



study guide

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Introduction

As I am writing this, Victoria is in phase 1 lockdown due to the exponential spread of COVID-19. Australians had been anticipating when, not if, the lockdown would happen as many other countries were already in lockdown.

So, when the Australian Prime Minister, and subsequently the Premier of Victoria, announced what was inevitable and its implications last night, Australians already knew that life would be dramatically disrupted. People must adjust to the new routine of life until everything gets back to normal again. However, we are yet to find out what the new 'normal' would look like at the other end.

When we heard and believed the gospel, it was such good news that our lives were inevitably and dramatically altered. If your story was like most Christians' stories, you too were so excited. The changes to your life, although different from other Christians, were quite dramatic.

However, soon enough, the temporary excitement toned down gradually until your life settled at a new 'normal.' For some, the new 'normal' is so dramatically different from their old 'normal' that people around them become so intrigued. For others, it is rather difficult to distinguish the new 'normal' from the old 'normal.' People around them couldn't see any change in their lives. They themselves began to wonder whether the conversion really did happen. Were their hearts genuinely transformed by the gospel? Or were they just imitating others outwardly without any real inner renewal?

That, to a great extent, is the reason the apostle John wrote his first letter. It is clearly addressed to those who have received the gospel, believed in the name of Jesus and already become part of *God's family* (1 John 1: 3, 3: 1 and 5: 3). However, just because one claims to be a child of God, it does not necessarily mean one is (Matthew 7: 21-23).

The apostle Paul instructed the Christians in Corinth to 'examine [themselves], to see whether [they] are in the faith' (2 Corinthians 13: 5-6). John wanted his readers to do the same. His intention was not to condemn and exclude those who were not Christians. Rather, his goal was for his readers to align their lives to God's family values, especially in how they should treat fellow members of God's family.

In so doing, they can have the assurance that they have indeed obtained eternal life (1 John 5: 13). Writing as a spiritual father, John only wished the best for his spiritual children. He took much joy in knowing that his children were walking well, in the light, with one another (1 John 1: 4 and 5: 21).

So, with this study guide, we are inviting you to join us in exploring John's first letter together. We trust that as you study this short apostolic book, the Holy Spirit will illuminate your mind with vivid description and imagination of what the new 'normal' should look like for anyone in God's family.

It is our hope that if you call yourself a Christian, you will repent from any attitudes or behaviours that contradict your identity as God's children, and you will reacquaint yourself again with the Good News of Christ that will empower you to grow in holiness and love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Finally, it is our prayer that at the end of the study, God will fill your heart with a warming assurance that you are indeed part of His family.

In Him,
Sandy Citro

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A New Family

The opening of John's first letter is startling. It lacks salutations, unlike most New Testament letters and other letters during early centuries AD. John went straight to what he wanted to say as if he did not want to waste ink and papyrus.

The short introduction, however, packs a punch and shows the overall purpose of his message. We must not miss what John was saying in these first four verses.

Context

1. John also wrote another New Testament book called 'the Gospel according to John' or 'the book of John'. What are the similarities between John 1: 1-18 and 1 John 1: 1-4?

Observation

2. The main 'object' of 1 John 1: 1-4 is 'the word of life'. Based on your observation in the previous question, does 'the word of life' refer to Jesus, the message of the Gospel or something else (John 6: 63-68, 11: 25-26)?

3. The key action in the passage is to proclaim. In the original language, the word 'proclaim' is different from the word translated as 'preach' (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:21-24). The original word for 'proclaim', however, has been translated in ESV as 'tell' (Mark 5: 19), 'report' (Acts 4: 23) and 'declare' (Luke 8: 47).

How does this affect our understanding of 'proclaim'? What does the word entail?

Meaning

4. What is the basis for our fellowship with one another (verse 3; John 17: 20-23)?

5. How would writing the letter make John's joy complete (verse 4; John 15: 11 and 3 John 3-4)?

Application

6. To whom and how can we proclaim the word of life, especially in the current situation of our world?

7. Given that we have been brought into a new family through our fellowship with Christ, how should we relate to each other? What is one practical thing you can do?

An Honest Family

Context

1. What does 'God is light' mean in relation to God's character (verse 5; John 1: 4-5 and 3:19-21)?

Observation

2. What is required for fellowship among believers (verses 3, 6 and 7)?

Meaning

3. How does the cleansing happen (verses 7 and 9)?

4. What is the meaning of having God's word in us (verse 10 and 2 Timothy 3: 14-17)?
How does this relate to the two pitfalls (verses 8 and 10; Psalm 119: 9-11)?

Application

5. What does the confession of sin look like in your life (verses 9; Psalm 51: 1-12 and James 4: 6-10)?

6. How can we help each other to confess our sins and walk in the light together through some practical ways (Galatians 6:1 and James 5:16)?

An Obedient Family

Context

None of us is free of sin (1 John 1: 8). Just as an accused person needs a defence lawyer to plead their case before a judge, we need Jesus to advocate on our behalf with the Father. However, this is not a free pass to live a sinful life that displeases God.

Observation

1. 'Propitiation' came from the Old Testament where atonement by blood sacrifice was performed to turn away God's wrath against sin. How does this apply to Jesus Christ as our propitiation (Leviticus 16: 15-16 and Romans 1: 18)?

Meaning

2. What are John's key points regarding sin in verses 1, 2 and 4?
3. What does it mean to abide in Christ and walk the way He walked (verses 6; John 15: 4-12 and Colossians 3: 1-3)?
4. Keeping God's commandments is crucial to our relationship with and knowledge of him (verse 3). How can we reconcile this while we still have sins in our lives (1 John 3: 4-6 and Romans 7: 21 - 8: 2)?

Application

5. What steps can you take where you are struggling to obey God's commandments (Romans 8: 5-8 and 12: 1-2, 9-21)?

6. Share an example where you have had to call out sin in someone's life. How did it go and what did you learn (Galatians 6: 1-5 and James 5: 19-20)?

An Authentic Family

Context

1. What was the content of the old commandment (verses 7 and 8) that John was referring to (Leviticus 19: 17-18)? How was it renewed and fulfilled in the human life of Jesus Christ (John 13: 34)?

Observation

2. How is the new commandment true in Christ and in us (verse 8; Jeremiah 31: 33 and John 13: 35)?

Meaning

3. How was the darkness passing away and the true light already shining (verse 8; Romans 13: 12-14 and Ephesians 8-11)?

4. What does each group represent in terms of spiritual maturity and continuity (verses 12-14)? Why are the corresponding truths particularly helpful for each group?

Application

5. How do you abide in the light of Jesus Christ in your life (verse 10 and 1 Thessalonians 5: 5-8)?

6. In regards to verse 9, what can you do to let go of grudges and pursue reconciliation?

A Unique Family

Context

John was contrasting those of God's family and those not of his family by examining how they engaged with the world.

1. What are some examples of 'loving the world'?

Observation

2. Was John referring to the natural world, the human race or something else (verse 15 and John 17: 14-16)?
3. The desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life are three aspects of loving the world which are not of the Father. What do these look like today?

Meaning

4. How does 'love for the world' differ in verse 15 and John 3: 16?
5. What does it mean that the world is passing away along with its desires (verse 17; 2 Peter 3: 10-13 and Matthew 6: 19-20)?

Application

6. What are some warning signs when a healthy enjoyment of the world is becoming excessive?

7. Which aspect of loving the world have you struggled with and overcome by God's grace?

A Persevering Family

Context

John had identified the problem of loving the broken and sinful world. Continuing his warning against those opposing the truth, he also identified the antichrists among us (verses 18-23).

1. What comes to your mind when you hear 'antichrist'?

Observation

2. What are the characteristics of an antichrist?

Meaning

3. What is the 'truth' (verses 20-23)? Why is the knowledge of the truth important (John 14: 6 and 16: 13)?
4. Do we not need to listen to other people's teaching (verse 27 and John 14: 26)?

Application

5. What are today's examples of antichrists? Why would you consider so? How can we protect ourselves?

6. John wanted us to remain in the truth of Christian faith (verse 20), let God's anointing teach us (verses 20 and 27) and continue in Christ's righteousness (verse 27 and John 15). How can we practically apply these three strategies in our life group and church?