



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: 1, 2, and 3 John Theme: Perfect Love

Overview: "God is love." The apostle John emphasized this simple yet profound truth over and over in his three letters, 1, 2, and 3 John. He wrote about God's love, and he wrote about the love of God as seen in the lives of God's children. John also emphasized the importance of truth and the dangers of false teaching. John wrote to the church at large (1 John), to "the lady chosen by God and to her children" (2 John), possibly to a specific woman but more probably to the church in a figurative way), and to a faithful disciple named Gaius (3 John). These three short letters challenge us to accept God's love, to display God's love, and remain faithful to God in word and action.

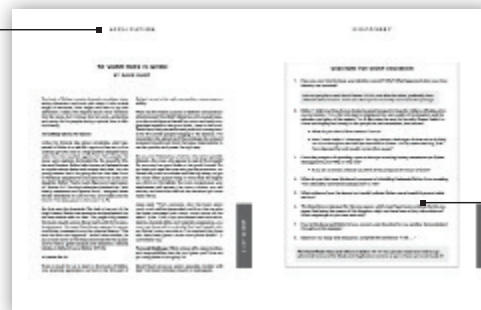
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

John, one of the original 12 apostles and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23) is the author of 1, 2, and 3 John. It is believed that John, as the last living apostle, wrote these letters from Ephesus.

Audience

Addressing his letters to Christians at large (1 John), to “the lady chosen by God and to her children” (2 John), and to “my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth” (3 John), John wrote to believers in his day—and ultimately to all future follows of Christ—to encourage love for God, love for one another, and love of the truth.

Date

John wrote these three letters between AD 80 and 95.

Setting

As the first century drew to a close, fewer and fewer eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ remained. One of the few living witnesses was the apostle John, an old man by this time. John called upon the

wisdom, experience, and insight he gained as one of the original 12 apostles to challenge the church to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of false teaching, and to show the indisputable proof and power of the risen Savior as witnessed by the love and faithfulness of his followers.

Theme

To read John’s Epistles is to come to grips with the importance of Christian love, to understand the necessity of remaining in fellowship with God, to ensure that your actions faithfully represent your convictions, and to fortify yourself against the lies of false teachers.

Why Study Galatians?

Don’t be misled by the brevity of these three Epistles. In a very short space, John explains how we can know that God loves us (and how we can demonstrate his love in convincing ways to others), how we can live victoriously over evil in the world, how we can be certain—beyond doubt—that we have eternal life, how we can keep from being led astray by false teaching, and how we can discern which spiritual leaders to follow and which to avoid.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: 1 John 1:5–2:11

WEEK 2: 3 John 3-8; 1 John 2:20–3:1

WEEK 3: 1 John 3:10-23; 2 John 4-6

WEEK 4: 1 John 3:24; 4:7-21

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Love your brother and
live in the light.**

STUDY: 1, 2, and 3 John

THEME: Perfect Love

LESSON TEXT: 1 John 1:5–2:11

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 89:15; John 3:18-21

STUDY

PERFECT LOVE IN LIGHT

BY MARK SCOTT

More than one person has overlaid Paul's triad of Christian virtues (faith, hope, and love) on the writings of John in the New Testament. If the Gospel of John is about faith and Revelation is about hope, then the Epistles of John are about love. And genuine Christian love always operates in the light of God—never in the darkness.

John has his own triad of virtues for the Christian life. In 1 John they are belief, righteousness, and love. These become tests of life. Flying under the radar of these themes are the upside-down beliefs of the false teachers (2:18-27; 4:1-6, 20, 21). Believing in the right person, doing the right things, and loving all people always undercut falsehood.

Walk in Light (1 John 1:5-10)

John loves contrasts—for example, physical water and spiritual water (John 4), physical bread and spiritual bread (John 6), earthly fathers and a heavenly father (John 8). In the lesson text today we see the stark contrasts between light and darkness (each mentioned several times), love and hate, and truth and deception (lies). After affirming the physicality of Jesus in the prologue (1:1-4), which addressed one false teaching of John's opponents, John made this big, incredible claim: "God is light." Christianity is not unique in using light as a metaphor in faith, but the Bible uses it in terms of knowledge, understanding, and moral excellence—all of which God is and has.

So it follows if God is light, then those who follow him should live in that light. The verses that follow have an alternating pattern. Verse 6 parallels with verses 8 and 10, and verse 7 parallels verse 9. The negative emphasis precedes the positive emphasis.

Claiming to be in *fellowship* (of a common mind) with God and *walking in darkness* is living a lie (cf. 1 Corinthians 5) and not "doing" truth. Claiming not to sin is to dupe oneself. Claiming not to have sin makes God out to be a liar (Romans 3:23) and shows that the word is not in us. On the other hand, walking in the light ensures our sins have been "purified" (cleansed) and our fellowship with other believers is effectual. Confessing sin allows us to lean into the forgiveness and cleansing of Christ.

Walk in Forgiveness (2:1, 2)

Walking in forgiveness is not exactly stated in these two verses, but it is implied by virtue of Christ's salvific act. As much as it breaks God's heart for us to sin after believing in Jesus, God has provided for our forgiveness. Obeying Scripture guards us from sin; but given the weakness of our flesh and given the conditions all around us in this fallen world, we still might sin. In such times we have an *advocate* (comforter or one who walks alongside of us and speaks on our behalf like a defense attorney). In the Gospel of John, the advocate is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Here the advocate is Jesus himself, who, by virtue of his righteousness, is the *atonement sacrifice* (i.e., the one who satisfies God's standards or requirements) for our sins as well as those of *the whole world*. For the believer, forgiveness is just a confession away.

Walk Like Christ (2:3-11)

Verse 6 offers a nice summary of the Christian life, "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." It does not get more succinct than that. If we walk as Jesus walked, we embrace obedience (3-6). Keeping the commands of God is love, not legalism (John 14:15). One cannot claim to *know* God and then disobey his commands. This duplicity makes it impossible to be *made complete* in Christ.

If we walk as Jesus walked, we embrace love. Much of 1 John is about loving others. The command to love others is as old as the Code of Holiness (Leviticus 19:18), and it is as fresh as Jesus' example (John 13:34, 35). In light of the incarnation of Jesus, *darkness is passing and the true light is already shining*. The light of God shines best when God's people love others.

Once again, the distance between what is claimed and what is lived is the test of life. Claiming light and hating others is really a life lived in darkness (and 1 John says it is equal to sin). Loving others is living in the light and ensures there will be no stumbling. Few things are as attractive to unbelievers as seeing people who love others and live morally excellent lives.

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APPLICATION

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF YOURS

BY DAVID FAUST

“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), but for many the world seems like a dark place. How can you and I brighten things up?

To make a difference, you don’t have to make headlines. Christ often calls his followers to serve humbly behind the scenes, like the woman named Tabitha or Dorcas, who “was always doing good and helping the poor,” making robes and other clothing items for those in need (Acts 9:36-39). I want to tell you about some light-bearers I know. They don’t seek recognition, so I am identifying them with initials rather than their names.

Small Deeds, Great Love

B drives a school bus. He sees the daily interactions with the kids on his route as an opportunity to brighten their day.

D has a gift for evangelism. She started a class to help immigrants learn English, and she has befriended several Muslim women who live in her neighborhood.

J leads a ministry in her church called Grief Share, providing comfort and practical help for the bereaved.

After suffering a broken neck in a car accident, D underwent intensive physical therapy in an effort to use his arms and legs again. He viewed his daily interactions with patients and therapists as an opportunity to lift their spirits.

M visits a jail every week and leads one-on-one Bible studies with prisoners. He also leads a weekly chapel service at a homeless shelter and eats lunch with the residents.

N is 13 years old. At the church door every Sunday morning he partners with a woman more than six times his age to greet worshipers and pass out bulletins.

Now retired from his career in sales, B volunteers with an urban ministry, serving meals and mentoring kids.

N and T are a busy married couple in their twenties; he is a teacher and she is a pharmacist. They’ve started a Bible class and two small groups for young adults, with dozens now involved.

E “adopted” a classroom in a local public school. She tutors students and finds ways to encourage the teacher.

A is a classical and jazz musician. He leads worship for the residents of an assisted-living facility.

B is a mechanic. Without charge, he repairs cars for families in need.

S organized a group of friends who like to sew, knit, and crochet. Each year they make more than 400 blankets to share with a local pregnancy care center.

Brighten the World Before You Leave It

Next to his chair in the retirement home where he lived, D kept a list containing dozens of names and phone numbers. Every day he phoned a few of his friends to encourage them. D brightened the world before he left it.

John wrote of Jesus Christ, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4, 5). Christ is the Light of the world with a capital L. He is the sun; we are the moon reflecting his glow. To brighten things up, we don’t have to be in the spotlight. It’s enough to be a candle shining in the darkness.

Personal Challenge: Think of someone you know who currently faces a dark, difficult situation. What will you do this week to brighten that person’s day?

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What challenges did you have trusting in God's absolute power and control over all things this past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 John 1:5–2:11**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. What recurring themes do you notice in this passage?
3. Let's dig deeper into some specifics in this passage:
 - What contrasts do you notice?
 - Find and discuss each statement that includes the word if. For each one, identify the condition (the if) and then the result or promise.
4. What do you learn about God's nature and character in this passage?
 - What do you learn about God from the if statements?
5. What do you learn about people? (Include both the "dark" and "light" nature.)
 - What part are we called to play in the if statements?
6. What commands in this passage are you called to obey?
 - In what specific way will you "live as Jesus did" this week?
7. With whom will you share the message from this passage this week?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
9. What challenge will you be facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **3 John 3-8** and **1 John 2:20-3:1**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Work together for the truth and don't be led astray.**

STUDY: 1, 2, and 3 John

THEME: Perfect Love

LESSON TEXT: 3 John 3-8; 1 John 2:20-3:1

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Timothy 2:3-7

STUDY

PERFECT LOVE IN TRUTH

BY MARK SCOTT

Truth and love have enemies, namely lies and selfishness—both inspired by the devil. Lies must be jettisoned, and selfishness must yield to love. The apostle John discussed how truth and love work in concert. A good example shows the balance between the two. An anointing keeps the community from being led astray to falsehood. And a lavish love from above garners confidence when Jesus comes again.

A Good Example (3 John 3-8)

The third Epistle of John was written to a man named Gaius. He was a stellar believer and a good example of balancing truth and love. When the truth was going to be compromised by a selfish man named Diotrephes, Gaius was as straight as an arrow in truth (8). When the church gave Demetrius a good testimony, John rejoiced in love (12).

John was confident that Gaius was as strong in his soul as he was physically healthy. Gaius did not have to boast about his love for the truth. Other believers spoke on his behalf. Word had reached John that Gaius was faithful to the truth and continued to walk in the truth. As a sidebar, John said he had no greater joy than to hear that his disciples were walking in the truth like Gaius (cf. 2 John 4).

But Gaius balanced his love for truth with tenderness for others. He had received *strangers* (probably a reference to unbelievers). This involved taking them into his home, feeding them, supporting them, and sending them on their way in the name of the Lord. The *pagans* (Gentiles or unbelievers) had not helped them, which made Gaius's generosity stand out all the more. Maybe some of them were the "least of these" (Matthew 25:31-46). Maybe some were angels (Hebrews 13:2). No matter, as Gaius showed them uncommon *hospitality*.

A Holy Anointing (1 John 2:20-27)

Loving others does not demand that believers kiss their brains goodbye. They still must be discerning in their love for others. And the good news is they have inside information to assist them in this. John had reminded his readers in this first letter that they were not to love the world (2:15-17). He also cautioned them against being duped by the antichrists (i.e., people who denied the reality of the incarnation of Jesus—2:18, 19).

In the midst of loving others, God would help these believers be discerning. He would equip them with his Holy Spirit (this is the *anointing* in the text), who helps believers to discern the difference between truth and error (1 John 4:1-6). The Holy Spirit reminded the community of faith of what was true (John 14:16, 17). The Holy Spirit would alert the community of faith of any false doctrine that denied the solidarity between the Father and the Son. The Triune God cannot be compartmentalized even though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have separate functions. John called the believers to embrace the godly tradition they had been given in Christ. He urged them not to stray from it. The motivation for all of this is quite simple—*eternal life*.

John made plain he was writing this part of the Epistle because he was concerned some in the church would be led *astray*. The Holy Spirit reminded the church of Jesus' teachings. No additional instruction would be necessary than this tradition of apostolic teaching.

A Lavish Love (1 John 2:28-3:1)

John wrote of truth that is not cold or indifferent. It is warm and identity giving. John addressed his recipients as *dear children* and *children of God*. He gave them something to do, something to know, and something to celebrate.

John's children (the people in the church) had something to do. They were to *continue in him*. The phrase highlights abiding or remaining. The abiding would be rewarded at the return of Christ. When he comes, John's people could stand *confident* (bold) and *unashamed* (to not shrink back).

John's children were given something to know. That truth was that Christ was *righteous*. And the accompanying truth to that was for his followers to do *what is right*. This demonstrated the people's conversions.

John's children were given something to celebrate. That celebration was the love of God. This is God's love for us as his children. He *lavished* it on us. We bask in that identity, and that helps us when the world gives us a first-class yawn and dismisses us. Be like Gaius. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide. Celebrate the love of God.

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APPLICATION

TRUTH AND LOVE—IT'S BOTH/AND NOT EITHER/OR

BY DAVID FAUST

In 1901 a songwriter in Chicago named Carrie Jacobs-Bond published her composition, "I Love You Truly." The song sold over a million copies (one of the earliest songs composed by a woman to do so) and became a favorite at weddings. Three American presidents invited Jacobs-Bond to sing at the White House. Her song concludes sweetly, "Gone is the sorrow, gone doubt and fear, for you love me truly, truly dear." Cole Porter's "True Love," released in 1956 and popularized by Bing Crosby and Grace Kelly, says, "You and I have a guardian angel on high, with nothing to do but to give to you and to give to me love forever true."

By 2016 those sugary lines gave way to the tart lyrics of another song called "True Love," performed by the British rock band Coldplay. This time the heartbroken singer instructs his estranged partner, "Just tell me you love me. If you don't, then lie, Oh, lie to me." Love's sweetness completely disappears by the time we get to "Bad Guy," a Grammy award winner for Song of the Year, in which 18-year-old Billie Eilish grunts sarcastically, "I'm that bad type. Make your mama sad type. . . . Might seduce your dad type."

Members of every generation dream about love, but the alarm clock of harsh reality shakes us awake. True love, it seems, is rare.

Don't Diminish Love

A friend of mine reviewed the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Chalcedonian Creed, and discovered not one of these famous belief statements contained the word *love*. Surprised, he also examined the belief statements posted on the websites of several Bible-believing Christian churches and noticed the same glaring omission. How can Christians attempt to tell the world what we believe and leave out love?

For Christ's followers, love is nonnegotiable. According to Jesus, love for God and love for our neighbors top

the list of commands. "The greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13), but is love the first word that comes to mind when your unchurched neighbors think of the church?

Don't Deify Love

The Bible says, "God is my Rock" (Psalm 18:2), but it would be idolatrous to say, "This rock is my god." Likewise, the Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:16), but we shouldn't twist the words around and think "love is god."

Agape love is central to God's character. He cares, gives, and sacrifices for the well-being of others. But God has other attributes as well, like justice, truthfulness, holiness, and grace. Our definition of *love* should come from Scripture, not from culture, and we should never misuse love as a lame excuse for immorality. We worship the loving God; we don't worship love itself.

Don't Detach Love (from Truth and Action)

With love and truth, it's not either/or, it's both/and. Someone said, "Love without truth lies; truth without love kills." Jesus commanded, "Love one another" (John 13:34), but he also insisted, "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Love and truth are inseparable. God's blessings "will be with us in truth and love" (2 John 3).

Love is far more than a Christian platitude or a theme for romantic music. Love sounds good as a noun, but Scripture reminds us to treat it as a verb.

Personal Challenge: Do you treat love as a verb? Each day this week, do a small act of unselfish service for a family member, neighbor, or coworker.

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What examples do you have of living as Jesus did this past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **3 John 3-8** and **1 John 2:20-3:1**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. What main themes do you see running through these passages? (Hint: look for repeating words.)
 - What evidence do you see for why John wrote this?
3. Let's dig deeper into some of the specifics in these passages:
 - What gave John joy?
 - Look for verses that encourage people to continue or remain. What do you learn from these verses?
 - What do you learn about the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Father?
4. What truths do you learn about God in these passages?
 - What do you learn about his nature?
5. What do you learn about the nature of humanity in these passages?
6. What will you do this week to better know, walk in, and obey the truth?
7. What can we do as a group to help one another remain in Christ and not be led astray?
 - In what ways can showing hospitality to others help us work together for the truth?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
9. What challenge will you be facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 John 3:10-23** and **2 John 4-6**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Work together for the truth and don't be led astray.**

STUDY: 1, 2, and 3 John

THEME: Perfect Love

LESSON TEXT: 1 John 3:10-23; 2 John 4-6

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 15:12-17; Colossians 3:12-14; Matthew 5:43-48; James 1:22-25

PERFECT LOVE. BROTHERLY LOVE

BY MARK SCOTT

Our identity is discerned from several things—e.g., heritage, upbringing, experiences, relationships, and actions, to name only a few. For the apostle John, identity is tied to the “tests of life” that consist of belief, righteousness, and love. These three themes rotate throughout John’s first Epistle. What one believes, how one lives, and whom one loves all help frame up whether a person is a child of God or a child of the devil.

Children of God

At the beginning of chapter 3, John remarked how wonderful it was to be a child of God (3:1). That glorious identity is marked out in several ways in our text. Children of God *do what is right* (v. 10). They habitually practice righteousness; they would never think of killing (v. 12). But it is not just what they do not do; it is also what they do. They love their brothers and sisters perfectly (vv. 11, 14, 23). They constantly give evidence of truly being Jesus’ disciples (John 13:35). They recognize that this radical lifestyle of doing right and loving others will bring them into conflict with the world. In fact, the world will hate them (v. 13).

This commitment to live righteously and love extravagantly shows up in proactive compassion and action (vv. 17, 18). Children of God who have *material possessions* (i.e., the basic biological necessities of life) and see a fellow Christian *in need* would never think of being heartless toward that believer. They *pity* (feel empathy and sympathy at a visceral level) such a person, and they get busy to put their compassion into action. Believers do not just talk a good talk (*words or speech*, content and tongue), they also walk a good walk (*actions and truth*, work and genuineness).

Children of God also have a clean conscience. They walk in *confidence* (boldness) knowing that Christ has liberated them from condemnation (Romans 8:1). This does not mean they have no consciousness of sin (1 John 1:8). But it does mean they trust their liberator more than allowing their hearts to be overwhelmed by guilt feelings (vv. 19-21). The apostle Paul also celebrated this victorious lifestyle (Romans 7:15-25). This confidence also shows up in a bold prayer life (v. 22). Believers ask God for *anything* because they know that they are doing everything possible to *keep his commands and do what pleases him*. They do not keep God’s commands to score points. They do it because they *believe in Jesus Christ* and they love others (v. 23).

As John wrote to *the elect and dear lady* (church?) in 2 John, this identity is also rooted in *walking in the truth*, walking in *obedience*, and loving others. Truth and obedience keep love from being mushy and undiscerning. Love keeps truth and obedience from being rigid and cold.

Children of the Devil

The contrast between the church and the world could not be clearer. These children *belong* to (literally, “come out of”) the evil one (1 John 3:12). The phrase reminds one of what this same apostle said about Judas (John 6:70; 13:27, 30). Judas led the Jewish authorities to Jesus, and they, in turn, handed Jesus over to the Romans who murdered him. John used an example from the earliest pages of the Old Testament of someone who actually committed murder himself, namely Cain. In fact, the New Testament told believers to avoid the way of Cain (Jude 11). The hatred he had toward his brother was prompted by his guilt and showed that *his own actions were evil*.

Some people contend that Cain offered the wrong sacrifice (fruit from the ground as opposed to an animal sacrifice). This is partly understood from Hebrews 11:4 about Abel offering “a more acceptable sacrifice.” But the context of Hebrews 11 is faith. Was the issue the content of the boys’ offerings or the faith with which the offerings were made? We know that God “had regard” (gazed with respect) for Abel’s offering but not for Cain’s. We cannot psychoanalyze Cain. At the very least his anger got the best of him. Children of the devil, like Cain, hate their brothers (v. 15) and their love for others is as temporary as the morning dew (Hosea 6:4) and then only in words, not actions.

God’s Son

Standing tall in the middle of this text is verse 16. It is about Jesus. If we want to know what real love looks like, we had better look to Calvary. He *laid down his life for us*. Perfect love is brotherly love, which sacrifices everything but truth.

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APPLICATION

MELTING POLAR ICE

BY DAVID FAUST

Polarized. If I were to summarize American culture and politics right now, *polarized* is the first word that comes to mind. Progressives and conservatives keep moving further apart. Republicans and Democrats can barely shake each other's hands and listen to each other's speeches, let alone work together to solve the nation's problems. On social media, respect and civility are out; sarcasm is in. Debates based on logic and persuasion have given way to name-calling and personal attacks.

Here's the problem: *Nothing grows at the poles.* Darkness and extreme temperatures make the North Pole and the South Pole cold and inhospitable. Life doesn't thrive at the poles. Despite their name, even polar bears struggle to survive at the North Pole, and none of them are found at the South Pole. At the North Pole, drifting ice moves constantly, making it expensive and dangerous for researchers to set up equipment there. At the earth's other pole, Antarctica provides a more hospitable environment, but unless you're a penguin, you probably don't want to make your home there. Life is very difficult at the poles.

How should Christians live in an icy, polarized world? What does it mean to be salt and light in a cultural environment filled with hostility and distrust? To paraphrase G. K. Chesterton, can you "hate the world enough to change it, and yet love it enough to think it worth changing"? Here are five points to consider.

1. Prioritize Christ over culture. Christians shouldn't be slaves to any human institution or ideology. We are followers of Jesus Christ. His Word sets the agenda. His Spirit sets the pace. Sometimes following Christ means we side with the prevailing culture on particular issues, while other times it means we side with the counterculture to advocate needed change. In every case "we make it our goal to please him"

(2 Corinthians 5:9), even if honoring Christ displeases some of our neighbors.

2. Prioritize God's kingdom over politics. We should go to the polls and vote, but we don't have to live at the poles of political extremism. Christians should join the debate, participate in the electoral process, and vigorously express our views in discussions of public policy. Some Christians are called to serve in public office. But our ultimate hope will never be found in any political leader or party platform. We "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

3. Prioritize winning souls over winning arguments. The apostle Paul threw himself into the cultural fray. He went to the marketplace, dialogued with philosophers, and debated in synagogues. He preached Christ in public gatherings, prison cells, and private homes. His goal? "So that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Are evangelism and discipleship always top-of-mind as we interact with our neighbors?

4. Prioritize love over selfishness. For a Christian, it's not "my way or the highway." Christ is the way, and he leads us to walk the path of unselfish service. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

5. Prioritize action over words. "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Sacrificial love warms hearts like nothing else. In our tense, divided culture, salt and light can melt some polar ice as well.

Personal Challenge: This week do an act of kindness for a person whose political ideology and personal lifestyle are different from your own.

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. This past week, what challenges did you have believing God's truth?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 John 3:10-23** and **2 John 4-6**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. What overall theme or themes do you notice in these passages? (Look for repeated words and phrases.)
3. Let's dig deeper into some of the specifics:
 - What contrasts do you discover in the passages?
 - What lesson can we learn from the story of Cain?
 - What relationships do you see between love, belief, and eternal life?
 - Between love and sacrifice?
 - Between love and actions?
 - Between love and God's commands?
4. What do you learn about God and the characteristics of his love?
5. What do you learn about yourself?
 - How can you expect to be treated if you are a Christ follower?
 - How are you to treat others?
6. In what area of your life does this passage compel you to walk in obedience? (Suggestions: laying down my life for others, loving others with tangible actions, doing what pleases God, passing my faith to the next generation.)
7. In what practical way will you share God's love with others in the upcoming days?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
9. What challenge will you face this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 John 3:24** and **4:7-21**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Live out perfect love
by letting God live in
you.**

STUDY: 1, 2, and 3 John

THEME: Perfect Love

LESSON TEXT: 1 John 3:24; 4:7-21

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 14:15-21; 2 Timothy 1:7; Romans 5:5

STUDY

PERFECT LOVE LIVING IN ME

BY MARK SCOTT

God often has more important stuff going on inside of us than around us. Make no mistake, God lives in a high and holy place and is concerned about worldwide events. But he also does some of his best work in the individual souls of those who are lowly and contrite of heart (Isaiah 57:15). God's love and God's Spirit work in concert to produce a more mature disciple (Romans 5:5). This great "love" passage—1 John 4:7-21—mentions that word 27 times.

Perfect Love Is Possible Because God Loves

We must start with a sidebar: "Perfect" does not mean flawless. That is impossible in a fallen world filled with fallen people. But it does mean "complete" or "mature." With God's help (his indwelling Spirit), we certainly can love more completely.

We must first acknowledge that God's love for us has nothing to do with us. He loves because it is his nature to love. Twice in this glorious passage we are told that *God is love* (4:8, 16). We are also told *he first loved us* (4:19). He is the original lover. This is such an important starting point: We can *rely* on his love (4:16).

Perfect Love Is Possible Because God Sent Jesus

Bob Goff's first book is entitled *Love Does*. Love is measured and filled with knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9), but it is never passive—it just does. God's love had to show up in some tangible way. And it showed up in Jesus of Nazareth. God sent (a key word in John's Gospel—20:21) *his one and only Son* (John 3:16) into the world. God's love, which we did not deserve, literally came down in Christ.

And this love coming down was salvific. It was effectual. It accomplished something we could not accomplish on our own. God sent his Son as an *atonement sacrifice* (propitiation—that which averts punishment) *for our sins*. This is no less than a reference to Calvary's cross. Scholars love to debate how to articulate models (ways of thinking) about atonement, but at the end of the day, when Jesus died on the cross, God called it "good" between heaven and earth. Perfect love stems from a regenerated nature.

Perfect Love Is Possible Because God Gave His Spirit

God's love is not profound because he gave us a gift. God's love is profound because he gave us himself. The Holy Spirit living inside of us is measurable evidence of God's love. This is mentioned twice in our lesson text (3:24; 4:13). When people acknowledge (confess) that Jesus is God's Son (4:15), God comes to *live in them and they in God* (4:15). The Holy Ghost becomes the Holy Guest. Romans 8:1 said there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. But the whole rest of the chapter does not discuss us being in him—it discusses him being in us. Believers always speak and act as people who are inhabited by the Holy Spirit. We have internal help from God to love.

The Holy Spirit living in us is subjective. But the work of the Spirit in our lives is also objective (or measurable). People can see evidence of this. In fact, while God cannot be seen (4:12; Exodus 33:20), the fruit of him existing in our physical bodies can be made complete when we love others.

Perfect Love Is Possible Because God Commanded Us to Love

Make no mistake about it, love can be commanded—and in some form, it is commanded (or referenced as something we do) six times in our text (4:7, 11, 16, 18, 19, 21). When we obey this command to love, we show we are *born of God and know God* (4:7). When we obey this command to love, we show that *God lives in us* (4:12, 16). When we obey this command to love, we live in victory and take *confidence* (boldness) in the *day of judgment* (4:17, 18). When we obey this command to love, we are *like Jesus* (4:17). Fear incapacitates perfect love, but *perfect love drives out fear* (4:18). Everyone will stand before God on the day of judgment (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), but people who love God and others will not be afraid.

The real litmus test of loving God is loving others. It is high treason and hypocrisy to claim to love God, whom we have not seen, and not love others, whom we have seen (1 John 4:20, 21). We can love others because the lover of our soul lives in us.

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APPLICATION

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CO-OPPORTUNITIES

BY DAVID FAUST

Several years ago I visited the island of Patmos. This cluster of rocky hills off the Turkish coast marks the spot where John “was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 1:9). In the first century, government officials sent political offenders to remote locations like Patmos to keep them from influencing others. Exile was basically a prison without bars. According to the historian Eusebius, John was in exile for 18 months. While on that lonely island, John received the inspired messages recorded in the last book of the Bible.

John knew what it was like to be isolated and alone. Maybe that’s why, in his letters, he put so much value on relationships with others. John wrote, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11, 12).

Love’s Leverage

Solomon observed, “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Effectiveness multiplies when believers in God pray and serve together. It’s love’s leverage—increasing our impact through relationships with others.

On the farm where I grew up, Dad took me with him to build fences, move livestock, and work in the fields. I remember standing next to him on top of the barn on a hot summer day, spreading silvery aluminum paint on the roof. On further reflection, I realize those collaborative efforts were Dad’s way of investing in me. He didn’t need my help. In fact, my clumsy presence probably made the work harder for him. But Dad wasn’t just doing jobs; he was raising sons. He loved my brothers and me enough to spend time with us. We learned and grew as we worked side by side.

Why did Jesus send out his disciples two-by-two? Because of love’s leverage. By traveling in pairs, they could employ their unique gifts, encourage one another, and connect better with different personalities they encountered along the way. We make “the most of every opportunity” (Ephesians 5:16) when we serve together, not alone. I like to call these partnerships *co-opportunities*.

If you are asked to lead a small group, could you invite a friend to co-lead with you so he can expand his leadership skills? If you cook a kettle of soup or bake a pie, could your child or grandchild join you in the kitchen? If you visit a shut-in, why not take a friend along? If your boss asks you to spearhead a project, could you turn it into a co-opportunity by including your team of co-workers? Could you make your next mission trip a co-opportunity by bringing someone along who never has served cross-culturally?

It Doesn’t Come Naturally

It might seem easier to go it alone and do the job yourself—to live on an island, separated from others. But John’s letters remind us not to live in isolation. It may not come naturally to invest in other people, but it comes supernaturally. Love originates in the character of God.

So don’t stay on an island. Don’t just do what comes naturally. Do what comes supernaturally. Your influence will multiply when you ask the Lord to fill you with his love.

Personal Challenge: Think of something you normally do by yourself (a household chore, a task at work, or a ministry at church) and invite another person to share the experience with you.

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What challenges did you encounter last week as you sought to walk in obedience to God's Word?
 - Did you share God's love with anyone this past week? If so, tell us more about it!

Ask two people to read aloud **1 John 3:24; 4:7-21**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. What main themes do you see in these passages? (Look for repeated words and phrases.)
 - What roles does each member of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—play in this passage, and how do they interact?
3. Let's dig deeper into some of the specifics in this passage:
 - From these passages, how would you define love?
 - How are love and God intertwined or related?
 - In your own words, describe the relationship between God's love for us and our love for others.
4. What do you learn about God from these passages?
 - What do you learn about what it means to live in God and him in us?
5. What do you learn about people from these passages, especially about how we should and shouldn't respond to God's love?
6. What is the Holy Spirit convicting you about from this passage?
7. With whom will you share the message of God's love for us this week?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
9. What circumstance do you anticipate you will need to deal with this week?

For Next Week: This week's lesson bring this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "**1717: Your Word Is Truth**" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.