

Bible Study Guide

From The Back End of the Bible

The Letters from John

Light, Life, Love, Liars & Lawlessness.

Letters to my Little Children

by
Steven Cutts

© 2021 *Steven Cutts*

This Bible study guide is part of a series written primarily with small groups in mind, but it would also be beneficial for individual use. It is my hope that however you use it, that it will provoke thought and stimulate discussion that draws you deeper into Christ, even as the writing of them has done for me.

The notes included with this study have come from my personal study of the Bible, assisted by William Barclay's "The Daily Study Bible" series, Tom Wright's "For Everyone" series, various study Bibles, personal notes from other sermons I've heard and some of the multitude of resources available in e-Sword. I'm also indebted to those who have been part of the small groups I have facilitated and have patiently allowed me to test these questions on them.

No matter how long, or how little you have been studying God's Word, it doesn't hurt to be reminded of the basics. If you want to get the most out of the time you spend, here are a few suggestions based on what I've found works for me.

1. Be prepared. Whether facilitating or participating, coming to the meeting with some ideas ready to share is helpful. If you are the one leading the discussion, it is very helpful a solid grasp on both the text and the questions.
2. Of course, it's far better to come and participate in the discussion regardless of whether you have looked at the text and questions beforehand or not.
3. Prayer is a vital part of both individual preparation and the group discussion. It is important to come to the Father for insight and it helps to focus your thoughts on the Word.
4. Be flexible – adjust the pace to suit your group and the time you have available. You may need to spread one section over two meetings, or you may find that you can get through more than one in a session.

5. Try to find that balance between free discussion and keeping on track. You want people to be able to unpack what they have learnt, but you only have a set time available to do so.
6. That said, where possible, it is better to slow things down so that everyone has a good grasp on what the Word is saying, rather than rushing it through. Steady, soaking rain over a time is much better for the soil than a single, heavy downpour.

There is space provided on the question sheets that hopefully gives you enough room to write your thoughts. Please print off as many copies as you need for the members of your group. I have found with some other studies that printing the questions single sided gives me somewhere to write extra notes, either as I'm preparing, or during the group discussion.

Thanks for giving this a go. I would welcome any feedback – good, bad, or indifferent – to help improve this guide.

Contents

Study 1 - 1 John 1:1-4 Eyewitnesses Testimony.....	5
Study 2 - 1 John 1:5-10 Light and Truth.....	9
Study 3 - 1 John 2:1-6 The Advocate and Our Actions	12
Study 4 - 1 John 2:7-11 The Old New Command.....	15
Study 5 - 1 John 2:12-17 The Reason for Writing.....	18
Study 6 - 1 John 2:18-29 The Antichrist and the Antidote	21
Study 7 - 1 John 3:1-12 Children of God or Children of the devil?... 25	
Study 8 - 1 John 3:13-24 In Deed and in Truth	29
Study 9 - 1 John 4:1-6 Tested and Proven (Origins)	33
Study 10 - 1 John 4:7-12 Love Defined and Demonstrated.....	37
Study 11 - 1 John 4:13-21 Love Perfected (by Abiding).....	40
Study 12 - 1 John 5:1-5 Born to Overcome.....	43
Study 13 - 1 John 5:6-12 The Testimony of Three Witnesses.....	46
Study 14 - 1 John 5:13-21 Confidence	50
Study 15 - 2 John 1-6 The Truth Walkers.....	54
Study 16 - 2 John 7-13 The Deceivers.....	57
Study 17 - 3 John 1-8 Testimony to Love.....	60
Study 18 - 3 John 9-15 Loves to Testify	64

Study 1 - 1 John 1:1-4 Eyewitnesses Testimony

Background.

John's letters were written late in the first century at a time when the church was becoming less of a novelty and more of a normality. While there would have been pockets of persecution, most of the problems came from within, from those who should have known better, yet sought their own agenda, rather than God's. Second and third generation disciples, who had never personally met any of the original apostles, were far more susceptible to false teaching – both giving it and receiving it¹. There was a belief by some that Christ Jesus only *seemed* to have a physical body (known as Docetism). Closely related to this error, and even incorporating it, was Gnosticism. While it's not a simple thing to describe, there were two kinds of Gnostics, both agreeing in the essential evil of matter, and neither accepting the Person of Christ. Some practised severe self-discipline and avoided all forms of indulgence, some swung to the other extreme and practised licentiousness. John opposed both types in his writing. They claimed to possess a superior, secret knowledge and so were called Gnostics (*Gnōstikoi*). Nine times John shows us how to recognise the truth and uses the verb "know", clearly targeting this kind of error.²

Barclay has this to say, that I find quite interesting:

"The trouble which 1 John seeks to combat came not from people who were out to destroy the Christian faith but from those who thought they were improving it. It came from people whose aim was to make Christianity intellectually respectable. They knew the intellectual trends and currents of the day and felt that the time had come for Christianity to

¹ Barclay, William. The Daily Study Bible: The Letters of John and Jude Introduction page 5. St Andrews Press 1976.

² A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New testament, Introduction to 1 John 1930-1933 Public Domain e-Sword edition

come to terms with secular philosophy and contemporary thought.”³

1. How do you think this compares with what we see happening today? What do you see today that reflects this kind of thinking? What is different?

Read through 1 John 1:1-4

2. What is John referring to when he says, “that which is from the beginning”?

- a. What does he mean by “from the beginning”?

3. Unlike most of the letters we have in the New Testament, John’s starting point is sensory – ... we have heard... we have seen... our hands have touched... What makes these experiences of John and the other apostles particularly important for us?

³ Barclay, William. New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of John and Jude (Kindle Locations 378-381). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

4. John testifies to the life that has appeared (verse 2). This is no ordinary life, but it is “the eternal life, which was with the Father”. What is John’s stated purpose for telling us about that which he has seen and heard? (Verse 3).
 - a. How do you think this proclamation of eternal life creates the fellowship that John mentions?

5. Then in verse four, he gives his reason for writing. What link, if any, do you see between fellowship and joy?

6. Everything about the Word of Life was made conspicuous. Jesus didn't hide His actions from public scrutiny, He didn't conceal His origin or purpose. John was an eyewitness to many of the things that Jesus did. In thinking about what John is declaring and his reasons for doing so, what should that prompt us to do?
 - a. Discuss what might be some practical ways to do those things in your specific work and community environments.

Study 2 - 1 John 1:5-10 Light and Truth

Introduction

Does anyone like walking around in the darkness? I'm not talking about a pleasant night-time stroll in the bush where the moon and stars give enough light to see the path. No, I'm talking about a deep darkness that cannot be penetrated. Our bedroom in the house where we lived in Canberra was very dark. None of the nearby streetlights shone in our bedroom window at night and unless the moon was up, it was almost impossible to find the way to the bathroom except by feel. More than once I bumped into the wardrobe or stumbled against the tallboy. Even in a familiar room, darkness can cause us to stumble. On an unfamiliar path that kind of impenetrable darkness can be far more dangerous.

Read through 1 John 1:5-10

1. The message that John has heard and now declares is "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." Is this just one of those feel-good things that we say, or does it mean something that we ought to get a handle on?
 - a. Discuss what you think that meaning is.

2. What things characterise "walking in darkness"? (v6)

3. John says in verse 6 that when the things we say do not align with the things we do, we are in fact living a lie. What are some things that demonstrate how important it is for those who follow Jesus to live a life that demonstrates truth?

4. For us to truly live, we must be connected to the source of life. Yet John shows us that we cannot maintain that connection by our own efforts. In verse 3 we see that fellowship with one another is linked to fellowship with the Father and with Jesus Christ. What do we need to do to have that fellowship and what is the result? (v7).

5. Darkness hides things, both good and bad. No one is comfortable having the bad things they've done exposed for all to see but walking in darkness is self-deception (v8). What is promised when we willingly let light shine on our sin? (v9)

6. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus calls us to be light that is seen by everyone. What might it look like for a Christian to shine light in a dark place?

- a. How do you think people will respond and why?
-
- 7. Not everyone can see that they have offended God. What does this reveal about such people?
 - a. How should we treat those who cannot see the truth of what God has said?

If we *say* and do not *do*, we are lying, we are fooling ourselves, we are calling God a liar. Owning up to what we have done exposes our sin to the light and in doing so, drives out the darkness through the work that Christ did on the Cross. Nothing less is sufficient.

Make some time to be still and allow the Holy Spirit to shine his light on the areas of your life where you need to be walking in light and truth.

Study 3 - 1 John 2:1-6 The Advocate and Our Actions

Those we love, we protect. We care about whether they succeed or fail. We do all we can to equip them for success and we do all we can to help them get back up when they fail. John's fatherly concern for those he is writing to is woven throughout this letter. He does not want them to 'miss the mark' or to veer away from what is true. The consequences of falling short of the goal are eternal, yet there is hope, even in the midst of their failure, and ours.

1. John's stated desire in verse one is for us to not sin. Obviously, we don't achieve that consistently, but we have Jesus as our 'Advocate' when we do. What is the purpose of an advocate?
 - How does Jesus fulfil that role? (vv1-2)
 - Propitiation, or atoning sacrifice, is something that turns away or appeases anger – it removes the cause. Should God be angered by our sin? Why?

- How does that gel with God being love?

2. Jesus didn't come to deal only with the sins that we do, but the sins of everyone who has ever lived or will live. It's clear though that not everyone knows Jesus and accepts what he has done for them. What is the defining characteristic of someone who does know Jesus? (vv3-4)

You can say, "I know God", anybody can speak those words. But what is behind the words? What is the intent, the motivation, the substance? John doesn't muck around here – if you say that you know God and yet still live in disobedience, then you are living a lie.

3. What then is the command that Jesus gives us? (Have a look at John 15:12-17 for some detail on this).

To know Jesus, to understand what He has done for us should provoke us to love Him. In that love, there should be an admiration

that makes us want to be like Him – just as child copies their parent or older sibling. This is one way that a child grows to maturity and in one way becomes “complete”.

4. Verse 5 is a bit of a tricky one and it depends on which translation you look at as to how it comes across. What do you think John means when he says that “God’s love is truly made complete”⁴ in a person who keeps God’s word?

5. What is the standard by which we can measure ourselves to have confidence of being “in Christ”?
 - Discuss how that might look in your neighbourhood, workplace, or church community.

⁴ Tom, Wright. Early Christian Letters for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 138). SPCK 2011.

Study 4 - 1 John 2:7-11 The Old New Command

At first glance, this short passage may seem a bit cryptic or confusing, but this is very much a case of needing to have context – both from within this letter and from other scripture. John has just been writing about keeping Christ’s commands as an indicator of a person’s relationship with Christ. Here John links keeping his word with loving God.

1. John is not introducing any new teaching but reminding them of the word that came from Christ himself. What then is this word that we have heard?
2. Look up John 13:34-35 (some of you may even know it by heart). What is the commandment that Jesus has given us?
3. Take some time to read Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, and 34, Mark 12:30-31, and Romans 13:8-10. Discuss how these verses point to that commandment also being something that we have had from the beginning.

- What do these verses show us about the things God cares about?

John has been saying all through this letter that if we are living in God's presence, we live a life that is visible, open, transparent, and full of light that comes from God. Our sin breaks the fellowship that we were created to have with God and with each other, yet God has done all that is necessary to restore that fellowship. When we look around us at the world and observe how people are behaving, it looks as if things are getting darker, that evil is growing. However, John says that this is not the case. His observation is that the darkness is fading, and the true light is already shining.

4. How can this be? How might John see an ever-brightening light despite the way the world is consuming itself?

5. We often think of hate as an act that harms another, and that is certainly true. But if love is an act of selflessness for another's good, where does doing nothing for someone fall?
 - How do you think this kind of behaviour leaves us in darkness?

6. For us to push back against that darkness, we need to love with the same kind of love that God has shown us. How can we demonstrate love for a brother or sister?

Love, the *agapáō* that Jesus has for us, allows us to see our own faults and with His strength overcome them as we grow to be more like Him. It also allows us to see the faults of others and walk with them anyway. As we do, we can draw them to the One who is more than able to transform them too.

Study 5 - 1 John 2:12-17 The Reason for Writing

John has been writing about Christ's command to love and how the act of loving illuminates our life. Then comes this song or poem, seemingly randomly placed, that speaks about why John has written this letter.

1. Do you think he is literally singling out fathers, young men, and children? If not, who is John speaking to?
2. List each encouragement given to each group and write next to them how it encourages you. If you can't think how it encourages you, think about how it might encourage someone in that stage of their walk with Christ.

Perhaps this word of encouragement is meant to help counter some of the heavy thoughts John has raised previously in preparation for those he is about to raise. Though it's hard to love your brother, your sins have been forgiven. We have an advocate, but you have overcome the evil one. Desires are difficult to master, yet God has given you strength. Knowing God, the One who is beyond time, is about understanding his character and thus pursuing the things He cares about.

3. There is a strong caution in verse 15 against loving the world, what is it about the world we are not to love?

- For those who do not heed this caution, what does it tell us about them?

- In what ways do we ‘love the world’?

- 4. We cannot long for and chase after the things of this world and expect the Father’s love to remain in us. Why then do we pursue the things that are passing away?

- How can we show love towards the Father?

- 5. Read the parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28-32. This was spoken as a stern warning to the Chief Priests and Elders.

Discuss how you think this might apply for all who claim to follow God.

6. What does doing the will of God look like for you?

Whatever age we are, whatever stage we are at in our walk with Jesus, we have something to contribute to the Kingdom. Whether we are children, youths, fathers, or mothers, we need to desire righteousness above all else. We all need to ask, "How can I use what the Father has given me in a way that pleases Him? Am I building up someone's faith? Am I helping them to gain knowledge? Does what I do contribute to the way they honour God with their life? What about speaking up for and acting to support those who are vulnerable?" These are things that please the Father.

Study 6 - 1 John 2:18-29 The Antichrist and the Antidote

'Antichrist' can either mean one who opposes the Lord's anointed, or one who seeks to usurp his position. We are to be on our guard against both and we are to be careful that we do not fall into the same trap ourselves. Could someone who has the anointing of the Holy Spirit oppose the Son, or seek to put themselves into the position that only he has the right to be? John makes it clear that cannot be the case. Nevertheless, we must be careful to weigh our own actions and motives against the clear command of Jesus to love and pursue the Kingdom and righteousness. We must hold each other to account in this regard, even while we work together to build one another up in these things.

1. What do you think John means when he says it is the 'last hour'?
 - If John was writing in the last hour, where do you think the clock is now?
 - How should that affect how seriously we take John's warning in this passage?

2. We often think of one specific 'Antichrist', yet John mentions 'many antichrists'. How do you think these ideas link together?

3. "These people ... never really belonged to us". It's not that these people were following Jesus and turned away, it's that they never did in the first place. In what ways were they 'antichrists'?
 - How should we respond to people who oppose Christ in this way?

4. Sometimes, when we see others walk away from following Christ, we might wonder if it can happen to us as well. John doesn't seem worried that that will be a problem for the readers of this letter. What is different about them and us? (v20)
 - How does that make a difference? (v21)

5. What things does John mention in verses 22-23 that identifies the liars?

- How easy are these things to identify in people?

6. Verses 24 and 27 show us how to counter the lies in our own walk. What instruction does John give to us here?

- What will that result in? (See verse 25, 28 and 29)

- Why might we shrink in shame?

There is no need to be ashamed of our work when our lives are producing 'the peaceful fruit of righteousness'. John wants his readers to be confident in Christ's presence, but only the righteous can stand before the Son of God without fear. Those who do what

Christ would do reflect His character and copy His actions because of the relationship they have with Him. Therefore, we need to remain close to Christ, but also our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to invest time with them, hearing what He has to say both to us and through us.

Study 7 - 1 John 3:1-12 Children of God or Children of the devil?

Throughout this passage, John flicks from describing those who are in Christ and those who are of the devil. Being in Christ produces predictable patterns of behaviour, and being apart from Christ produces different, but equally predictable behaviour. In the descriptions of these different characteristics, we have a standard to measure our behaviour against. And this standard is purity, righteousness, and love. Who we belong to is revealed by the things that we do.

1. When John tells us to “see”, he is telling us to examine the detail, drink in the beauty, and marvel at the great love the Father has lavished on us. Spend some time doing just that and write down the impression this verse leaves with you.

2. Though we certainly are God’s children, it isn’t always obvious to others. What is the reason John gives as to why this happens?
 - Are there other reasons why we are not recognised as part of God’s family? Discuss what they could be.

We are children of God now, but we do not know exactly what we will be when we reach the completeness or maturity mentioned in James 1:4 and Ephesians 4:13. What we do know is that we shall bear Christ's image, we will have the character that he has, we will do the kind of things that he would, without fault or failure. This is our hope, our expectation for our future, even as we strive for it now.

3. What is something that verse 3 says we are to do *now* that will set us going in the right direction?

- Why is this important?

4. Verses 4, 6 and 8 reveal the characteristics of those who are 'of the devil'. What kind of behaviour would we expect from such people?

5. What should those who are children of God be doing, according to verses 7 and 10?

- What specific actions do you think this might result in?

Back in chapter one, John says that we are deceiving ourselves if we deny the sin in our life. Here, in verses six through to nine, it appears that he is saying the opposite – that if we are born of God we cannot sin. Most commentators think, and many translations indicate, that John is referring to sin that is habitual and deliberately persistent.

6. What is it that draws us back to the Father when we do sin? (verse 9)

7. John puts failing to love in the same league as Cain killing his brother (verse 12). Do you think that is a reasonable comparison?

- Why?

8. In verse 11 John circles back to the message that we have had from the beginning. The command to love one another has always been central to the message that we have been given. What will that look like in our speech and our conduct?

Study 8 - 1 John 3:13-24 In Deed and in Truth

There is some hard teaching in this passage and none of us get it right every time. That doesn't mean we should ignore it – this is at the very foundation of what we believe.

Truth reveals itself by the deeds it produces. This is true of love also. A rose might smell the same regardless of what we call it but calling manure a rose will not change its smell either. There is much that we call love, yet it bears little resemblance to the love we see demonstrated by Christ Jesus.

1. This passage starts with a warning, almost out of the blue. Does the World hate us?
 - In what ways have you seen this played out, or not?

 - Discuss what our response should be when we encounter such opposition.

2. In verse 14 John says that we have “passed from death to life”. Paul says that we were “dead in [our] sins” before God made us “alive with Christ” (Colossians 2:13). How can we be sure that this has truly happened?

3. Verse 15 John uses some strong language regarding hate, in some ways aligning with his thoughts in verse 13. By equating hate with murder, it sets the bar very high. In what ways do we hate?
 - Have a look at what Jesus says in Mat 5:21-24 and discuss how such things could be equal with murder.

Does hate require action on our part? Is it not merely the absence of love? Love must act. Love demands, compels us to step forward to help our brothers and sisters. To hate simply requires us to do nothing. Hate closes its eyes to needs and walks to the other side of the road, while love dodges traffic crossing the street to help.

4. Verses 16 through 18 show us what an active, love-in-truth looks like. Where must we look to see what love is?
 - What examples of demonstrating love does John give?

- How might we make that happen?

- What other ways could we 'lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters'?

A heart and a conscience that are sensitive to the Holy Spirit will be pricked when we sin – we will feel the condemnation of our actions. For those who abide in Christ, these actions are not the norm. Rather, the Holy Spirit draws us back to the Father, back to the right actions that we modelled in the Son. "...And God is greater than our hearts..." or to put it another way, his grace is more than sufficient when we truly turn away from sin.

5. Having exposed our sin to the light of Christ's love and turned away from disobedience, what is the promise we have? (verses 21-22)

6. Looking at verse 24, how do we know that we live in God?

- How do we know that he lives in us? How important is it to have such certainty?

Study 9 - 1 John 4:1-6 Tested and Proven (Origins)

In these verses, we have a warning and a test. Warnings of course help us to avoid danger. Generally, if we apply a test to something, we measure it against a specific set of criteria. We gather evidence to prove that those criteria have been met. In education, we have assessments to show that the learning outcomes have been achieved. We ask, does the person demonstrate the knowledge, skills, attitude, and behaviour required to do this task or role?

1. What does John tell us to test in this passage?
 - Why are we to test them?
 - What standard do we measure them against?

2. Why is it so important that 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh'?

What we are testing for is the origin of the words being spoken. Do they come from God, or are they things that people have made up to suit their own agenda? There are today, even as there was then,

some who would lead others into error. It may be for personal gain, or it may be because they have themselves been deceived, yet we must determine if what they say aligns with the Spirit of truth.

3. How do you think we could make that work in practise?
4. John reminds us in verse 4 of where we are from and the victory we have. I think it's reasonable to think that his readers were somewhat overwhelmed by what was going on. Do you feel overwhelmed in your walk with Jesus at times? In what ways?
5. Even with the issue of the false teachers and other problems, John says they have overcome. Where does this victory come from?

6. There is a clear difference in viewpoint between those who are of the world and those who are of God. Discuss how this difference in perspective might shape our thinking and thus our behaviour.

7. Think about the substance of your own conversations and actions – where are they focused? Are they focused on things that are temporary (of this world), or do they reflect the things that endure (of the Kingdom of God)?

8. If people are listening to us, what is it that we are saying?
 - Do we need to shift our viewpoint?

 - How might we do that?

A final thought – who are you listening to? Are you taking the time to measure what you are hearing against the Word? Are you spending time in the Word, seeking wisdom from the Holy Spirit as you do? The Holy Spirit speaks the truth, He testifies to our hearts what is true regarding Jesus Christ (John 15:26). His words are truth – they create, they build up, they unify.

Study 10 - 1 John 4:7-12 Love Defined and Demonstrated

These verses show us just how God's love for us has been put into action. We are shown that God is the source and initiator of love. He is set apart as the benchmark of what love does, He is the one we are to emulate. If we are from God, if we are walking in the Truth, if we know God, then the natural result is that we will love one another with this same kind of love that God has for us. Of course, this requires the same kind of rebirth that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about (John 3:3-6), because it is not something that we can produce in our natural state or by our own efforts.

1. Why does John urge us to love one another?
 - What do our acts of love towards others demonstrate?

2. John says that all love (agapáō) has its origin in God, who is by very nature love. This is followed up with, 'Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.' Do we not see this kind determined, sacrificial love in those who do not follow Christ?
 - What do you think this means when we do observe such love in those who are outside of Christ?

3. God showed us just how much He loves us. Paul observes in Romans 5:8 'God *demonstrates* His love...' To what end, or to what purpose does God go out of His way to love us? (Verse 9).

4. God's love for us is held up in verse 10 as the perfect example of love. What things about God's love for us makes this so? Refer to Romans 5:6-11 and think about how that ties in with what John says.

5. Why do you think that loving each other is an appropriate response to God's love for us?

6. Discuss how loving one another and having God live in us makes his love complete in us.

The 'one another' means those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. This is essential – we must be able to love our family! But I do not think that it ends there. I suspect the rubber hits the road with when it comes to loving your enemies. God loved before we knew that He loved us, even before we could love Him. He loved when we were openly hostile towards Him. That is the example that we have. That is the standard that we cannot live up to without being in Christ and empowered by the Spirit.

Study 11 - 1 John 4:13-21 Love Perfected (by Abiding)

While the NIV uses the more familiar word “live”, and some others use “remain”, I still love the way the NASB and ESV use “abide”. It conveys not only a sense of permanency but also of rest. Whether we live, remain, dwell, or abide it is not about a physical location but a relational one. I might live in Adelaide or Sydney or Canberra or Brisbane but in all of them I abide with my wife.

1. Discuss what this idea of abiding in Christ means for you.

2. John was a witness of Christ’s life and service. In what ways are we also witnesses?

We have a testimony of what we have seen, and a confession of faith (verses 14 & 15). This is tied to our position in Christ – that is, abiding as well as knowing and believing the love of God. John and the other disciples saw and heard much as they went around the country with Jesus, and they couldn’t help but tell others about what they had observed (Acts 4:20).

3. While we have not walked physically with Jesus, we have still walked with him. What have you seen in your life that convinces you that 'the Father sent the Son to be the saviour of the World'?

4. What do you think it means to 'know and rely on the love of God'?

 - How can we know God's love for us?

 - In what ways do we rely on it?

5. How does love remove fear? John tells us quite plainly in v 18.

- In what ways are we still afraid, despite all that we know of God's love?

6. How does loving those who are our family in Christ demonstrate the love we have for God?

- What might that love look like when put into practise?

We demonstrate love to those we can see, because of the love shown to us by the One we cannot see. Love cannot be passive. Hate on the other hand does not need to be active for it to be hate. Simply doing nothing will suffice for hate. Ignoring injustice, passing by those in need, failing to hold others to account – all of these things are 'absent actions' that do not seek out what is best and do indeed cause harm. We love Christ Jesus when we obey His command, and His command is to love – to go out of our way to do what is best for others.

Study 12 - 1 John 5:1-5 Born to Overcome

We know from John's account of Jesus' life that we cannot be part of God's Kingdom without being reborn (John 1:12-13; 3:3-6). Not a physical rebirth, but a spiritual one, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. To be in Christ, to see His Kingdom, we must be born of God. This great privilege is available to all who receive Jesus, to all who believe in His Name. Believing that Jesus is the Christ means that we believe, not only who Jesus is, but also the authority that He carries.

1. As shown in verse one and the references mentioned above, those who receive Jesus as God's anointed one are born of God. What does this mean to you?

2. John says that God's commands are not a burden, that they won't weigh us down. What do you think he means by that?
 - Does doing what God requires always feel that way?

 - Why do you think they do feel heavy sometimes?

3. There seems to be a link that John makes between Jesus' commands not being a hassle and with our being born of God (3b-4a). What might be John's thinking here?

4. How does faith in Jesus as the Son of God give us the victory that John speaks of in verses 4b and 5?

5. Refer to 4:4 and discuss how that links to John's thought in 5:5.

6. John keeps reminding us of the importance of obeying God's commands. Compare John's statements here with those of Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40. How does what Jesus commands in Matthew's account relate to what John says here?

- How does that impact your thinking on this matter of obedience?

To be born of God means that we love those who are also of God. If we genuinely love the Father, it will be no burden to love others. The love to which we are called is a revolutionary love that these days, we have lost sight of to some extent. Yet God is within us – His strength in us, His victory in us, His life in us through faith. Those who share His life, share His victory.

Study 13 - 1 John 5:6-12 The Testimony of Three Witnesses

While forensic investigators will use fingerprints and DNA to testify about what has happened, there is still a need for eyewitnesses to say what they have seen or experienced. If we can rely on the testimony of two or three people in a court of law to establish what is true, how much more trustworthy is it when the one who bears witness has truth as His very character?

1. How much weight do we put on testimony? Think not just about in legal terms, but in general do we believe what people say they have seen or experienced.
2. How often do we doubt what God has said?
3. How does the way we act, or fail to act, show what we believe?

4. Does it matter what we believe? Does it change what is true?

5. There are two distinct means by which John says Jesus Christ has come – the water and the blood. Why do you think these two things are important?

6. The testimony of the Spirit agrees with that of the water and the blood. Along with this, John says that God’s testimony through the Spirit carries more weight than that of those who walked with Jesus while he was on this earth (verse 9). Why do you think this is so?

7. How does the Spirit bear witness to the truth of Christ’s humanity and sacrifice?

Anyone who believes in the Son has been born of God (5:1) and we know that requires the work of the Holy Spirit, who speaks the truth about Jesus. Thus, what the Spirit testifies concerning Jesus is embedded in the core of our being.

8. Those who do not believe God are said to make him out to be a liar. How do they do that?

9. Consider what we know about God's character from verses such as Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:17-18. Why does it matter if people call God a liar?

10. What is available to all in verse 11? Where do we get hold of it?

11. Obviously, not everyone is interested in such a gift, or they reject the only means to attain it (verse 12b). Why do you think that is?

12. The statement in verse 12 is black and white, there are no shades of grey in it, no gaps where one can find a loophole. How do you react to this stark contrast?

- Do you find it offensive or encouraging and why?

Eternal life, as described in scripture, is not a slow wearing down, spread too thin life that Bilbo experienced in Lord of the Rings. Rather, it is a full and enduring life that does not wear out. It is, as Tom Wright puts it, 'the life of the age to come'. There is no third option. Either you have the Son and share in His Life, or you do not have the Son and have no part in it. There is no other name by which we may be saved. There is no other way for people to come to the Father. Religion, as man has made it, may well be a placebo, but when we are in Christ we have gone beyond Religion and into Relationship – and that is where Life is found.

Study 14 - 1 John 5:13-21 Confidence

In his effort to counteract the false teaching that was becoming prevalent in his day, John writes to give us certainty. In this passage, he gives us the six things that we can be certain of, six things that we can have confidence in. This is knowledge that anyone in Christ can have. They are not things that only a select few can understand. John writes to give us all certainty in the knowledge of the things of God.

1. What is John's stated purpose for writing? (verse 13) Why do you think it is important for those who believe in Jesus to have that assurance?
2. There is no need to be timid, or fearful when coming to God with a request, but there is a precondition for God hearing our requests (verse 14). How can we know what God's will is so that we can ask in accordance with it?
3. Jesus has plenty to say about how we should ask. Have a look at John 15:7. How do you think Jesus' requirement to abide in Him tie in with asking according to God's will?

4. In verse 16 John mentions one thing that we are to pray for. Discuss what you think those prayers for a brother or sister might look like.

- What other action might be required of us?

5. What do you think John means by 'a sin that leads to death' in verses 16 and 17?

- How would that change our approach to someone who is going down that path?

6. 'Everyone who has been born of God does not keep sinning...'
I think it's clear that John is talking about persistent and wilful disobedience to God's commands. What is your attitude once sin has been identified in your life? Does it make a difference who points it out and how they do so?

7. In what ways does Jesus (the one who was born of God) protect us? (Verse 18)

8. Verse 19 has two things that we know. Do you find this verse to be an encouragement? In what way?

9. John is determined to get through to us things that we can know. While we may not be dealing with quite the same kind of thinking as the church in his day, why is it still a good thing to have confidence in what can be known by us as people who follow Jesus?

10. This letter finished with what may seem to be an odd and out of place command. In a world that chases after invented 'gods' that are empty and short-lived, John has been pointing to the true and eternal God who offers a fullness of life that cannot be found elsewhere. Think about the things you spend your efforts on that are as empty and temporary as the idols of first century Rome. What do you need to do to set them aside for things of eternal substance?

We know Christ came, because we have eyewitness reports, but we also know Him. This relationship is only possible because of the work Christ did. He bought us out of slavery to sin and into the freedom of life in him. We can know, in a relational sense, the One who is perfectly True. It is in this relationship alone that we find Life as God originally intended, Life that is of the Kingdom. Only in the True God do we find True Life. That is confidence.

3. John has confidence that God's grace, mercy, and peace are with us. What do you think is the source of this confidence?

- What do these three things mean to you?
- Why do we need God's grace, mercy, and peace?
- Do we look for these anywhere else, if so, where?

4. Those children who are 'walking in the truth' do so because they 'know the truth'. John is compelled to remind them to love. Walking according to God's commandment, walking in the truth, loving one another. How are these things linked?

5. Why is it so important that we 'walk according to His commandments'?

6. Knowing the truth provokes us to love. What is this truth that we know?

- How do you think this relates to with 1 John 5:18-20?

It is as we walk in truth and love, as we continue to abide in Christ, that we have access to the resources that we need to demonstrate to the World that we are in truth His disciples.

Study 16 - 2 John 7-13 The Deceivers

Lies are often dressed up with truth. They can seem so plausible until they are examined closely. There are, have always been, and always will be, those who seek first their own empire and glory, those who look at people as a means to their own ends. In the second part of this short letter, John turns his attention from encouraging the people to warning them of a serious danger in their midst.

1. In verse six, John repeats the requirement to walk in obedience to God's commands. He then explains that his reason for this reminder is because of the many that are actively working to deceive followers of Jesus. How might following this command to love, guard against false teachers?

2. John gives us a simple test of a person's teaching in verse seven. What is it and why is it important?
 - How might we 'lose what we have accomplished'? (Verse 8)

3. In verse nine, John says that these false teachers 'go too far', that they 'run ahead' of the things that Christ taught. What do

you think he means by this? Does it bring to mind anything in particular?

4. How would offering hospitality, or greeting a false teacher give us a share in what they are doing?

- How might this verse also apply to the way we treat those who teach what is true?

5. Do we have an obligation to love even the enemies of Christ? We sure do, but how do you know when to press on with a friendship and when to draw the line?

- Can we continue to remain in relationship in the hope they might still listen? Up to what point?

6. John closes by expressing a heart-felt longing to be with these people, to speak face to face, rather than communicating everything by letter. Discuss how this hope, this longing for fellowship would result in a joy that is abundant to the point of overflowing.
- Have you observed any link between relationships and joy in your own life?

Encouragement is never so effective as when given in person. Difficult conversations to correct those in error or who are struggling, are simply not as effective unless done in person. The process of respectful disagreement, discussion with a view to understand, and to discover from others that your ideas are in accordance with sound doctrine is what we need to be working towards.

Study 17 - 3 John 1-8 Testimony to Love

The first letter we have from John is to the Church universal, the second to a specific fellowship and this third one to an individual who is much loved by John. There are four key things in the first part of this letter: Truth, Joy, Love, and Faithfulness. Just as in his letter to 'the chosen lady', in John's letter to the 'beloved Gaius', love and truth are tied to each other throughout.

1. This letter follows a pattern that was typical of personal letters of the day. Do you find that greetings by yourself and others express a genuine concern, or are they little more than polite conversation?
 - What could we do to demonstrate genuine concern for others?

2. On hearing the testimony from some believers, John has great joy. What is the reason for that joy?

3. What is 'walking in the truth'?
 - What can we do to help each other in that?

4. John considers Gaius to be one of his 'children'. What does he mean by this?
 - Do you see your brothers and sisters in Christ as family? How important is that to you?

5. Gaius has shown himself to be faithful to the truth (verse 3). What do verses 5-8 tell us about the kind of work he was doing to earn such a testimony?

6. The support given to the itinerant preachers by Gaius had been widely reported. Why did his treatment of these people matter so much?

7. Verse six tells us one thing that the support given by Gaius to these travellers demonstrates. What is it and why is it so important?

8. Coming back to the issue of family, what obligations do we have to one another as family?

9. Hospitality was a vital part of the first century church. In what ways have we continued this practice?
 - In what ways do we fail to show hospitality? How could we do better?

Not all of us have the gifts and abilities to go to the ends of the earth. Some have physical limitations. Some are just not suited. That doesn't mean that those who don't go are uninvolved. When we invest time in prayer, when we provide practical help or finances, we are "fellow workers with the truth". It's a bit like having shares in a company, though we are more involved, and the investment yields eternal dividends.

Study 18 - 3 John 9-15 Loves to Testify

Sadly, it seems that each week brings another high-profile pastor called out for abusive behaviour of one kind or another. Our willingness to make celebrities of people who ought only to be servants of Jesus is a factor, but more so is our individual tendency to pride and power. Of course, this isn't a new thing. After expressing his joy, John comes to the difficult part of the conversation. How hard must it be to hear of such destructive behaviour among people for whom he has such love!

1. What is the root of the problem with Diotrephes?
 - While it may be easier to spot in someone else, think about when you may have had the same attitude (discuss if comfortable).
 - What is the best way to guard against this kind of attitude?

2. The two charges that John brings against Diotrephes are that he likes to be first and that he does not accept what John says. (Other translations say, 'he will not welcome us' or 'refuses to have anything to do with us' but I think the underlying problem remains the acceptance of John's authority as an Apostle). Why are these things a problem?

3. Contrast the actions of Diotrephes with those of Gaius. How does Diotrephes' attitude and actions fit in with the family obligations that we discussed earlier in this letter?

4. John has a simple and direct approach to deal with this problem. What is it and why do you think it would work (or not)?

The call to imitate what is good rather than evil comes just before John's commendation of Demetrius. It is almost certain that Demetrius was bringing this letter and was likely travelling with other evangelists. He is given an introduction, even as Paul did for Phoebe in the letter to the Romans.

5. Why do we know that Demetrius was someone whose behaviour was worth imitating?

- In what ways could you be the kind of people that others ought to imitate?
6. We don't know all the things John wanted to communicate, but he felt that writing was not the best way to do it. Discuss why face-to-face might have been the best option?

Seeing God changes us. Though I do think that we can look at someone and not truly "see" them. John implies something more than a passing acquaintance with someone or recognizing a face that goes with a name. That which we closely observe, we will imitate. Often children do this to a parent's embarrassment. Think of someone you know and whose behaviour you could seek to model. Consider whether you could ask to be mentored by them.