

The Epistles of John

Bible Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Before beginning this Study Packet, read all of 1 John in one sitting (approx. 10–20 min). Reading aloud may be helpful. As you read, look for commonly repeated words, phrases, or themes. Write your observations in the space below.

1 John – Key words or themes:

Besides key words or themes, another important aspect of John's epistles is his purpose (why did he write the letters?). The chart below will help you discover the answers. For each of the verses listed below, complete the sentence on the lines provided.

Verse	Purpose Statement
1 John 1:3	John wrote this letter so that...
1 John 1:4	John wrote this letter so that...
1 John 2:1	John wrote this letter so that...
1 John 2:26	John wrote this letter because...
1 John 5:13	John wrote this letter so that...

As you work through each week's lesson, it may be helpful to return to this section in order to remind yourself about John's overall purpose for the letters. You might also want to adjust your responses in each of the sections.

To get the most out of your personal Bible study time:

- Begin each section with prayer.
- Read the passage carefully and repetitively.
- Keep a pencil handy to write down any thoughts
- Work on the "Study & Discussion Questions" with someone
- Seek out opportunities to encourage others in their study

As you grow in your understanding and obedience to God's Word, look for the fruit that God will produce in and through your life.

OVERVIEW OF 1 JOHN

Many people know the Apostle John as the writer of the fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation. Besides writing those books, he also wrote three short letters (epistles) to believers. First John is the longest of these epistles. Although he was an older man by the time he wrote, he still had a vivid memory of his time with Jesus and a loving heart for Christians everywhere, whom he affectionately calls “children.”

Since false teachers continue to attack the church and pull people away, John writes to believers to remind them what true Christianity is. The basics of the faith include correct doctrine about Jesus and a life of obedience to God’s moral standards. The more Christians understand authentic Christianity, the less likely it is for them to be confused by the false teachers. Using the chart below will help you summarize John’s teachings in each section of the epistle.

Do not complete the chart below at this time.

Section	Marks of an Authentic Christian
1 John 1:1-4	A true believer...
1 John 1:5 - 2:2	A true believer...
1 John 2:3-11	A true believer...
1 John 2:12-17	A true believer...
1 John 2:18-27	A true believer...

1 John 2:28 – 3:10	A true believer...
1 John 3:11–24	A true believer...
1 John 4:1–6	A true believer...
1 John 4:7–21	A true believer...
1 John 5:1–12	A true believer...
1 John 5:13–17	A true believer...
1 John 5:18–21	A true believer...

As you work through First John, come back to this chart and fill in some of the truths John is emphasizing about Christian doctrine or life. Think about questions like: *How can I identify a real Christian? What should a true Christian believe? How should an authentic Christian live?*

WEEK 1

1 JOHN 1:1-4

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. [HCSB]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John emphasizes his personal experience with Jesus Christ. *See also Lk 1:2; 24:39; Jn 1:1-18; 15:11, 27; 16:24; 17:3; Acts 1:3; 4:20; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Pet 1:16; Rev 1:8.*

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Underline every verb/action John uses to describe people's interactions with Jesus (e.g., they heard Jesus).
- Circle every time John uses the word "life" or "fellowship."
- Put a box around the words "so that."

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is John referring to when he writes "we"?
2. What lies about Jesus or himself could John be responding to?
3. What are John's reasons/goals for writing this letter?
4. Why is it so important that Jesus was a real man?
5. What does it mean to have "fellowship with the Father"?
6. How have you experienced the joy of telling someone about Christ or seeing someone come to faith?
7. Who can you pray for and speak to about Christ this week?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John's message.

WEEK 2

1 JOHN 1:5 – 2:2

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. [ESV]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John explains who God is, what sin is, and what Jesus accomplished on the cross. See also Ps 5:4; 32; 51; Prov 4:18–19; 20:9; 28:13; Jn 3:19–20; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36; Rom 3:23–26; Eph 5:8; Ja 2:14–17.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Underline every time John uses a form of the word “sin.”
- Circle every time John uses the phrase “if we say.”

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that God is light without darkness?
2. What are some wrong ideas about sin that John points out?
3. What does it mean to be cleansed from sin?
4. What is another reason John wrote this letter?
5. What does it mean that Jesus is the propitiation for sin?
6. What is confession like in your life? How can it change in response to this passage?

Go back to pages 3–4 to summarize John’s message.

WEEK 3
1 JOHN 2:3-11

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who 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. [NASB]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John highlights a believer's obedience and love. See also Mt 11:29; Lk 6:46; Jn 8:31; 13:15; 14:15, 21-24; 15:10, 14; Eph 5:1-2; Tts 1:16.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Underline every use of "know," "keep," & "commandment."
- Circle every occurrence of "light" or "darkness."

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does John say about a true believer?
2. What does it mean to abide in Jesus (or in the Light)?
3. Does your behavior prove that you are saved? Why or why not?
4. What can you do this week to demonstrate love?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John's message.

WEEK 4
1 JOHN 2:12-17

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 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. 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. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 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. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. [NIV]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John tells every phase of Christian growth to stay separate from the temporary pleasures of a sinful world. *See also Ps 73; Pr 10:25; Mt 6:24; 24:35; Jn 15:19; Rom 12:1-2; Col 3:1-2; Ja 4:4.*

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Underline every time John uses the word “know.”
- Circle every occurrence of “love.”
- Put a box around the word “world.”

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does John describe each phase of spiritual growth?
2. What’s the difference between the sinful world and the obedient people of God?
3. What level of Christian maturity are you on?
4. How are you loving the things of the world?
5. How can you deepen your relationship with the Father?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John’s message.

WEEK 5
1 JOHN 2:18-27

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. [ESV]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John shows the difference between false teachers and true doctrine. See also Mt 24:11-14; Jn 10:4-5; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Pt 3:3.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle the words “know” and “truth.”
- Underline every reference to “antichrist(s)” and “lie/liar.”

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does John describe false teachers?
2. What is another reason John wrote this epistle?
3. What has God given you to guard against being deceived?
4. What are you doing to abide in Christ?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John’s message.

WEEK 6
1 JOHN 2:28 – 3:10

So now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears we may have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know Him. Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure. Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law. You know that He was revealed so that He might take away sins, and there is no sin in Him. Everyone who remains in Him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you! The one who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. The one who commits sin is of the Devil, for the Devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the Devil's works. Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because His seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. This is how God's children—and the Devil's children—are made evident. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother. [HCSB]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John shows the incompatibility of sin with the children of God. *See also Ps 16:11; Rom 8:18; Col 3:4; Ti 2:12–14; 2 Pt 3:14.*

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle every form of the word “know,” “love,” & “remain.”
- Underline the references to “God” and “Father.”

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does John want you to respond to the return of Jesus?
2. What is John teaching about sin?
3. For what purpose did Jesus appear?
4. What can you do to love others this week?

Go back to pages 3–4 to summarize John's message.

WEEK 7
1 JOHN 3:11-24

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. [NASB]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John describes the love, persecution, and prayers of the church. See also Ps 145:18-19; Jn 15:12-19; 17:14; 1 Pt 1:22; 3:8; 4:8.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle every form of the word "love" or "commandment."
- Underline every form of the word "know."

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the world hate people who love so much?
2. How can you love someone in the church this week?
3. Why does God hear our prayers when we obey Him?

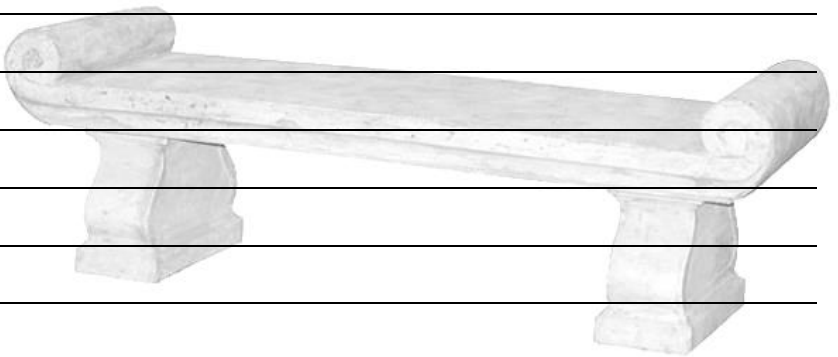
Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John's message.

CHECKPOINT

You are now at the halfway point of John's epistles. Take some time to pause and reflect on the fruit God has produced in you and through you.

In what ways has your understanding of John's epistles influenced your prayer life? What are some specific things you can pray for?

In what ways are you currently suffering for the sake of Christ? How are you responding to that suffering?



In what ways has your understanding of John's epistles influenced your worship? Are there any songs that have been an encouragement to you?

What is one of your favorite verses that you have covered so far in John's epistles? Describe how it has helped you grow closer to Christ.

Before continuing, reread 1 John in one sitting. It will help remind you about the big picture and let you review everything that has been covered so far.

WEEK 8
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. 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, 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. 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. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 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. [NIV]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John emphasizes the difference between true and false doctrine. See also Prov 14:15; Isa 30:10-11; Jn 15:9; 1 Cor 2:12-14; 1 Th 5:21.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Underline the words “false,” “antichrist,” & “world.”
- Circle every time John mentions God.

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can you “test the spirits”?
2. What false doctrine were people probably teaching?
3. Who is “the one who is in you”?
4. Who is “the one who is in the world”?
5. What are you doing to protect yourself from false teachers?
6. What are you doing to protect others from false teachers?
7. Who can you talk to about the true message of Jesus?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John’s message.

WEEK 9
1 JOHN 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. [NASB]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John describes the love of God and of the believer.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle every time John uses the word "love."
- Put a box around the words "God" and "Father."
- Underline every time John uses the word "abide."

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the world's love different from God's love?
2. How can you show true love this week?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John's message.

WEEK 10
1 JOHN 5:1-12

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of Him. This is how we know that we love God's children when we love God and obey His commands. For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands. Now His commands are not a burden, because whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. And who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? Jesus Christ—He is the One who came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the One who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and these three are in agreement. If we accept the testimony of men, God's testimony is greater, because it is God's testimony that He has given about His Son. (The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within him. The one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony God has given about His Son.) And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son of God does not have life. [HCSB]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John discusses love, obedience, and the witnesses of Jesus.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle the words “love,” “command,” and “testify/testimony.”
- Underline any time John mentions God (Father, Son, or Spirit).

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that God's commands aren't a burden?
2. How has your faith conquered the world?
3. How has God testified to you that Jesus is the Messiah?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John's message.

WEEK 11
1 JOHN 5:13-17

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. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. 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. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. [NIV]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John describes the assurance and prayer that true faith produces. See also Ps 106:23; Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 29:12-13; 33:3; Eze 22:30; Rom 8:15-17; Eph 3:12; 1 Tim 1:15-16; 2 Pt 1:10-11.

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle every time John uses the word “know.”
- Underline every occurrence of the word “sin.”

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is another reason John wrote this letter?
2. How have you seen God answer your prayers?
3. How did Jesus describe eternal life in John 17:3?
4. What does it mean to pray according to God’s will?
5. What is a “sin that leads to death”?
6. How does John define all sin?
7. What specific sins do you need to start battling against?
8. Is it ever okay *not* to pray for someone?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John’s message.

WEEK 12
1 JOHN 5:18-21

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. [ESV]

SUMMARY OF THE PASSAGE

John describes the sure victory believers have over Satan. *See also Ps 119:101; Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 1:4; Col 2:2-3; Jas 1:17-18.*

STUDY ACTIVITY

- Circle every time John uses the word “know.”
- Underline every mention of “God,” “Son,” or “truth.”

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does John mean when he says that a believer does not keep on sinning?
2. Who is “he who was born of God”?
3. What has God provided for His children?
4. What can the evil one *not* do to believers?
5. What is the appropriate response to God’s protections?
6. What idols is John talking about?
7. How can you keep yourself from any idols?

Go back to pages 3-4 to summarize John’s message.

WEEK 13
2 JOHN

Take time this week to read 2 John in one sitting (approx. 1-5 min).
Write down any key words or themes below.

Summarize the following sections into one main thought:

vv. 1-2	
vv. 3-4	
vv. 5-6	
vv. 7-9	
vv. 10-11	
vv. 12-13	

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does John feel about the people he is writing to?
2. What does John want for the people he is writing to?
3. What does John warn the people about? How does he tell them to respond?
4. How can you demonstrate John's heart for other believers?
5. How can you practically love others this week?
6. How can you protect your family from false teachings?

WEEK 14
3 JOHN

Take time this week to read 3 John in one sitting (approx. 1-5 min).
Write down any key words or themes below.

Summarize the following sections into one main thought:

vv. 1-4	
vv. 5-8	
vv. 9-10	
vv. 11-12	
vv. 13-15	

STUDY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does John feel about the people he is writing to?
2. How does John tell the Christians to help the travelers?
3. What activities does John point out as a bad example?
4. Who does John point out as a good example for the church?
5. Who are the good examples in your church for your family?
6. How can you steer your family away from bad examples in the church?

