter. The apostle is not to be confused with John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for Jesus (see Luke 3). Instead, John was one of the first 12 disciples of Jesus (see Luke 5). He was one of the first disciples called by Jesus and he was with him through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. There was perhaps no greater eyewitness of Jesus Christ than John.

### When did he write it?

It is believed that John wrote this letter while he was living in Ephesus towards the end of his life, at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, somewhere between 85-95 A.D. At this point, he was most likely the last remaining disciple of the original 12, and as a result, had a great deal of respect and authority within the early church.

### Who did he write it to?

He wrote this letter to a group of churches in and surrounding the city of Ephesus. John is writing as their pastor, in a very compassionate and concerning way, as evidenced by the personal and affectionate language he uses to address them: "*My little children*" (2:1; 2:28) and "*Beloved*" (4:1; 4:7).

### Why did he write it?

There was a rival group of people who had left the church (see 2:19), who John refers to as the "antichrists" in 2:18, and were trying to lure the churches away from the central truths of Christianity (see 2:26). It is believed that this group was influenced by the beginnings of a movement known as Gnosticism. There were two principles of Gnosticism: the impurity of matter and their secret knowledge. In their minds, based on their impure and evil view of matter, God could never become matter, or become a human being. This led them to deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of God (see 2:22; 4:2). Instead, they believed they had a relationship with God, not through Jesus Christ, but through their "secret" knowledge.

Well aware of this growing movement, John writes with two goals in mind: first, to correct the false teaching, and expose the false teachers in the process; second, to correctly explain that fellowship with God and other Christians is dependent upon walking the light and loving one another.

## Lesson #1: 1 John 1:1-4

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian has—and brings others into—deep and joy-bringing fellowship with God and others through Jesus Christ.
- **Summary of Passage:** This passage includes one really long and confusing sentence. It's hard to know what exactly John is saying. The key is to look at the main verb in this passage, which, although it does not happen until verse 3, is “we proclaim.” John is primarily concerned with proclaiming the truth of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Especially against the rival group who denied the validity of his incarnation, John is clear in affirming that Jesus is more than a man, he is Christ. Jesus, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity, who has existed before the beginning and was with the Father in Heaven, came down to earth as a human being. John can testify to that fact, as he heard, saw, and touched Jesus Christ. John has a clear purpose for proclaiming the truth about Jesus Christ: so that other Christians can join in fellowship with him, and ultimately with God. In short, John proclaims the truth of Christ for the sake of fellowship with believers. That was his heart for the early church and that becomes our heart today: to be in fellowship with other believers because of Jesus Christ.
- **Interpretation Issues:**
  - The phrase “concerning word of life” in v.1 is another way of saying the gospel and is not a title of Jesus. The first verse could be re-worded in this way: “In our proclamation concerning the message of life in Christ...”
  - The “our joy” in v.4 is a difficult issue. Does it include the audience or does it refer only to John and the other disciples? The oldest manuscripts have either “your” or “our.” It is best to conclude that the audience is included in the joy, regardless of either “your” or “our” is used. One translation captures this idea: “we write this in order that the joy of us all may be complete.” In same way that John hopes the churches share in the fellowship, he also wants them to share in the joy (See Psalm 16:11).

### \*\*Introduction:

- Spend some time sharing about old childhood and high school friends. Who was your best friend growing up? What made your friendships so great? Do you still have contact with that person?

## **\*\*Discussion Questions**

- Discuss what John says is at the core of the gospel? **Hint:** v.1-2 and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
  - Why do you think he emphasizes that? **Hint:** In other words, what's so important about the incarnation? Why did Jesus Christ have to become a real human being? **Hint:** Hebrews 4:15-16 – Jesus had to become a human being so he could live a life without sin, and thus, be an acceptable sacrifice on our behalf, to appease the wrath of God.
- As noted above, the main verb of this passage is “we proclaim,” and that is most important to John. He wants to remind the early Christians of what is central to the faith. Brainstorm as a class some of the best practices from experience in reminding each other about the good news about Christ. As you think about reminding each other of the gospel, what are ways that have worked best for you? What are ways that haven't worked so well?
  - **Follow-up:** What needs to be emphasized about Jesus today?
- The main reason why John proclaimed Jesus Christ was, as he says in v.3, “so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Fellowship is an important idea for John. He wants the early church to be in fellowship, but a certain kind of fellowship. Discuss these two questions: What is the foundation for Christian fellowship? **Hint:** Look at the last part of this verse; the foundation for Christian fellowship is Christ.
  - **Follow-up:** How does the foundation impact the type of fellowship Christians should have? What words would you use to describe it?
  - **Follow-up:** How does, or should it compare with non-Christian fellowship? (Create two lists of words that compare Christian with non-Christian fellowship).
- John concludes this passage with the topic of joy. What's important about joy being described after fellowship? Examine the connection between fellowship and joy.
  - **Further Study:** Joy is also incomplete if others around us are not experiencing the gospel of Christ. John's joy will be made complete when the early churches share in his fellowship, and so our joy will be made complete when we help others share in our fellowship. Who can you help share in your fellowship, and how can you do that? In other words, how can your group help others enter into good Christian fellowship?

## **\*\*Application:**

- Evaluate (and discuss) the quality of Christian fellowship that you have in your life right now. What are some individual and group goals you could set?
- Who is someone that you could invite to join your fellowship?

## Lesson #2: 1 John 1:5-10

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian lives in a way that reflects God's character.
- **Summary of Passage:** In this passage, John declares the message that he received from Jesus and is proclaiming to the early church: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." This is a statement describing God's very nature. There are two important meanings attached to the phrase "God is light." First, on an intellectual level, light is truth, while darkness is ignorance. Second, on a moral level, light is purity and holiness, while darkness is evil and ungodliness. As one commentator describes, "to affirm that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all is to affirm God's absolute holiness and complete freedom from any taint of evil." It seems in this passage that John is emphasizing God's pure and holy nature, as he proceeds to discuss the early church's response to sin. John wants the church to know that because of who God is, because God is light, then that has serious implications for their relationship with him. If we, as sinfully enslaved human beings, are going to go deeper in our relationship with a God, who is completely free from anything remotely sinful, then somehow the issue of sin needs to be continually addressed. John addresses different pitfalls to avoid with three false claims all starting with "If we say..." (v.6, v.8, v.10). The key to this lesson will be to help people to see the truth of God's holiness and their own sinfulness, while recognizing the provision of Jesus Christ to deal with sin, which John affirms in v.7 and v.9.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - In v.9 John says when we confess our sins Jesus will both forgive and cleanse us. What's the difference between those two words? If any? One commentator gives this helpful distinction: Forgiveness focuses on the relationship of the person with God while cleansing focuses on relationship of the person with sin. In other words, "the one affects peace, the other our character." We are forgiven of our sins to create peace with God and ourselves and we are cleansed of our sins to develop holiness within ourselves.

### \*\*Introduction

- This is a more personal lesson, so you could start out the time by having people share their most embarrassing moments/stories. It could help create an openness and vulnerability needed for this passage.

**\*\*Discussion Questions**

- The primary idea in this passage is God is light. And so, it's vital for us to not only have that knowledge but to really believe and experience it. I suggest that the more we truly realize God as light, the more that will transform the way we live. How do we do that? Read and reflect on these selected passages on God's Holiness: (Perhaps write these verses on notecards and pass them out as people arrive; they can read these verses when you say).
  - Leviticus 19:1-2; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 77:11-15; Isaiah 5:16; Isaiah 6:1-5
  - Isaiah 43:15; John 17:11; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Revelation 4:8.
  
- In v.6, John refutes the claim that fellowship with God is possible if we walk in the darkness. If we claim deep fellowship with God while we live in darkness, we are liars, for that is contrary to the very nature of God. What does John mean by "walk in darkness"? Describe a person who would be the prototype for someone who is walking in darkness. What would they do? How would they think?
  - **Hint:** A definition if needed could be: A persistent movement, or lifestyle, towards sin. Think of it like a flight, East is darkness and West is light. Is your flight heading East or West? You could still be flying West towards the light and have turbulence and a few bumpy moments, but all in all you are still heading towards holiness.
  - **Darkness – Further Study:** Evaluate this truthfulness of this person's claim: I find myself struggling with the same sin (perhaps pick a certain sin that is relevant and non-threatening to the group) over and over, but I am not walking in darkness. Discuss the difference between struggling with sin and walking in the darkness. Perhaps you can look at Romans 7 and talk about Paul's struggle with sin, or look at Galatians 5:16-25.
  
- In v.7 John states "But if walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...". Two discussion points from this verse:
  - What does it mean to "walk in the light"? In a similar way that you did for darkness, describe the person who would be a prototype for walking the light? What would that person do? Not do? How would that person think?
    - **Hint:** We are to walk in the light "as he is in the light," so go back to the understanding of what it means for God to be light, in both the intellectual and moral way, and base your answer off of that. To walk in the light must include a consumption and processing of God's revealed truth, the Bible, as well as a continual putting to death of sin.
    - **Hint:** One commentator described it this way: "Walking the light is a persistent movement in the direction of holiness."

- **Follow-up -- Think practically:**
      - What are ways that we can continually walk more and more in the light? Maybe brainstorm as a large or small group, what are the best practices for pursuing holiness from the group? What sorts of things have helped you really walk in the light?
- As John discusses what it means to walk in the light, he addresses the issue of sin. In v.8-10 John warns against the error of denying that “have no sin” and denying that “we have not sinned,” while giving the proper response to sin. Walking in the light demands a confrontation with darkness and not a denial of it.
  - **Examine the wrong ways to deal with sin:**
    - Hint: Denial of sin. Help them think through how and why people deny sin. What’s appealing about ignore/denying sin?
      - Not knowing what sin is...or isn’t...Being afraid of judgment by others...Feeling too guilty...Preserve their self-image...
- Discuss the response that John does want and the promise God gives us.
  - **Hint:** Instead, in v.9, John states the appropriate response to sin: confession. What role does or should confession play in a growing Christian’s life?
  - **Hint:** Contemplate the basis of God’s character for our forgiveness: Anything surprising? Wouldn’t we expect love, mercy, and grace?
- How does walking the light impact our relationships with other people? How this group change if everyone began walking more in the light?
  - **Answer:** “A true Christian will find the searchlight of God’s truth constantly exposing the parts of his life that need to be confessed as sin and left behind.” For example, if we are walking in the light, the sin of stinginess could be exposed, and we could become more generous with our friends, family, and co-workers.

## **\*\*Application**

- Give the group time to assess and confess the patterns of sin in their life. This is a personal lesson, and confessing sin to a group of people, no matter how close, is simply not going to happen. This could be a good time to give the people a notecard and 10-15 minutes at the end of the lesson to be by themselves to reflect on and confess the un-confessed and potentially hidden sins in their life.
  - What sins are they struggling with?
  - How are they affecting your relationships?
  - How can they begin to deal with those sins?

### Lesson #3: 1 John 2:1-6

#### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** For a growing Christian, Christ is the answer for sin, the voice to be listened to, and the example to be followed.
- **Summary of the Passage:** This passage is all about Christ. It's about his work on the cross, his commands to follow, and his behavior to imitate. As a growing Christian contemplates Christ, two main ideas emerge. The first main idea is about what not to do. In the preceding passage John emphasizes the reality and impact of sin on our relationship with God and others; we cannot ignore it. However, John does not want to promote sin either. In other words, sin is real but sin is not acceptable. In fact, John's desire is that they do not sin. But, if (and when) they sin, we have the person and work of Jesus Christ to deal with our sins. The second main idea is about what to do. We are not to sin, but instead, we are obey to Christ's commands and imitate his character. For this is how we truly grow in him.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - In v.2 John says that Jesus is the "propitiation for our sins." What does that mean? The word propitiation means "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favor." Although in the NIV and other translations propitiation is replaced with "atoning sacrifice," it carries the same meaning: on the cross, Jesus satisfied the wrath of God, which was instigated by our sin. It is also used in 1 John 4:10.
  - In v.5 the phrase "the love of God is perfected," is used. What does that mean? It could mean "God's love for man" or "man's love for God" or "God's kind of love." The best, and most likely, interpretation is "man's love for God." A Christian's love for God is made complete through moral obedience.

#### \*\*Introduction

- Have some time share some of the grossest thing you have eaten and/or seen...as a way to transition into thinking of the "grossness" of sin and our response to it.

**\*\*Discussion Questions**

- In the first verse John states clearly his desire for the early church and for us not to sin. It is a normal and a real part of a believer's life, but it is by no means acceptable. Sin is detestable in John's eyes. What makes sin so detestable to John? Why should sin be so detestable to us?
  - **Follow –up:** When you think about the Christian church today, especially in America, how would you rate the attitude towards sin? On a scale of 1-10, what number would you give and why?
  
- The goal of John is that we would not sin, and yet we all do. When a growing Christian does sin, what should their reaction be? A tendency could be guilt, fear, shame....but where does John immediately point us? John points to Jesus Christ as the reason why believers have no need to fear when they do in fact sin. There is no room for guilt or feeling of condemnation. God has provided a way against sin. According to John, what is it about Jesus Christ that comforts us when we sin? See also Romans 8:1.
  - **Hint: Three parts**
    - His heavenly advocacy.
      - Christ is advocating for us, much like a defense lawyer, in heaven. He pleads our case to the Father.
    - His righteous character.
    - His propitiatory death.
      - As one commentator put it, "Our advocate does not plead that we are innocent, or adduce extenuating circumstances. He acknowledges our guilt and presents his vicarious work as the ground of our acquittal."
  
- John switches gears in v.3-5. Christ is still at the center, but instead of focusing on what not to do, i.e., sin, John turns our attention towards what to do: obey Christ's commands. Help them to see that the greatest commandment is surely Matthew 22:34-40, but it is not the only commandment by any means. This could be a good time to divide the group to examine the breadth of Jesus' commands. What does Jesus command exactly? (Pick as many passages as you want – don't feel like you have to read and discuss all of them).
  - Matthew 5
  - Matthew 6
  - Matthew 7
  - Matthew 10:26-33
  - Matthew 11:28-29
  - Matthew 18:7-9
  - Matthew 18:15-19
  - Matthew 19:1-12
  - Any others you want to throw in...

- **Follow-up:** Our love for God is seen in the way we obey his commands. See John 14:15 when Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Obedience in Jesus' love language so to speak. We show our love when we obey his commands. Given the centrality of obedience, spend some time analyzing the catalysts for obedience and catalysts for disobedience (other voices/influences in our life?)
- John continues a similar theme in v.6, as he describes another behavior of a growing Christian. A growing Christian not only obeys Jesus' commands but imitate Jesus' behavior. We "ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." In a similar way that we examined Christ's commands, let's spend time examining Christ's character. John does not explain exactly what it means to walk as Christ walked. Let's figure it out. What conclusions do you draw from these stories, and what implication does that have if you want to walk as Jesus walked?
  - Philippians 2:5-11 -- Humility
  - Mark 2:13-17 – Hanging out with tax collectors
  - Mark 8:1-3 – Feeding the four thousand
  - Mark 11:15-19 – Clearing of the temple
  - John 8:1-11 – Woman caught in adultery

### **\*\*Application**

- Challenge the group to choose one command of Jesus and one character attribute that they can intentionally focus in on this next week.

## Lesson #4: 1 John 2:7-14

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** For growing Christians of all stages, there is one thing that is certain in a conflicting world: the command to love others.
- **Summary of Passage:** Throughout the first chapter, John made it clear that sin was a real and impactful reality for all people and believers (1:8-10). This reflects our current place in history, which John describes this way in v.8 of our passage today: “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” We live after the first coming of Christ and before the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, and this middle ground includes both the darkness of sin and the light of Christ. In the midst of the conflicting world, and in the midst of darkness, there are two certainties for the growing Christian: the call to the love and the assurance of their faith. After speaking of obedience to Christ’s commands in general (2:3-5), John now zeros on Christ’s greatest commandment: to love others (Matthew 22:34-40). Love is a sign of a person moving into deeper fellowship with God. But if a person does not love, and instead hates, it is sign that the person is far from God. While encouraging them to love, John goes to great lengths in v.12-14 to assure them of their spiritual standing before God. It seems that John wants Christians to continually assess their treatment of others but not their standing before God.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - In v.8 John writes, “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” This verse refers to the current stage the world it is in; it is often referred to with the phrase “already, but not yet.” It means that Christ, the true light, has *already* come and defeated Satan and death on the cross; that victory has been won. His light is shining. *And yet*, this world and all of us who are in it are not perfect, as Satan, the darkness, still has power and sin is still a part of reality. But he is passing away. There is a mixture of darkness and light, of the power of Christ and the power of Satan, in this world, and the conflict will continue until Christ returns. In other words, Christians live in a world where Christ’s light is shining, but it has not driven out all the darkness of sin.
  - The groups of people addressed in v.12-14, who are named “little children,” “fathers,” and “young men,” have received much debate. Against some people who think that the names are to be taken literally in terms of physical age and maturity, the best interpretation is in terms of spiritual maturity. The little children refers to new believers, the young men refers to the developing Christians who are fighting the good fight, and the term fathers refers to the mature and seasoned believer.

## \*\*Introduction

- Have people share their favorite, best, funniest, most important news story of the week. Be sure to have one or two yourself. It could be a personal story as well – or you could share hi/low of the weeks. This helps transition into the darkness/light world we live in. (Need help – See “Headlines” from Jay Leno).

## \*\*Discussion Questions

- In v.8 John describes the setting of this world by saying, “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” Two questions: What does that mean or refer to? **Hint:** See above.
  - **Follow-up:** In what ways do you see and experience v.8 – “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” How do you see that truth in the world? If you think about the world, what are signs of the darkness and what are signs of light? Think globally...but also think locally, and even personally.
- After exhorting the believers to obey Christ's command in the last passage, discuss what command John focuses on. What makes it old and new?
  - **Hint:** Old – See Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:19; New – John 13:34
  - **Follow-up:** Discuss the priority of love in a Christian's life by also looking at 1 Cor. 13.
- The language of Old/New commandment is interesting, especially in an age focused on grace and love. John is referring to an old commandment, a commandment from the law in the Old Testament. Furthermore, in Galatians 6:2 Paul refers to the “law of Christ” which refers to all his commandments, but in particular the law of love. And at times, the ideas of grace and law are divorced from each other. This can lead to many people claiming grace while ignoring the law. They will say, “It doesn't matter how I live, God will forgive me.” How do we stress God's grace and Christ's law? Aren't we free in Christ?
  - **Observe Romans 6:12-20 and share your observations.**
- In v.10 John describes how those who love have “no cause for stumbling.” The phrase “no cause for stumbling” refers to the person giving love. He is making a connection between our treatment of others and our spiritual growth. The same connection is made in v.11, when John states, “But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” Spend some time discussing the connection between our treatment of others, both loving and hateful, and our spiritual growth. What sort of ripple effects do our actions of love and hate have? What is the connection between our love of others and our spiritual growth? How does our love for others impact our spiritual growth? In other words, what sort of spiritual development is John advocating for? How do you see that playing practically?

- **Hint:** John is making a direct connection between how we treat others and our own sanctification. When we love others, we are removing barriers in our own hearts, minds, and lives to stumble over. We grow spiritually through loving others; in a similar way we stumble around spiritually when we hate other people. For example, when we decide to love someone, there is no cause to stumble into gossiping or envying that person.
- Analyze the way that John speaks to the different groups of people of their spiritual standing (12-14). What does he say to the little children, to the father, and to the young men to comfort and assure them? Have people share which group they identify with the most, and why. How does assurance play a role in how we love others?

**\*\*Application**

- Go back to the list of places of darkness, pick one area in particular that is in the most need of love and discuss how could this group focus on loving and bringing light to that area?

## Lesson #5: 1 John 2:15-17

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian interacts with the world—and the things in it—in such a way that reflects his or her love for God.
- **Summary of Passage:** In this passage John warns the early church of the enticing, yet deceiving quality of the world. He identifies three marks of the world: “the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions (or pride of life in the NIV). All of those things can be very appealing, but John warns us of the true nature of the world in v.17 – “the world is passing away along with its desires.” There is a temporary reality to this world; it will not last forever. That’s what makes it deceiving. From the outside, the world appears to be reflecting a permanency; however, one day, this world will be pass away and be no more. It is here where the temporary nature of the world is confronted by the true permanency of God. It is possible not to pass away as God never does. And for us who do the will of God, we too transcend the temporary nature of this world and enter into the eternal realm with God through Jesus Christ.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - What does the “world” mean here? In other places in John’s writing, most notably, John 3:16, we are told that God loved the world, and yet, John tells the early church to not love the world – what’s up with that? It’s important to note that John obviously uses the term “world” differently. In John 3:16 it is right to infer that “world” refers to people, which makes sense that God so loved the people. In our passage, as one commentator defined it, the world is “the life of human society as organized under the power of evil.” In other words, the world in this passage refers to the society of fallen human beings apart from God. It refers less to individual people and more to a way of life against God. One translation captures this meaning by rephrasing the verse to say, “the godless world.”

### \*\*Introduction

- Spend some time sharing what they did over the weekend – hobbies/events, etc. This can transition into seeing how much we interact with the world, and today we are going analyze what a proper relationship should be in the world.

**\*\*Discussion Questions**

- What does John mean by the word “world”?
  - **Hint:** In v.16 he identifies three characteristics of the world: the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions (or pride of life in the NIV). In short, our cravings, our lusts, and our pride.
  - **Follow-up:** It seems like John has a negative view of the world, but just how negative is it? Discuss this statement: Everything in the world's culture today is evil. Why or why not? Are there any positive aspects of our culture? Examples of some positive things – desire for social connection? Growing work of charity?
- Why does John command us not to love the world? Analyze the reasons John gives.
  - **Hint: Two Major Reasons**
    - v.15b – Love for the world is incompatible with love for God
      - See Matthew 6:24
    - v.17 – The world is passing away...
  - **Follow-up:** Describe what the consequences could be for loving the world. EX: What would be the result of our community if we began to pursue the world?
- John is calling us not to love the world, but it can be difficult. Despite the ugliness of the world, there is an appeal. Evaluate the appeal of the world. List the top things most appealing in the world. Have people share the area of the life that is most appealing for them, or where they may have a love.
- He has clearly commanded not to love the world, but instead of the loving the world, how are we called as Christians to interact with the world? This could be a good time to break down into smaller groups and study Matthew 5:13-16 and John 17:14-18. Then discuss this question: If we are not to love the world, how do we properly engage with the world without loving it?
  - Should we isolate ourselves? Should we consume? What are some dangers to be acknowledged when dealing with the world? How do we remain involved in the world and yet not in love with it? Be sure to be practical. Try to pick one hot issue to debate, depending on the context. Homeschooling, Private vs. Public School, Alcohol, etc.

**\*\*Application**

- At the heart of this passage is John's heart to steer clear from the world – for the things of this world are not from God and they are temporary. Encourage your group to spend time reflecting on their involvement with the world, and even confessing the ways that they are in love with the world. And on the flip side, the most positive one, encourage your group to find ways to break their love of the world, and pursue their love of God.

## Lessons 6: 1 John 2:18-27

### \*\*Leader Background:

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian avoids the deception of false doctrine through abiding in the truths of the gospel and the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Summary of the Passage:** This passage is a return to a similar theme found in the beginning of the book in chapter: the person of Jesus. There were some people who had left the church, who John refers to as the antichrists, who had their own view on Jesus. They were a part of the Gnostic-influenced group that did not believe that the Christ and Jesus were the same people. They thought that the Christ descended on Jesus the man at his baptism and departed before his crucifixion. Jesus was not actually the Son of God. Not only had the left the church, but they were trying to deceive the other members in the church as well (see v.26). Seeing this, John encourages the early Christians to return to God's Word and the fundamental truths of the gospel, and to live out of the presence of the Holy Spirit within them. Essentially, John wants the early Christians, as he wants us to confront heresy (false belief) with God's Word and God's Spirit. And as we abide in those two things, we enjoy Jesus' promise of eternal life.
- **Interpretation Issues:**
  - **V.18 –“antichrists.”** The term is tossed around in Christian circles quite frequently, but sometimes without a true understanding of what it means. Here is a definition: an antichrist is an adversary to Christ. Also, notice the plurality in the term used; there is more than one antichrist.
  - **V.20 – “anointed by the Holy One.”** This phrase sounds so mystical and yet it is crucial to understanding this passage (it is also referenced in v.27). The anointing by the Holy One is a synonym for being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. There is a similar reference made by Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.
  - **V.24 – “what you heard from the beginning.”** We saw this phrase back in 2:7, and its repeated twice in this verse even. As a reminder, “the beginning” refers back to the beginning of their faith. It is the true apostolic message of the gospel. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a man, lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, arose a victorious resurrection, and ascended a triumphal ascension.

### \*\*Introduction:

- What great/bad ideas have been shared with you or you have shared lately? We are a culture that loves new ideas...but sometimes new doesn't always mean better...that can transition into sharing how some people were trying to share with the early Christians a not so great idea...

**\*\*Discussion Questions:**

- **Understanding the antichrists.** Discuss the antichrists. V.18-23. Help them think through why John considers them the antichrists – see v.22 (wrong theology and then teaching that wrong theology to Christians)—and what two things did the antichrists lose? **Hint:** The two results of the antichrists are losing fellowship with true believers (v.19) and true fellowship with God (v.23).
  - **Follow-up:** Where, if anywhere, do you see this sort of “antichrist –type” behavior in this world? In other words, what religions doubt who Christ is? Try to identify certain accounts of Christ and Christianity that are different from the truth. What ideas do we need to on the look out for? EX: Jehovah’s Witnesses.
  - **Follow-up:** John goes out of his way to point out again and again the false teachers among them. It makes me wonder if the early church even knew the false teachers were false until John mentioned them. Evaluate this claim: Antichrists are easily spotted.
    - **Hint:** I would have to say no. Often times “new ideas” about Christianity are appealing and interesting. We may think that person is really smart and so the new idea must be true.
  - **Follow-up:** How should you respond these false teachings/teachers?
    - How tolerant should we be? Is everyone entitled to belief whatever is right for them?
    - **Hint:** Inward response: Taking a cue from John, we make sure to warn other Christians about false beliefs.
    - **Hint:** Outward response: Taking a cue from the Great Commission, we need to disciple the false teachers, if its within our ability. Sometimes its not when we read about it in a book or something.
- **Combating the antichrists:** There are two pieces of advice he gives. He encourages them in two ways to remain faithful against the teaching and persuasion of the antichrists. The best way to protect yourself from wrong theology is to abide in...
  - **The truths of the Gospel.** John is concerned about these antichrists, who are the same people that are trying to deceive the early Christians (as noted in v.26), and he encourages them to “let what you hear from the beginning abide in you.” John is encouraging them to remain true to fundamental truths of the Gospel. There is strong emphasis on knowledge and proper theology. **Discuss with your group John’s first encouragement to remain faithful in the face of pressure from the antichrists in v.24.**

- What is that they have heard from the beginning?
- What does it mean to abide in these things? How do we abide?  
This could be a great time to share best practices for how people:
  - Study the Bible...
  - Seek God in Prayer...
- Have them fill in this statement perhaps: It is \_\_\_\_\_ important to be a good theologian. Why or why not?
  - Try to help them see how important good theology is; how necessary it is to think correctly about God. Everyone is a theologian, it's just a matter if you think rightly or poorly about God. Especially look at v.22-23 and the ramifications of failing to confess Jesus as Son. Discuss how theology affects our faith.
- **The presence of the Holy Spirit.** Discuss with your group John's second encouragement to remain faithful in the face of pressure from the antichrists in v.20 and 27. Evaluate how the Holy Spirit protects us from "antichrists." **Read John 14:6 and 15:26** and discuss the Spirit's role of teaching in your lives. **Hint:** Part of it is helping discern between truth and error.
  - What does John mean when Jesus says the Spirit will teach you? Does that mean we do not need teaching from anyone else?
  - How do we know when it's the Spirit? **Hint:** See 15:26 as the Spirit will bear witness to Christ. There is a direct connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

**\*\*Application:**

- **The key word in this paragraph is "abide." When you think about abiding in God's Word and Spirit, what changes do you have to make?**
- **How could this group function in a better way to address false teaching?**
  - Any particular topics, after this 1 John series that could be addressed?

## Lesson 7: 1 John 2:28-3:10

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian, as a child of God, pursues the path of righteousness.
- **Summary of Passage:** This can feel like a confusing passage as John's ideas are not laid out neatly; instead, they are scattered and repeated throughout the passage. And yet, we recognize that John is returning to a common theme in this letter: the moral component of being a Christian. He touched on this in 1:7 in his discussion on walking in the light, and then again in 2:1-6 with regard to obeying Christ's commands and following his example. And now, in this passage, he again calls Christians to purify themselves, to practice righteous living, and to avoid sin. He points to the comings of Christ as the reason to strive for righteous living. In the first half of the passage, 2:28-3:3, he focuses on Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, and in the second half of the passage, 3:4-3:10, he focuses on Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> coming. Throughout the passage, John is pushing the early church to realize the high standard of righteous living that God has on his children.
- **Interpretation Issues:**
  - **V.4-9 – “No one keeps on sinning...no one born of God makes a practice of sinning...”.**
    - V.4 – “Sin is lawlessness.” This is the nature of sin, which helps us understand that sin more than an accidental or passive action, but it is, as one commentator states, “an active rebellion against God's known will.”
    - This passage in particular is the subject of a lot of controversy because it discusses the sort of holiness that is possible for a Christian. The phrases, for example in v.5 which say, “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning...” and in v.9 which says “no one who is born of God will continue to sin...” forces us to think through the matter of perfection. Can—and should—Christians be perfect, i.e., without sin? There are a wide range of interpretations but it makes most sense to think of these verses in terms of habitual and persistent sin. For a true believer, one who has been born again, it is impossible to make a practice of sin. In our re-birth as children of God, as one commentator states, “sin becomes abnormal and unnatural to us.” Although perfection is not possible, we can still have confidence in our fight against sin.
  - **V.9 – “God's seed abides in him.”** Although there are several interpretations, it is clear that the seed is divine in origin. That is the

key. Some claimed it refers to God's Word, others God's Spirit, but the point seems to be as one commentator put it, "John's meaning is the same, namely that is the Christian's supernatural birth from God which keeps him from habitual sin." Either way, there is something other than our normal "humanness" that allows us to pursue righteousness.

### **\*\*Introduction**

- Share funny/crazy family traditions/quirks from growing up...or now! What was (or is) the telling characteristic of someone in your family? In other words, what made a Smith a Smith? Or what made a Jackson a Jackson?
  - Transitions into what its like to be part of God's family. In God's family, as we learn, carries a highly ethical and moral standard, specifically in how we deal with sin.

### **\*\*Discussion Questions**

- John uses the phrase "children of God" in 3:1. God calls us his children. It's incredible. Read the passage in its entirety and then discuss this question: **As a child of God, what is expected from us?**
  - **Hint:** Be sure at the end of the conversation to point to the pursuit of righteous living. You could read part of v.10 to do, when it says, "anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God." In this passage today, there is a high standard when you are God's child. We are called to live righteously and empowered not to constantly live in sin.
- **Looking Forward to Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming:** Evaluate this statement: In John's thinking, the study of Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming impacts how we live today.
  - **Hint:** Read and look at 2:28-3:3, in which John uses the phrase "he appears" twice, in reference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. And then in 3:3, John gives his own evaluation of this phrase: "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." The way we think about end times, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, has a huge impact on today's living.
  - **Follow-up:** As a result of the importance of Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming on our daily battle with sin, **how do we better live with Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in mind?**
- **Looking Back to Christ's 1st Coming:** He repeats the same argument two times; first in v.4-7 and then in v.8-10, each time focusing on the purpose of what Christ did on the cross; "he appeared to take away sins...the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." Discuss how Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> coming influences our response to sin.
  - What he did – see v.5 and v.8
  - How he lived – see v.5b – "in him is no sin."

- Throughout this passage, and particularly in v.4-9 there is a certain and fresh optimism brought to sin. Often times Christians resort to pleading Romans 7:14-20 in which Paul explains how he does not do what he wants to do. The struggle with sin becomes almost acceptable and even expected. Read Romans 8:37 and discuss the type of success we should expect to have in our battles with sin. What sort of optimism or pessimism should we be with regards to sin? Why? Have them fill in this sentence: We can be \_\_\_\_\_ (optimistic or pessimistic) towards dealing with our sins. **Hint:** Try to push the discussion towards optimism, towards a sense of confidence that God has given a way to defeat sin and overcome temptation.
  - **Follow-up:** What makes it possible today for us to overcome sins in our lives? In other words, as we think about defeating sin and overcoming temptation, what sort of resources do we have at our disposal? **Hint:** Its fascinating to look at the structure of 3:9: The structure emphasizes the middle verse and the resource of the Holy Spirit, which is God's seed (see Romans 8:9-11 for further insight).
    - No one who is born of God
      - Will continue to sin
        - **Because God's seed remains in him**
      - He cannot sin
    - Because he has been born of God
  - **Follow-up:** The pursuit of righteousness can often become something we do on our own. It's supposed to be based on God's strength and power, but it's easy to slip into our own strength and power. Maybe through a list of do's and don'ts. In other words, we can say we are pursuing righteousness but we are really just legalistic. Discuss the difference between pursuing righteousness and becoming legalistic. How do you know if it's becoming legalistic? Identify legalistic behaviors.

## **\*\*Application**

- Given the priority of doing what is right, brainstorm how to best pursue righteousness. Imagine a new believer came to you wanting to pursue righteousness, how would you advise that person?
- How can we show ourselves to be one of God's children this week? Where is one way you can pursue righteousness?

## Lesson #8: 1 John 3:11-24

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian strives to avoid the hate of Cain and imitate the love of Jesus Christ without worrying about their status before God.
- **Summary of Passage:** This is a passage that we can not let become too complicated. There are some other confusing passages in this book – but this is not one of them. In this passage John sets up a dichotomy between Cain and Jesus. Cain murdered his brother; Jesus was crucified for his brothers. The message is straightforward: be like Jesus – not like Cain. God calls us to love each other in the way that he loved us. John tell us that the way Jesus Christ loved us was through sacrificing the most precious thing he had: his life. And now, we are called to sacrifice the precious things in our lives for the sake of others. As we pursue loving each other, John does not want us to play mind games about our faith and if we are doing enough; instead, we are to trust in what God says about us—and not what we think about ourselves.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - In v.15 John says, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Does this mean that anyone who commits a murder or who hates his brother does not have eternal life? This does not mean that there is not forgiveness available to those who repent of murder and hatred, for we already saw that God is faithful and just to forgive the sins of those who confess them (1:8). Instead, as a general principle, the presence of hatred or the act of murder is a sign of a person's negative spiritual state, just like the presence of love is a sign of a person's positive spiritual state.

### \*\*Introduction

- Share stories of the nicest thing someone has ever done for you. Hopefully, you can transition somehow like this: It's been really encouraging to see all the great ways that we have been treated, all the love shown to us. That's what we are talking about today: love. And as we all have benefited from the love of other people, we are going to spend time thinking on how we can love others.

### \*\*Discussion Questions

- In this passage John sets up a dichotomy between Cain and Jesus. He wants us to not like Cain and instead to imitate Christ. In v.11 we are commanded to love, but it's not until v.16 John tells us what that means. Spend some time coming up with a clear definition of “Love.” When John is calling us to love one another like Jesus loved us, what is he calling us to do? Come up with a list of behaviors that are Jesus-like and we should do.

- **One definition (if you need it):** “Love is the willingness to surrender that which has value for our own life, to enrich the life of another.”
- In contrast to Christ's example of love, John points to the story of Cain, who murdered his brother. This story is found in Genesis 4:1-12. Re-read that story and then observe the differences between the example of Cain and of Jesus.
  - **Further Study:** At first it seems like it would be no problem to avoid Cain-like behavior, after all, he did murder his brother, but let's not dissociate ourselves from Cain too quickly. Read v.15 and Matthew 5:21-22. When John is calling us to not be like Cain, what is calling us not to do? Come up with a list of behaviors that are Cain-like and we should avoid.
- In the contrast between Cain and Jesus, the significance of love in a Christian's life can not be understated. Throughout this passage, especially in v.14 and v.19, John states that it is through love that the early church knew they were believers. Essentially, he is saying that love is the defining mark of true believers. If nothing else, they should be good at loving others. In fact, John goes as far as saying that God's love cannot be in a person if that person does not show love (v.17) Have the group list things that are a common part of a Christians' life (like reading Scripture, being a part of community, praying, attending church, reading Christian books, etc) and then rate the list in two ways: Time given to it by us and value placed on it by John. Discuss how and why their final list would be different from John's ideal list. Hopefully you can point them towards the priority and importance of loving others and to evaluate just how much time is spent loving others. Is loving others more important than spending time reading God's Word? Than going to church on Sunday?
  - **Further Study:** Analyze Paul's discussion of the priority of love in 1 Corinthians 13, especially v.1-3.
- As we think about loving in a Christ-like fashion, John gives a practical example of love in v.17. He explains that if we truly love God we will give away our money and possessions to those who need it. Discuss the generosity principles that you live by. What sort of lifestyle is appropriate for a Christian? How does v.16 impact v.17?
- As we pursue loving one other, John finishes this passage by calming one of the potential nerves that we all have when we evaluate the way we love other people—and that is anxiety over our faith. It can be easy in a self-examination to realize how poorly we, at times, love each other, and then to question our status before God. But that is only going to hinder our fellowship with God. John is quick to calm that nerve by reassuring them of their confidence before God. He doesn't want our pursuit of love to lead us into a state of anxiety but throughout pursuit, he wants us to maintain boldness before God, trusting in Him and his character that we are his children.

- **From v.19, what is the mind game we can play with ourselves as we try to love one another well?** Hint: We can have, as it says in v.20, “our hearts condemn us”, and play the mind game of wondering, when we fail to love others well, of our status before God. We can think we aren't doing enough.
  - Has anyone experienced this sort of anxiety before?
  
- **From v. 20-22, discuss how John moves us away from that sort of mind games?**
  - Hint: **How John moves us away** – V.20. John is aware of that pitfall to feel anxious about our faith, and he reminds us in v.20 that “God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.” What he means is this, as one commentator put it, “[We] can safely entrust ourselves to the judgment of God who knows all about them, and consequently they can set their hearts at rest, even though they feel self-condemned.” John is pointing us to the idea in 2 Timothy 2:19 – “The Lord known those who are his.” And even though we aren't perfect, “God understands us better than our own hearts know us, and in his omniscience (ability to know everything) he knows that our often weak attempts to obey his command spring from a true allegiance to him.”
    - Also see Romans 8:1.
  
  - Ultimately, John wants us to be free to love as best we can, and we may fail sometimes, but may we always remain confident of our status before God. We are free to love others – not to doubt our status.

### **\*\*Application**

- Love appears to be more than simply one action, but a lifestyle. How can a group of people begin to create a culture of love?
  
- Pick one person in your life who you have treated in a Cain-like fashion and think through how you could change that behavior to treat the person in a Christ-like fashion this week. You could give people time alone and then, if people are willing, share with the group.

## Lesson #9: 1 John 4:1-6

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian is able to discern if something is of God.
- **Summary of Passage:** We know that at this time there was a growing movement called Gnosticism that was influencing the church. There was a group of people who let Gnosticism influence their view of Christianity. In their minds, based on their impure and evil view of matter, God could never become matter, or a human being for that matter. This led them to deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of God (see 2:22; 4:2). They left the church over this new belief and yet were still trying to persuade others of their views. In the midst of these differing viewpoints of Jesus, John wanted to protect the early churches from these false teachers. This passage is another attempt at protection. The first part of his protection is to encourage them not to be gullible Christians, and accept everything they hear; instead, they need to test what they hear to see if it is from the Spirit of God or from the spirit Satan, the antichrist. The proper ways to assess the source a person's message include examining the content of the message and observing the listeners of the message. In terms of the content of the message, a person inspired by the Spirit of God will testify for Jesus Christ, while a person inspired by the spirit of the antichrist will testify against Jesus Christ. In terms of the listeners of the message, the source of a person's message can be tested by observing who is listening and following them. A person who has the world following and listening is inspired by the "spirit of error" while a person who has people who know God following and listening is inspired by the "Spirit of truth," also known as the Holy Spirit.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - The word "spirit" in v.1 can refer to a "person inspired by a spirit."
  - The phrase "for he who is in you..." refers to the Holy Spirit.
  - The word "world" is used, as it was earlier, to refer to "the life of human society as organized under the power of evil."

### \*\*Introduction

- Discuss the last books and movies you read and watched. Hopefully this can help transition into thinking about the sorts of influences in our lives, and how we discern between them.

## **\*\*Discussion Questions**

- Discuss the idea of “testing” that John wants from Christians in v.1. What does it mean and why is it important? What are some potential dangers that could happen if we do not “test” what we hear?
- Consider the two ways that John wants us to test the people and messages we listen to.
  - Hint: See v.2 – Faith in Jesus Christ. See v.5-6 – Look at the audience.
  - **Follow-up:** Compare John’s tests with the way we sometimes test people? What are some personal preferences that we use as our own tests? How valid are they in deciding who we should listen to? Is there a difference between testing and being critical?
- How would you describe a person who is a good “tester”? Give an ideal profile of that kind of person. How does that sort of person compare with a gullible Christian?
  - **Hint:** Read v.4 and Acts 17:10-11.
  - **Follow-up:** How do we become less gullible and better testers?
- In our pursuit of becoming better testers, the role of the Holy Spirit is especially highlighted in this passage (v.4). John is pushing the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If you had to summarize the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us discern, what would you say? What other passages are helpful?
  - Hint: In v.2 it births the confession of Jesus and in v.4 it is more powerful than the spirit of the antichrist.
  - **Follow-up:** Look at John 16:12-15 and how it impacts our ability to test.
- In his evaluation of the current status of the world John is clear about the presence of the antichrist (v.3) and false prophets in the world right now (v.2). We know that there were false teachers causing trouble back then, but what about now? Discuss who you think who would be properly labeled as a false prophet. Because why? In other words, who are some people who are potentially dangerous to the Christian community?
  - **Follow-up:** In a culture that leans towards toleration, when we learn of a false prophet, what’s the best way to respond?
    - Ignore? Call out? Spread the word about him? Reach out?

## **\*\*Application**

- How can everyone as a group and individually become better testers? Discuss steps to take as a group.

## Lesson #10: 1 John 4:7-21

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian loves for divine reasons.
- **Summary of Passage:** In this passage we return to a prominent theme in this letter: love. The summary of this passage is in v.7 – “Let us love one other.” We saw this similar command two weeks ago in 3:11. And yet, in that passage we learned more about what love is, and in this passage we learn more about why we love others. We love not because of anything in ourselves or anything in other people, but because of who God is and what he did through Jesus Christ. And love of other people isn't an option; in fact, it is impossible to separate the love of God and the love of others. If we claim to be in a relationship with God, we will love other people. This reveals God's presence within us and grants us confidence on the day of judgment.
- **Interpretation Issues**
  - The phrase “propitiation” or “atoning sacrifice” in v.10 refers to the way that on the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied the wrath of God, which had been aroused on the basis of our sin.
  - In v.12 the phrase “his love is perfected in us” means, as one commentator put it, “God's love for us is perfected only when it is reproduced in us.” This means that God's love is perfected, or made complete, when we reproduce in significant ways. This means that God's love has not accomplished its purpose until it re-creates the same kind of love in us.
  - In v.18 there is the phrase “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” And yet, there are other places in the New Testament, like in 1 Peter 2:17, it commands us to fear God. It's important to keep this verse in 1 John in context. In the previous verse, v.17, John gives us the context: the Day of Judgment. We are not to fear God on the day of Judgment, but this not preclude us from having a reverent respect for who God is and what He can do.

### \*\*Introduction

- Share some of your best reasons for either a) not going to school or b) not going on a date. Hopefully you can transition in a way like this: It looks like we are all pretty good at coming up with reasons for more trivial matters ... but now let's come up with reasons for more meaning and deep matters.

**\*\*Discussion Questions**

- **Human reasons:** In general, what are typical reasons why people love? (To get something in return, fear of losing someone, to look better, etc).
- **Divine reasons:** Now spend time discussing John's reasons. As we return to the command to "love one other" in v.7, examine the reasons why John wants us to love one another, as noted in v.7-11. Why are we to love?
  - **Hint: There are two...**
    - Read v.8 – the character of God (v.7-8).
    - Read v.9-10 -- God's supreme example of love.
  - **Follow-up:** Interestingly enough, notice what is not mentioned in John's argument for us to love one another: our mood, circumstances, or the other person's character or attitude, etc. I find it fascinating that the reasons for loving other people is based on who God is, what he has done, and what he hopes to continue to do. **Now fill-in this statement:** The sign of mature Christian love is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - **Hint:** Loving people in all circumstances. The goal is to help them compare the human and divine reasons and evaluate the validity and priority of each. Also, look at v. 19 –“We love – why? – because he [God] first loved us.” We love because of a divine reality and not a human circumstance. The sign of mature Christian love is loving other people because of who God is and what He did (divine reasons) and not based on how others treat me.
- **Divine Indwelling:** Based on v.12, what does our love for others reveal about us?
  - **Hint:** The presence of God through us. This idea can be tricky, but basically its saying that when we love each other, we are revealing God within us. He says in the beginning of v.12 “No one has ever seen God...” and so the question becomes how do people see God? People see God through our love. As one commentator put it: “Although God cannot be seen in Himself, He can be seen in those in whom He abides and in whom his love is perfected.” John wants us to see the huge role we play in revealing God.
  - **Follow-up:** Discuss this statement: “The way I treat other Christians will determine how non-Christians treat God.” What opportunity do we have as Christians?
  - **Follow-up:** Looking at v.13-16, there is a focus on how we abide in God and God in us. We abide in God through the giving of the Spirit and the confession of Jesus Christ. What role does the Spirit play in how we love?
- **In v.17-18 discuss what God's perfected love means.**

- One of the results of God's love being perfected in us is our approach to Judgment Day. He says in v.17, "By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment." As Christians we can have confidence on the day of judgment; we do not have to fear God's final punishment.
- **Follow-up:** How does that compare with 1 Peter 2:17, when he commands us to "Fear God."
  - **Hint:** It's important to keep our confidence before God and lack of fear, in the context of the day of judgment. We do not have to be afraid of God's final verdict of us: we know that we are considered righteous, and have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. And yet, we can live our lives in a certain fear of God, a reverent awe of who He is. The difference is the object of our fear: in 1 John the object we are not fear is the day of judgment; in 1 Peter 2 the object of our fear is God himself.
- **In v.19-21, it describes the connection between our relationship with God and with others.** Throughout this passage there is a direct connection between our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. In v.7 John says, "whoever loves has been born of God and knows God," and then at the end, in v.20 he declares, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." How would you describe the connection? What do we learn about our relationship with God?
  - **Follow-up:** In v.20 John writes, "If anyone says 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." Fill in this statement: The best barometer of person's spiritual maturity is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - **Hint:** Loving people as much as God.

## \*\*Application

- To finish, given the significance of love in John's mind, it's important that we get very practical in this issue and think through how we can love each other better.
  - **First**, list and discuss the barriers to loving each other. What prevents love? EX: Or I am too busy to spend time with others. I grow best on my own.
  - **Second**, discuss the catalysts for love. In other words, what conditions in your world or in your heart make you more likely to love?
- Who is someone you have not loved and need to reconcile with, and show love?
- How can you reveal God best? In other words, as a group, what would be one way to love one another better?

## Lesson #11: 1 John 5:1-5

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian is able to overcome the ways of the world through faith in Jesus Christ and pursue the ways of God, which are love and obedience.
- **Summary of Passage:** This is a loaded five verses. In it, there is love, faith, obedience, overcoming the world, and being born again. All popular and fairly well-known Christian words and ideas. But how do they all fit together? At the center of this passage is the idea of being “born of God” as it is repeated in v.1 and v.4. To be “born of God” then, leads to several others things: faith in Jesus Christ, love for God’s people, and obedience to God’s commands. Think of the being born again, being a child of God, as the foundation all major aspects as a Christian. It begins to with the Holy Spirit convicting us of our sins (John 16:8) and leading us to believe in Jesus Christ. As a result of our faith in Christ, we have a new life – a life that has overcome the world –and that life is one of love for God and His children, as well as obedience to His commands.
- **Interpretation Issues:**
  - The word “world” has been used a lot, but its even more important that we understand its meaning here, so here is the definition again: “the life of human society as organized under the power of evil.” In short, the world is anything moving against the ways of God. One commentator lists some for us: “Sometimes these are moral pressures—the outlook, standards, and preoccupations of a godless, secular society, ‘the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does’ (2:16). Sometimes they are intellectual (false teaching) and sometimes physical (persecution).”

**\*\*Introduction:** Have a few people share how their story of conversion. Or you can have a lot of people share in one sentence their conversion. That can lead into the first point on discussing being born of God – all Christians are – but what does that mean and how does that influence our life?

**\*\*Discussion Questions:**

- This passage lays out two ways – the way of the world and the way of God. Discuss the idea of the ‘world’ and name the top 5-10 things opposing or luring Christians away from God in your particular life-stage. If the group has a variety of ages, then be more general.
  - **Follow-up:** How do they hold us down?
  - **Follow-up:** What are other appealing options for dealing with the world?
- **Based on John 16:33 discuss Jesus’ battle with the world.**
  - **Hint:** Jesus is the Ultimate Victor – as he came into this world and he overcame the world, defeating the power of Satan on the cross, and giving us a new way to live. See 1 Cor.15:20-26; Colossians 2:13-15.
- This passage seems to present two ways to live—the way of the world or the way of God. What’s going to be the difference between the two in our lives? Discuss how we overcome the world?
  - **Hint:** John makes it clear that the only way to live God’s way is through faith in Jesus Christ. John declares only through faith in Jesus Christ. **Also** see Romans 8:37 and Romans 6:5-11. We are united to Christ in his death and in his resurrection and we share in his victory over death.
  - **Follow-up:** Given the importance of faith, what does it look like to live each day in faith? It’s more than a one time trusting in God...but how can and should our days be shaped by faith?
    - Based at John 16:33 what can we expect our battle with the world to be like?
- When we overcome the world, we are open to the ways of God. Based on v.1b-3, how would you describe God’s way?
  - **Follow-up:** Based on v.2-3, what is an important part of living in God’s way?
    - **Hint:** The word “commands” is repeated 3x.
  - **Follow-up:** Based on v.3, discuss this statement: God’s way is easy.
    - **Hint:** John says that God’s ways are not burdensome because when we are born of God, we have a new desire to do his will. God’s ways are not a burden – but a joy – because our heart is more in line with God’s heart.

**\*\*Application:**

- Throughout this paragraph are three major ideas of John: faith, love, and obedience. In a perfect world we could all say we held the three together perfectly, but odds are, we probably don’t. Where do you see a need for growth?
- What is a worldly battle you are fighting right now? How are you fighting it – with a worldly move ... or with faith in Jesus Christ?

## Lesson #12: 1 John 5:6-12

### \*\*Leader Background

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian has—and wants to share—assurance of eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ.
- **Summary of Passage:** This passage is all about John's defense of Jesus as the Son of God and our belief in Jesus as the Son of God. In the last passage he claimed that those who believe in Jesus can overcome this world. What allows him to make such a claim about Jesus? To support his claim, John brings in his star witness: God himself. According to John, God testifies in three ways about Jesus as the Son of God. Exhibit A: water. Exhibit B: blood. Exhibit C: the Holy Spirit. The reason John presents this testimony is to move people to believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. For without belief in Jesus Christ, there is no eternal life.
- **Interpretation Issues:**
  - "Came by Water": Although there are various interpretations, the most likely one appears to be baptism. For at his baptism, he was declared to be the Son of God and was empowered by the Spirit to fulfill his mission (Matthew 3:13-17).
  - "...and Blood": Blood refers to his crucifixion and death, when he finally fulfilled his mission to take away the sins of the world. Interestingly enough, John is clear to point out that Jesus not only came through water, but by water and blood. This goes against the leading heresy of the day that claimed the Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism, only to depart before the cross. By emphasizing the blood, John is declaring Jesus to be fully God and fully man throughout all of his life.

### \*\*Introduction

- What was the last man-influenced purchase you made? Did someone recommend a restaurant? A movie? A car? As we think about the influence of a man's testimony, we are going to learn a little about God's testimony today, especially his testimony about Jesus Christ.

**\*\*Discussion Questions**

- What are the common critiques of Jesus, and reasons why people do not believe in him?
- Looking back v.6-7, analyze John's defense of Jesus. What does John emphasize?
  - **Hint:** John emphasizes that Jesus came by "blood...He did not come by water only, but by water and blood." As we know, "blood" refers to the death of Jesus. The importance of blood is to combat a belief that "the Christ" left Jesus right before the cross, and so Jesus was only a man on the cross, and not fully God. That is why John emphasizes blood 2x, to make known that Jesus was fully God and fully man throughout this life, and especially on the cross.
  - **Follow-up:** Discuss the role of Jesus' blood in our salvation.
    - **Hint:** See 1 John 1:7; 1 John 2:2; Ephesians 1:7, and especially Hebrews 9:11-14. It is through Christ's shedding of his blood on the cross that we have redemption. If we take away the cross; if we take away "blood" than we are separated from God.
  - **Follow-up:** John is working hard to make sure we think correctly about who Jesus is. What are the foundational beliefs about Jesus Christ that we must hold as Christians? What's important about each one?
    - Fully human – If Jesus had not been fully man, he could not have died in our place, and paid the penalty due to us (Hebrews 2:16-17).
    - Fully God – If Jesus had not been fully God, he could not bear the full penalty for all the sins, and he could not have been the one mediator between God and man, and he could not have saved us, because salvation is only through God and not through man.
- Based on v.6-8 discuss this statement: Without the Holy Spirit, we would not be able to know – for sure — the truth about Jesus Christ.
  - **Follow-up:** What does it look like for the Spirit to testify to us about Jesus?
    - **Hint:** Internal assurance; Teaching us God's Word: John 14:26
- One of the primary goals in this passage seems to be granting assurance of eternal life to all those who belief in Jesus Christ. John wants to the early Christians to be assured of their eternal life (see 5:13). And yet, the idea of thinking about eternity is hard, and sometimes not motivating. Describe a person who lived out of a full assurance of their eternal life with God. How does the assurance of eternal life impact their daily living? What would they be like?

**\*\*Application**

- On a group basis, take time to discuss this question: What are the primary parts to this group? In other words, what are the main goals for gathering together? What role can v.12 have in your group? Evangelism may or not be not a primary goal – but if it is, how can the group improve in this area?
  - To close, on an individual basis, take some time to gather names of people who do not know Jesus and spend time praying for each person.
    - **Follow-up:** What about Jesus would you share with them?

## Lesson #13: 1 John 5:13-20

### \*\*Leader Background:

- **Big Idea:** A growing Christian, through the certainty of Christ, has confidence in prayer, assurance of protection, and freedom from idols.
- **Summary of Passage:** This passage finishes off 1 John and ends with three unrelated—yet important—ideas to consider about our fellowship with God and others: prayer, sin, and idols. In the preceding verses John assures the readers that Jesus is the Son of God and that through belief in him they have eternal life. From that certainty, which he again affirms in v.20, John encourages to the early Christians and us in three ways. First, to be confident when we pray. We can have confidence that God will hear and grant our requests—when we pray according to his will. Second, we have assurance in our protection against sin. We are promised that Jesus will protect us in our battle against sin. Lastly, we can freedom from idols since we know the true God through Jesus Christ, and have everything we need, in eternal life with Him.
- **Interpretation Issues:**
  - V.15 – “we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” This means that when we pray according to God’s will, we can have confidence that we have what we asked for, because he has heard us. One commentator helpfully described it in this way: “Our petitions are granted at once: the results of the granting are perceived in the future.” This means that God grants our requests now, and we will see the results in the future.
  - V.15-17– “Sin that leads to death ...sin that does not lead to death. There are a variety of interpretations for what the “sin that leads to death” is, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This means then that the term “brother” refers to an unbeliever and not a believer, which makes sense because God will grant life to unbelievers who do not commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

### \*\*Introduction:

- What’s your prayer life like? Talk about when the last time your prayed was and what you prayed for. This can transition in this way: Prayer is fairly common practice, and yet it can also be a fairly confusing thing – how do I pray? What do I pray for? How often? At the close of this letter, John is going to help refine and encourage our prayer life.

**\*\*Discussion Questions:**

- **Prayer:** In the section on prayer, v.13-17, we see John encouraging our approach to prayer and refining the content of our prayers.
  - **Approach to Prayer:** Analyze v.14-15 and **discuss how this verse encourages our approach to prayer life.** In that, discuss what are some barriers to our confidence and what John describes as the basis for our confidence.
    - **Hint:** Confidence based on our belief in Jesus Christ – and nothing else.
  - **Content of our Prayers:** Examine v.14-16 and **explain how these verses shape the content of our prayers.** What should we be praying for? Who should we be praying for?
    - **Hint:** Pray according to God's Will; Pray for other who struggling in Sin.
  - **Follow-up:** The key term in this verse is according to God's Will, so fill-in this statement: The best way to improve your prayer life is \_\_\_\_\_. How do we become better at praying?
    - **Hint:** To grow in our knowledge of God's will. How do we do that? Now this may sound like it makes prayer even more confusing, but think about God's will in this way: "If Christians are praying in accordance with what pleases God as found in the teaching of Scripture, then they are praying according to his will." To grow in our prayer life requires growing in our knowledge of God's will, which he was revealed in His Word.
  - **Follow-up:** Evaluate: There is a wrong way to pray.
- **Sin:** In the section on sin, v.18-19, John assures of the protection we have from "the evil one." It picks up on reoccurring theme in 1 John that Christians do not make a practice of sinning. Discuss the hope that John teaches Christians have towards sin.
  - **Follow-up:** Explore how Jesus protects us from sin. List some of those protections.
    - **Hint:**
      - The Holy Spirit (John 14:16)
      - His Word
      - Community of Believers
      - Others?
- **Idols:** In the section on idols, v.21, John commands us to stay away for idols. Discuss the top five idols facing your game and the role they play in disrupting our fellowship with God and each other.

- **Follow-up:** How does v.20 protect us from idols? Analyze the connection between v.20 and v.21
  - **Hint:** In v.20 John has explained the fundamental truth throughout this letter: Jesus Christ, the Son of God has come into this world; we are in Him and he is in us; through him we have all we need, for he is the true God and giver of eternal life. Often times, we look to idols because we think they offer something more than what God is offering us. On some level, that purchase, or that indulgence, or that pursuit, will bring us happiness and joy. We seek the promises of an idol only to realize that the idol cannot deliver on its promise of joy or satisfaction or meaning. John is trying to tell us that we have all we need in Christ, and idols have nothing to offer us; they will only disrupt what we have in Christ.

### **\*\*Application**

- In terms of prayer, decide on a reading strategy for the Bible or parts of the Bible that can help you grow in your knowledge of God's will.
- What are some protections you can utilize more in the fight against sin?
- What is the lie behind one of your idols?
- **Close:** The last week is here – take some time to share at the end! What have been some of the biggest take-a-ways from 1 John? What changes have you noticed in your own life?