



LifeLight

“ *In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.*” John 1:4

1 John

LEADER



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing other Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth studies of Bible books. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and a review (through reading the enrichment magazine) of the week's study.

LifeLight Participants

Anticipated LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine (in this course, four) weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing

the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth form of Bible study employed by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- reports LifeLight activities and plans to the district's board of parish education, the other congregation(s), and to the district LifeLight director;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director *(optional)*

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mu-

tually agreeable.

The Presenter

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the presenter begins on p. 9.**) The presenter

- prepares and presents the Bible study to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and materials of the presenter's own choosing;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator

(optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director in follow-up of outreach through the discussion leaders;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 33.**)

There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are

most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 33!**);
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. Since LifeLight is a 1½ hour week-day program, with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings, some congregations may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the presenter and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The great effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week-by-week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains a hymn, prayer, and other worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels

of study.

2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period for worship (five minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the reading they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.
3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by reviewing the study leaflet they completed (and which they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading the appropriate articles from the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Called to Rejoice in Jesus Christ

1 John 1:1–2:6

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

In Jesus Christ, God removes our sin and darkness, so that we can live with Him in the beauty of His holiness.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. grasp a fresh vision of Christ's atonement for us;
2. appreciate the importance of confession and forgiveness, by which God in Christ sustains the eternal life God has given us;
3. experience the joy of life with God through Jesus Christ.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on p. 33

For the Presenter

Throw a stone into a quiet pond. Watch the ripples flow out from the center in ever-widening circles. If you can picture that, then you've begun to understand the approach the apostle John takes in his first epistle.

Like the circles of water you just created in your mind's eye, John introduces key concepts in the first verses of his first letter. Then he returns to them time after time in the rest of the letter, expanding them and explaining more of their meaning for our everyday lives. Because this is so, you would do well to read the entire letter several times before you prepare the lecture for session 1. Look for words and concepts like truth, lies, light, darkness, sin, forgiveness, fellowship, love, life, and joy. Let the Holy Spirit open your heart to more of His truth as He prepares you to share it with those to whom you will speak.

All the while, remember that those privileged by God's grace to share His Good News of salvation in Christ must take that privilege seriously and assume it with much enthusiasm. As you prepare, pray, and present, ask your Lord to work in you an attitude of humility. Expect Him to empower you to be His ambassador—that is what you truly are!

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn. Follow with the responsive reading in the study leaflet. Then use the devotion (below) and close with the prayer.

Hymn

Devotion

Have you ever noticed how simple words often best express what we mean? Suppose someone says this to you:

Drop dead!

Shut up!

Get out!

We seldom stop to wonder what those words mean. Or suppose someone says this:

Case dismissed!

Sold!

Welcome home!

We seldom stop to agonize over what those would mean either. Clear. Precise. Crisp. Words like these can change a life—for better or worse. The apostle John uses simple words, too, words chosen by the Holy Spirit to teach us more about the Word Incarnate, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, our Savior. John's words are packed with meaning. Simple words? Yes. But so full of the power of God that we will spend all eternity exploring their depths: Life. Fellowship. Light. Joy. Love. Truth. Words like that have changed our lives forever,

and by the grace of God they continue to do so. As we begin the adventure of a deeper exploration now, let's ask the Holy Spirit's presence and enlightening power to reveal our sins and to point us to our Savior's cross.

Prayer

Gracious Savior, our Redeemer and Lord, You love us and care for us. Let us live knowing that! Fill our hearts with Your light and life that we may shine in this dark world. Let us overflow with Your joy! Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Rejoice. Joy. We run across these words frequently in the New Testament. Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It settles deep in our hearts, a fruit of faith. We will consider Christian joy as we take up the first letter of John. As he begins his letter John tells us his goal (1 John 1:4)—complete joy.

1 The Source of Complete Joy (1:1–4)

John makes it clear immediately—the source of complete joy lies only in a relationship with Jesus Christ, the “Word of life” (1:1) and the one through whom we have fellowship with the Father (1:3). These introductory verses clearly lay out the main thought of the letter, as does the similar first verse of John's gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

The first four verses of John's letter not only lay the foundation for the entire letter, but they also point out the obvious difference between the Gospel of Christ and the teachings of a religious philosophy that was beginning to challenge the Gospel in John's time—Gnosticism. Gnosticism was based on a distinction between material and spiritual. The material was regarded as inherently evil. If that is so, then obviously God could never become a human being! He could not have a human body! Either of these would taint a holy God with evil.

John's chief opponent was a Gnostic leader, Cerinthus, who led the charge against the Gospel in John's time. Cerinthus maintained that Jesus was the physical son of Joseph. To explain how God might make use of Jesus to accomplish His purposes, Cerinthus taught that the “Aeon,” or “heavenly Christ,” was united with Jesus at His Baptism. But since the “heavenly Christ” could not die, Cerinthus taught that Christ left Jesus before His suffering and death. By their teaching, Cerinthus and his followers denied that Christ was human. Cerinthus claimed that the divine Christ simply used Jesus' human body for a time. For the Gnostics, Jesus and the Christ could not possibly be the same person.

For Gnostic philosophers like Cerinthus, the idea that God became human and died for the sins of humanity was totally unacceptable, unthinkable. But the cross stands firmly as the main teaching of the Christian faith: the God-man Jesus died on the cross for us and there paid the penalty for our sin, a penalty we could never hope to pay. John asserts what he—an eyewitness—experienced (1 John 1:1–3): “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it. . . . We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.” Against the Gnostics' philosophy John simply asserts the facts. No matter what the false teachers say, impossible or not to their way of thinking, we saw it!

In his gospel, John tells us that Thomas had to touch the resurrected Christ before he would believe (John 20:25, 27). Here the understanding of touch is “to grope as if searching for something.” John also uses a verb we translate “to see” but which actually means “to search for the deeper meaning.” These two words—*touch* and *see*—together suggest that those who find the source of their faith—and of their joy—in Jesus as the Christ understand what Cerinthus and the Gnostics could never comprehend—namely, that Jesus is God!

In writing as he does, John is a great example of what it means to bear witness about Jesus. Someone who witnesses testifies to something he or she has experienced personally. That was what all the apostles did. They witnessed to the world concerning what they

heard Jesus say and what they saw Jesus do—climaxing with His resurrection from the dead. When the church chose a successor to Judas (the disciple who betrayed Jesus and then committed suicide), they chose one of the men who had been with them “the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21–22). How wonderful that God provided these witnesses—including John! How valuable is their witness for the church!

Now, we have not seen Jesus in the flesh as the apostles had. But we also have experienced the love of Jesus and His forgiveness, strengthening presence, and peace in our own lives. And we can—and must—certainly testify concerning what we have experienced. God can and will bless also our witness, just as He blessed the witness of John and of the other apostles.

And the result of witness concerning Jesus? “Fellowship ... with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). When people believe as the result of the witness of such Christians as John—or us—they are brought into the Christian fellowship. Or if they are already believers, they are sustained and strengthened in that fellowship. And the result of that fellowship? Joy for the one who provides the witness (“We write this to make our joy complete”; v. 4) and joy for the one who receives the witness. (Some manuscripts of 1 John read “We write this to make your joy complete.” Either way is correct.)

What a beginning John has made! He has directed us to the source of complete joy—to Jesus, the Word of life, the Son of God who actually became man. Now John leads us into considering the result of our complete joy.

2 The Result of Complete Joy (1:5–10)

An old Arab parable tells of a man who woke up hungry in the middle of the night. He reached for a date, examined it under the light, but found a worm in it and threw it away. He reached for a second date, but this one also had a worm. Finally, he turned off the lamp and proceeded to consume the entire jar of dates in the dark.

Now, isn’t that how many people today live? In a manner of speaking, they, too, turn off the light, eat in the darkness, and forget about the worms, pretending they do not exist (or at least ignoring them). The resulting sickness, which the Bible calls “sin,” eats away at them. They become spiritually ill and die without being cured.

In verse 5 John declares that God is light and that there is no darkness at all in Him. Light comes from God, who is light! When God created the heavens and the earth, His first move was to “let there be light” and to drive away the darkness from the formless and empty surface of the waters that covered the earth (Gen. 1:1–3). Without God’s presence there is no light. There is no joy, no fellowship, no forgiveness—and people sit in the darkness and eat their dates (and worms). John says in verses 6–10 that fellowship, truth, and forgiveness are found in the light that radiates from God; when we live apart from the Lord, who purifies us from sin through the blood of Jesus, we walk in the darkness.

Paul warned the Christians at Corinth to watch their relationships with unbelievers. He asked of them, “What fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). Only in Christ, who is the light of the world (John 8:12), can people experience the “light of life.” Paul’s admonition is illustrated in an incident that John’s pupil Polycarp recalled. Polycarp remembers John feeling so adamant about the heresy of Cerinthus “that John, the disciple of the Lord, having gone to take a bath in Ephesus and having seen Cerinthus inside, left the baths, refusing to bathe, and said: ‘Let us flee lest also the baths fall in since Cerinthus is inside, the enemy of the truth.’ ”

We forget that darkness is a power. Satan rules in the realm of darkness. He gets us to love the darkness. The result, as Jesus told Nicodemus, is this: “Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed” (John 3:19–20). Remember what Adam and Eve did after the devil had led them into sin? They ran and hid from God since they did not want their disobedience exposed. “Walking in the darkness” means living continually in sin. None of us is immune from sinning. But to remain in sin, to

consciously choose to disobey God time after time after time without repentance or remorse, leads to only one end—broken fellowship, eternal death. The wages of sin is certainly death.

Cerinthus is a good example of one who lived in the darkness. He repudiated what the apostles had to say about Jesus Christ and scorned their fellowship. Cerinthus and others like him to this very day deny their need for a Savior. Escape from evil, they said, is simply a matter of living on some other, higher plane. So we have in our own day many popular cults, Far Eastern religions, transcendental meditation, the New Age movement—all of them attempt to avoid the physical and moral and to separate it from the spiritual. Some cults, with their unrealistic and ungodly thinking, give their followers or their leaders license to do whatever they want, for there is no accountability before God. For such false prophets and their disciples, sin needs no covering, God's wrath is a fiction, and the idea of sin itself is reduced to a mistake of the mortal mind.

The result of all this, John says, is self-deception. We make liars of ourselves, and we miss the complete joy that can be found only in Christ's forgiveness. John's message is straightforward (1:6–10): "If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light ... we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives."

John's counsel is straightforward and direct. Avoid the darkness of sin. Do not tolerate sin in your life. Confess your sin so that God may cover it with the blood of Jesus. Flee from sin and walk in the light of the Gospel of the Lord. The earnest warning and plea of St. Paul bears repeating: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

So much of what John writes in his letters has parallels in his gospel. In John 8:31 Jesus encouraged some who believed in Him, "If you hold to My teaching, you

are really My disciples." But those who would not heed His Word Jesus declared to be children of the devil (vv. 43–44). His Word was not in them; they were liars who made God Himself out to be a liar (1 John 1:10).

What a joy to receive forgiveness for our sins! What a joy to have fellowship with God and with God's people! What a joy to walk in the light of the Lord!

3 The Test of Complete Joy (2:1–6)

The real test of our joy comes when we do fall into sin (2:1). Perhaps that is why John gently addresses his readers as "my dear children." Here comes John's loving reminder. No matter what our sin is, the Lord has forgiven it.

When we fall into sin, we can confess our sin and plead for mercy, confident that Jesus Christ is our advocate, the friend of the accused who voluntarily steps in and personally speaks to the Father in our defense. What a wonderful comfort it is to know that we have this friend in heaven, so close to the Father's ear! Paul, in 1 Tim. 2:5, also refers to Jesus as our heavenly mediator. And what a powerful argument Jesus offers on our behalf! For He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sin, in fact, for all of the sins that have ever been or ever will be committed by everyone in the world! Paul, in referring to Jesus as our mediator, also adds that Jesus "gave Himself as a ransom for all men." In 1 John 2:2 Jesus is pictured as the one who appeases God's wrath. The wrath of God (Rom. 1:18) is turned aside only through the blood of Christ for our sins. Jesus, God's only Son, is the "atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Napoleon once said, "Battles are won, not by men, but by a man." He was right in more ways than one. Our spiritual victory is also won, not by Christians, but by Christ.

And note this remarkable fact—Jesus is the atoning sacrifice "for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). No one should doubt whether Jesus' sacrifice counts for him or her, too, for everyone is included. In one of the most beloved verses in the whole Bible Jesus Himself said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God Himself puts no limit to the atonement Jesus accomplished by His sacrifice on the cross. Instead, some people exclude themselves from His atonement by refusing to believe and so to receive this gift. “God so loved the world,” but “whoever believes in Him shall not perish.” John has already spoken of those who “claim to be without sin” (1 John 1:8) and “make Him out to be a liar” (1 John 1:10). By their denial of their own sin and need for a Savior, they are calling God a liar.

But those who receive it know the atonement is complete and always in effect. The one who speaks in our defense is always on duty. “We have come to know Him if we obey His commands” (1 John 2:3). Obedience results from love and knowledge of Him. This love for God is “made complete,” because it is a love responding to Jesus’ love (v. 5). It responds by desiring to “walk as Jesus did” (v. 6). Yes, it is a “new” commandment—yet at the same time, ages old. It was given before in the Old Testament (v. 7). Yet it is new—motivated and enabled by the completed work of Christ (v. 8). Christians need no threat to obey, and Christians no longer fear the threat of the Law since Christ removed that threat by fulfilling the Law for us. No, this obedience flows from love for God, who has redeemed us in Christ. But our willing obedience does reveal that we are walking in the light of the Lord, for this obedience flows from faith.

We are regularly tested as we seek to obey our Lord’s commandments. Our faith is bombarded by devilish voices that say to us as they did to Eve, “Did God really say ...?” The prowling Satan of 1 Peter 5 seeks to convince us that our joy can never be fully complete in Christ. Satan loves to make suggestions of his own. He is always eager to point out that something’s missing. Somehow, he intimates, God is not showing us the full picture. He tries to persuade us that complete joy can only come with our own input and ingenuity.

In 2 John 9–10 the apostle refers to the “teaching” of Christ’s “coming in the flesh” (v. 7)—true God became true man in Jesus Christ. John warns that those who deny the incarnation of the Son also deny the Father. But those who believe in God’s Son who came “in the flesh” also have God the Father. Our new life in Christ brings with it the complete joy won for us on Calvary’s

cross and confirmed by the open tomb. Paul refers to this new life in Col. 3:1–3: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died [that is, through your Baptism], and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

In a *Peanuts* cartoon Lucy is frightened by continual rain, thunder, and lightning one night. She wonders if it may signal a repetition of Noah’s flood. Charlie Brown reminds her of God’s promise and the meaning of the rainbow. Much relieved, Lucy says, “You’ve taken a load off my mind.” To which Charlie replies, “Good theology has a way of doing that.”

The promises of God do relieve the pressure and burdens sin puts on our consciences (Matt. 11:28–30). And “good theology” also suggests that we, saved by God’s grace in Jesus, are now recreated to do good works, works which God has fashioned beforehand (Eph. 2:8–10). Keeping Christ’s commands and witnessing to God’s love and power to forgive sins brings much joy to a believer’s heart. In this way our joy in Christ is made complete even as the Lord strengthens and affirms our faith in trials and temptations.

----- **Concluding Activities**

Make the following suggestions/assignments. As each day closes this coming week participants are to

- make a list of those situations or events that brought them joy;
- pray, confessing their sins and their need for God’s forgiveness, recognizing His promise to grant it for Jesus’ sake;
- reread Colossians 3, remembering their Baptism.

Doing all three of these will help them sense the ongoing joy of life in Christ and be more aware of how much the Lord is doing in their lives.

Distribute study leaflet 2 and remind participants to check the enrichment magazine for materials they find interesting in light of their daily study. Refer them in particular to the articles on Gnosticism and on Cerinthus: “Two Heresies, Old and New” and “Gnostics Today.”

Notes

Called to Choose God's Standards

1 John 2:7–27

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

To know Christ as the sacrifice for our sins is to recognize and adopt new conduct for daily living. Central to this new attitude of life is the love of our Christian brothers and sisters and the hatred of sin and falsehood.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. use these verses to evaluate how much of "the world" has crept into his or her walk of faith;
2. recognize and confess the impossibility of keeping God's standard and to accept His forgiveness in Christ;
3. understand and trust that God's indwelling Spirit gives us discernment;
4. pray for a greater measure of maturity in these matters.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on p. 37.

For the Presenter

This lesson stresses a dependence on the Lord and reliance on one another in the body of Christ as we share our love and support of each other. If you do not make a practice of it, be conscious at this week's meetings of leaders and with class members to express your love, care, and thanks for those who surround you in the body of Christ.

You have a special responsibility on the LifeLight leadership team. Others look to you for spiritual strength

and insight. Pray daily for this God-granted ability. (If you are the pastor or the professional staff member who oversees the LifeLight process in your congregation, evaluate how effective and enthusiastic you have been thus far. You might want to ask the small-group leaders and/or even the members of the class to share with you personally their evaluation of the LifeLight process.)

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn, followed by the devotion (below) and the prayer from the study leaflet.

Hymn

Devotion

After the hymn, read the following verses from Romans after a short lead-in:

Like John, the apostle Paul, too, had much to say about how to live as Christ's follower. Reading from the paraphrase of J. B. Phillips, here are verses from Romans 12:

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers [and sisters], as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practice that the will of God's good, acceptable to him and perfect. ...

Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine hatred for evil and a real devotion to good. Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other [person] have the credit. ... Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer (vv. 1–2, 9–10, 12).

After the reading, pray. Invite everyone to read together the prayer in the study leaflet.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

"I'm sorry," the editor says to the reporter. "This story is just not up to our standards for publication. You will have to revise it."

"I don't believe that moral standards are as high as they used to be," your neighbor observes as you talk about the general state of the world over the backyard fence.

"As supervisors we have to set a high standard of performance for our employees," the plant manager declares at a meeting of the company's management team.

We all are aware of standards. Standards are what are expected of us. There are standards of performance, moral standards, standards of excellence, and other kinds of standards. In the section of John's first letter we have studied this week, the apostle has urged us to live in the light of God's standards.

1 Living in the Light of God's Standards (2:7–11)

Jesus Himself sets the standard by which we, His disciples, are to live. This is the standard of love that expresses itself in service.

You may remember that Jesus spent the night before His death with His disciples. That was a most remarkable evening. It was then that Jesus established the Lord's Supper. On that evening Jesus spent a long time in conversation with His disciples; in fact, John devotes five chapters—almost one-quarter of his gospel—to the things Jesus said and did with His disciples on that one night. And on that evening Jesus did something that very much surprised His disciples: He assumed the position of a lowly servant, kneeling down before each of them and washing their feet.

What a remarkable evening—a crucial evening for the disciples! And even more remarkable was what else was going on that night—things Jesus knew, as He knew everything. On that night one of His own disciples, Judas, was betraying his Master for money. On that evening the high priest was making plans to arrest, try, and execute Jesus. And yet, with all this going on, Jesus calmly

devoted His attention to His disciples. He knew how frail and frightened they were. He knew what a jolt their faith would suffer very shortly. He knew His death would overwhelm them. So now He would show them kindness to support and strengthen them. He would pray for them. He would prepare them. He would show His love for them and encourage them to love one another. He would demonstrate the standard He had set for them.

Living in love, showing kindness, and washing feet are not always easy or pleasant things to do. Yet that is the standard Jesus sets. In a sense this standard is a recycled standard. The standard was stated already in the Old Testament but was recycled for us through Jesus' fulfillment of the Law on our behalf. That standard is the standard of love. John puts it this way in 1 John 2:7–8: "Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet, I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in Him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."

Jesus summarized the standard of love required by the Law when He responded to a question about which commandment is greatest: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). But since the fall into sin human nature cannot fulfill that commandment, so Christ came to fulfill the Law for us. His perfect performance is credited to us. Then Jesus recycled the commandment, telling the disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

This commandment is old, yet new. It is old, since it is the essence of the Law given at Sinai. Yet it is new, for now in Christ we have the ability to obey it. The love that now flows to us from God renews our hearts; it inspires and produces in us that love that the Lord seeks from us. This command is new, because it is based on the new relationship Jesus has established through His life, death, and resurrection. Now the darkness of sin is passing away from us whose hearts have been renewed by Christ's death and resurrection;

the light of His righteousness is shining in us.

The evidence that we are living in the light of the standard of love is seen in the love we have for one another. When we live a lifestyle of love toward one another, we show that God's love has found a place in our hearts. We show that we are, in fact, living in the light of God's love. On the other hand, if we live a lifestyle of hatred, we show that we are still walking in the darkness of sin. When we habitually practice hateful thoughts, use hateful words, or do hateful deeds, we show that our hearts are still ruled by the devil.

Christlike love is the standard. And it is now possible since God the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts to inspire and produce this love. What the Law could not do—because our hearts ruled by sin could not produce the love the Law required—the Holy Spirit can and does do, because through the Gospel He has cleansed our hearts and now dwells therein.

2 Maturing in the Light of God's Standards (2:12–17)

The ability to live by God's standard of love is one in which we grow and mature. John refers to this growing maturity as he addresses his readers using three different terms, which he then repeats. He writes to "dear children," to "fathers," and to "young men." As we consider these three terms, we will see how Christians mature in living by God's standard.

In referring to "dear children," to "fathers," and to "young men," does John address three groups of people or only two? Probably two, because John often refers to all of his readers as "dear children." (See 2:1; 2:18; 2:28; 3:7; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21. See also 3:1–2; 3:10; and 5:2; where John refers to Christians as "children.") Remember that when John wrote this letter he probably was a very old man. That age and his affection for the believers whom he has led shine from the term "children." If "dear children" (2:12–13) refers to all of John's readers, then in verses 12–14 John refers to two specific groups: the mature Christians (not necessarily older chronologically, but those who had been Christians a longer period of time) and those who were less mature because they had not been Christians as long. Although the terms John uses are masculine, we may confidently conclude that

they apply to both genders.

To all three groups John speaks words of approval and encouragement. He reminds all his "dear children" that their sins are forgiven and they know the Father. Jesus once told His disciple Philip, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). These things would be true of all Christians; we have seen Christ and His love by faith, and therefore we have seen and known the Father. To the "fathers" (vv. 13a, 14a) John speaks of a faith that goes way back. John implies that their faith is strong, seasoned, and secure. To the "young men" (vv. 13b, 14b) John speaks words of encouragement and praise. They have overcome the evil one (the devil), and they are strong against temptation and false doctrine because the Word of God lives in them.

All believers in Christ are children of God: our sins are forgiven, and we know God through faith. Some of us are "fathers"—possessing a fuller maturity in Christ; some of us are "young men"—having overcome the evil one by coming to faith in Christ and now growing in that faith. Each Christian has a special place within God's family; all have something to contribute from their own experience of God's love and grace.

An honest evaluation of our own spiritual life can indicate at which stage we find ourselves. But whether we are relatively new to the faith or whether we have known the Lord for a long lifetime, we are all children who need the nourishment of the Gospel. That is why experiences such as this LifeLight Bible study are so important for us.

To all of us John has this reminder: "Do not love the world or anything in the world" (v. 15). By "the world" John means the unbelieving world, the system at work in the world that resists God's reign and which will not receive Christ. It prefers to be ruled by its own base appetites. John cautions us to watch out for three ways the devil will seek to trip us and to trap us. These three include the cravings of the sinful man, the lust of the eyes, and boasting of what we have and do. The term "cravings of the sinful man" refers to the rebellious desires of our sinful nature, which resists the control of God and the bounds God has set for us. The term "lust of the eyes" refers to those things that look so good to

us and make us want them, even though they will hurt us. Satan uses “the lust of the eyes” to incite wrong desires in us just as he used the beauty Eve saw in the fruit. Attracted by it, she fell into sin and eternal death. “Boasting of what we possess or have done” refers to self-centered arrogance, often based on outward wealth or rank.

With each of us the devil seems to know which button to push to get the response he desires, just as he knew how best to tempt Eve and then Adam in the Garden of Eden. “Watch out!” John warns in verses 15–17. “These things do not come from the Father but from the world.” The world will soon pass away. The pleasures that seem so tempting are short-lived, but they would rob us of the lasting joy of God’s kingdom. The immature more easily fall victim to such deceiving enticements; therefore, we are to mature in that standard that God has set for us.

3 Standing Guard in the Light of God’s Standards (2:18–23)

We live in the final stage of God’s plan of redemption. Throughout the Old Testament period God planned and prepared to redeem the world through the work of the Messiah. He chose a people for Himself, through whom He would bring the Messiah into the world. With great patience, He carefully preserved a faithful group of believers through whom His plan could be carried forward. Then, at just the right time, Jesus the Messiah was born into the world. Jesus was baptized to identify Himself with the sinners He had come to save. He resisted the temptations of the devil. He chose disciples and trained them for their later work as apostles, as He taught and as He displayed God’s saving power through His miraculous deeds. Then He permitted Himself to be sacrificed on the cross. He died, was buried, and rose again. After appearing to His followers for 40 days, He ascended into heaven.

Immediately afterward, the third and last stage began—the stage of history in which we live. In this stage Jesus has sent His church to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. Through our witness to the Gospel the Holy Spirit creates faith in many, many hearts. One day Christ will come again in glory to end this age and to

inaugurate His glorious and eternal kingdom.

John calls this final stage “the last hour” (v. 18). During this period Satan works mightily to prevent the salvation of as many as possible. He sends his lieutenants into all the world to deceive people and to oppose the witness of the church. John refers to these agents as “antichrists.” While the devil himself is the chief architect behind every force or plan opposing Christ, many antichrists help accomplish Satan’s evil intentions. Antichrists are simply the opponents of Christ. They are the instruments of Satan as he seeks to draw us away from Jesus.

While He lived here on earth, Jesus warned His followers that false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles, signs and miracles that will “deceive even the elect—if that were possible” (Matt. 24:24). In 2 Thess. 2:1–4, Paul reveals that toward the end of this age there will appear a “man of lawlessness” who will be a great deceiver. In fact, this Antichrist “will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” These stern words warn us to be on guard against any individual, any church body, or any church leader who waters down or adds to the chief doctrine of our Christian faith—salvation by God’s grace in Christ, received by faith alone.

The strategy of all the antichrists is identical—deception. They masquerade as religious leaders, often even as Christian leaders, but they lie, just as the devil himself is the father of lies (John 8:44). While these lies are many and varied, their chief lie concerns Jesus. They deny that Jesus is who He really is. They do not want people to believe in Him as the Son of God who came to be our Savior. They do not want people to trust in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. John intimates that the antichrists “went out from us” (v. 19). Just as the devil himself was once a holy angel, so the antichrists know something about life in Christ. But they have rejected Him as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

We can easily see that many antichrists are active even now in our own day. In fact, their number seems to be

growing! Some of these false religions are updated versions of religions that have been around for centuries, while others, completely new, seem to spring up overnight. Take, for example, one antichrist religion—Mormonism. Official Mormon doctrine accepts the biblical death and resurrection of Jesus. It therefore “sounds Christian.” But Mormon doctrine distorts the Gospel by denying the deity of Christ and by asserting that by His resurrection Christ opened the way for people to work out their own salvation.

4 Abiding in the Light of God’s Standards (2:24–27)

How are Christians, especially inexperienced and immature Christians, to be protected from such lies, lies that sound quite plausible, perhaps even more so than the true Gospel itself? John points to our means of defense—the Holy Spirit. Each Christian receives the gift of the indwelling Spirit at Baptism. The Holy Spirit testifies to us, teaching us the truth through His Word. As we listen to the Gospel, the Spirit assures us of its truth. He enables us to rely solely on Jesus Christ—true God and true man—for our forgiveness and salvation.

John refers to the gift of the Spirit as an “anointing” (1 John 2:20, 27), a sacred outpouring that marks us as belonging to God and that provides us with the sacred gift of faith in Jesus, the Son of God and our Savior. As we stay close to our God and to His Word, He will protect us from all antichrists and their lies. By the power of the Spirit we will be able to recognize the deadly influence of all antichrists so that we can avoid them. By remaining in Christ, we will be on guard and we will by grace maintain God’s standard, the standard of true, Christlike love.

Concluding Activities

Invite the class to set one goal as an action plan for this week. Suggest a plan having to do with the points of the outline. For example:

1. Praying for and establishing a new relationship with a specific individual who has been difficult to love.
2. Committing more time to reading and studying the Scriptures as the means for maturing and abiding in the truth.
3. Consciously looking at those people in our lives who are influential. Asking ourselves, “Are they a positive or a negative spiritual influence? How could my witness about Christ change their thinking or behavior?” Then praying and thinking about a strategy by which to accomplish a clear, winsome, consistent witness in words and actions.

Distribute study leaflet 3. Mention specifically the article “Can a Christian Fall from Faith—And Could It Happen to Me?” (in the enrichment magazine). The article will provide background for the study of a difficult text in study leaflet 3.

Notes

Notes

Called to Demonstrate Christ's Love

1 John 2:28–4:6

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

John points out three ways in which children of God are like their heavenly Father—in righteousness, in love, and in the way we regard Jesus. John does this to reassure us in times of doubt, especially when we are under attack by the devil, antichrists, or the unbelieving world.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. recognize the evidence that John offers to show that he or she is a child of God;
2. feel reassured that he or she is a child of God;
3. ask the Holy Spirit for a greater faith in Jesus and a greater love for God that he or she may, more consistently and with greater fervor, do right, love others, and believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on p. 41.

For the Presenter

As a member of the LifeLight leadership team and proclaimer of God's precious Word, it is important to remember St. Paul's admonition to those in such positions:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. ... Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 5:1–2; 18–20)

As we come close to the end of this short study of 1 John, make some reflective notes on the positives and negatives of the course from your perspective as presenter. Be ready to share those with the leadership group at your final training session. Think about asking them for their personal views on your presentations and the material in general.

Offer to keep all comments confidential. In so doing, you may want them to hand their opinions to you in written form next week. Be sure to underscore that the purpose of the evaluation is to make the next round of study even better than this one.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn. Follow with the devotion (p.22) and the prayer.

Hymn

Devotion

This week's study emphasizes showing love to our fellow believers because we, by grace, belong to Jesus. But what does that mean in practical terms? An unknown author summarized it well:

*Let me be a little kinder,
Let me be a little blinder
To the faults of those about me;
Let me praise a little more;

Let me be, when I am weary,
Just a little bit more cheery;
Let me serve a little better
Those that I am striving for.

Let me be a little braver
When temptation bids me waver;
Let me strive a little harder
To be all that I should be;

Let me be a little meeker
With the brother that is weaker.
Let me think more of my neighbor
And a little less of me.*

("My Daily Creed," author unknown, *Baker's Pocket Treasury of Religious Verse*, comp. Donald T. Kauffman [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980], p. 203.)

Prayer

Merciful Father, You never turn Your back on us, though we fail You and one another so often. Thank You. Give us new hearts, Lord. Fill us to overflowing with Your love so that it spills out in words of witness and in deeds of love for those around us. Show us how to follow Your Son more nearly. In His name. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Do you resemble one or both of your parents in some ways? Do you look like one or both of them in some respects? Do you reflect their attitudes or values? Do you act like them? Do you have mannerisms that are like those of one or both of your parents?

Probably. Family resemblances are so common that we take them for granted. The first examination of an infant by its relatives is bound to result in comments about the ways the newborn resembles one or both parents. "He has his father's chin." "She has her mother's eyes." "Look! He crinkles his nose just like his mother does!"

As the child grows older he or she may consciously copy actions, attitudes, and even the very words of the parents. Of course when the child reaches the teen years, the process is temporarily apt to shift into a screaming reversal, emphasis on screaming! But, after making the point that he or she is "me—not you!" the child soon reverts to parental characteristics. And while in some contexts, "You're just like your mother!" may provoke a fight, most of us would like to think that we carry on the more admirable traits of our parents.

In the section from John's first letter that we studied this week, John encourages us, as children of God, to be like our heavenly Father. In fact, he points out that we may be sure that we are children of God because we *are* like our Father.

1 Like Father, Like Child—in Righteousness (2:28–3:10)

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). Why, John can hardly get over it! And can anyone blame him for that amazement? That God should love us so as to come down from His glorious heaven to this sinful earth to redeem us by suffering and dying in our place ... the whole story is so amazing it can hardly be believed! And, in fact, it would not be believed if the Holy Spirit had not convinced us through the power of the Gospel.

But that is what we are—children of the heavenly Father! And, as the heavenly Father's children, we come to resemble Him, just as children resemble their human parents in various ways. First, we resemble the Father in righteousness.

God Himself is righteous. Of course, we would not dispute that. God is without sin, and He always does what is right. God is holy, and there is no unrighteousness in

Him at all. In fact, God defines what righteousness is by being what He is. Being righteous is to be like God—in being right and doing right.

And Jesus, the Son of God, is righteous. Although Jesus became altogether human when He took on a human body and human nature through His mother, Mary, Jesus was untainted by the sin that so thoroughly corrupts our own human nature as we are born into this world. You probably have heard the observation of the English poet Alexander Pope: “To err is human, to forgive divine.” Those words are true only because of the fall of our first parents into sin. Humans were without sin when they first came from the creating hand of God. To err, to sin, wasn’t always human.

Nor will we be sinful when we have left this sinful world (and our sinful nature with it) and are in heaven. We will still be human, then, of course, but we will be human in the way God created us to be human—without sin. John refers to this when he writes in 3:2, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears [John is referring to Jesus’ return at the end of this age], we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Then, in that glorious eternity, we will be like Jesus, without sin, and wholly righteous, just as He is righteous.

At present we are not without sin in either our nature or our behavior. And yet we are *now* children of God—John is clear about that. And we now are righteous, too, in that we are righteous before God. Through faith we are clothed, covered, with the righteousness of Jesus. “He appeared so that He might take away our sins” (v. 5). This is the righteousness that will acquit us when we stand before God. This is real righteousness, not pretend or make-believe righteousness. In fact, this is the only righteousness that counts.

But John is also admonishing us to do right as we live in this world; being right and doing right are evidence that we are children of God. Doing right testifies to our new birth in Jesus through the work of the Spirit in the Gospel.

If someone continues to live with a reckless disregard of sin, he shows that he is not God’s child. For no child

of God can continue to live in sin—that is, to live without caring how we live or whether what we are doing is in accord with God’s will. Such a careless disregard of God’s will cannot coexist in the heart with trust in God or love for Him. St. Paul voices horror at such an attitude when he declares in Rom. 6:1–2: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

Certainly, while we live in this world, having to contend with a sinful human nature, we will fail to keep God’s Law or to do His will perfectly. John has already acknowledged this (1:8–9): “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” But in writing, “No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning” (1 John 3:6); “He who does what is sinful is of the devil” (v. 8); and “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (v. 9), John is referring not to failings of weakness but to deliberate disregard of God’s will, to stubborn unbelief, and to unrepentant rebellion. This is the attitude of the unbelieving world around us, a world ruled by Satan. It is this attitude that cannot live in the heart of a Christian! It is this attitude that is the opposite of righteousness; it does wrong, not right, because it wants to do wrong.

How different is the child of God, who desires to do right and in this way be like the heavenly Father. John says, “If you know that He [God] is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him” (2:29). Like Father, like child—in righteousness.

2 Like Father, Like Child—in Love (3:11–24)

Now we focus on like Father, like child—in love. How amazing is God’s love! We wonder at the extent of that love when we think about Jesus. Just as the Father defines what righteousness is by being righteous, so Jesus defines what love is by being loving. John exclaims in 3:16, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.” In fact, the love of God in Christ is the theme that runs all through John’s first letter.

But God's love in Christ is only part of John's theme. The second part is that "since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (4:11). Since we are God's children, we love as God loves. And this love of God is not merely theoretical or abstract—it is love at work, love in action. The love that is like the Father's love is practical—as practical as a neighbor's need. It is a love that takes time, listens attentively, gives generously, hugs, and helps. Like Christ's love which caused Him to "[lay] down His life for us" (v.16)—so is our love: "we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (v. 16).

To lay down our lives for our brothers is not to die for them, as Christ died for us, but to live for them. We live for one another when we share what we have, whether money, skills, or time, with the brother (or sister) who needs it right then (v. 17). James refers to this practical love when he asks in 2:15–16: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"

The love we give others makes us like our Father and like Jesus and is evidence that we are God's children. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" (v. 14). So crucial is the presence of love for others in the life of a Christian that John declares that its absence—and its opposite—shows that someone is not a child of God. "Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (vv. 14–15).

The presence or absence of love reveals the presence or absence of faith. Faith makes us and our lives acceptable to God, because faith receives the grace of God extended to us in Christ. Love shows that we belong to the truth—that we believe the Gospel and are in Christ. Faith is confidence before God. Faith results in peace with God, a quiet conscience, satisfying prayer. Faith reveals itself through love. John shows how faith and love are related when he writes in verse 23: "And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us."

A faith that does not show itself by love in action is not genuine faith. James insists in 2:17–18: "Faith by itself,

if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ... Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." James is not saying we must have faith plus deeds, but he is saying that genuine faith shows itself by its deeds.

One caution about this point. We must not judge someone's faith by measuring how much love that person shows by action. Nor ought we to spend time counting up our own loving actions to see how much faith we have. Instead, we ought to concentrate on looking to Jesus for grace and to the Spirit for an increase of faith. We can be confident that as the Lord increases our faith, our love will grow, too, and will evidence itself in action. When we see ourselves or another Christian act in love, we can thank God for the faith that produced those loving actions. That is John's point: our active love indicates that we are God's children, for like Father, like child—in love.

3 Like Father, Like Child—in the Way We Regard Christ (4:1–6)

John refers in this section to one more way in which we show that we are children of God—in the way we regard Jesus. God the Father Himself has made Jesus' identity quite clear. At Jesus' Baptism the Father spoke audibly from heaven, declaring, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). When Jesus was transfigured—changed so that He was seen with His heavenly glory by His disciples—the Father spoke once again from heaven, repeating what He said at Jesus' Baptism: "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" (Matt. 17:5).

There is no doubt about the regard the Father has for Jesus as His divine Son, who enjoys His complete favor and approval, and who speaks with the Father's own authority. The fact that we have the same regard for Jesus shows that we are God's children. "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God," John writes in 1 John 4:2, referring to how true prophets—and true children—may be recognized: "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."

In light of the error of Cerinthus and other Gnostics

who denied Christ's true human nature, the key words here are "in the flesh." Jesus' full humanity and full deity cannot be denied by anyone who takes John's letter seriously. But the false prophets of John's time (and ours) do not. They are the antichrists of whom John warns us.

John then (v. 4) commends those who apply this test and so recognize the spirit of the Antichrist in those who masquerade as true prophets and true children but are not: "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you [the Holy Spirit, who reveals Jesus to us as true God, true man] is greater than the one who is in the world [the devil]."

That we regard Jesus in the same way the Father does shows that we are true children of God. Those who do not regard Jesus as the Son of God and the only Savior of the world likewise show that they are not children of God but children of the devil. Of such people Jesus declared in John 8:44, 47: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ... He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

In 1 John 4:5 John repeats Jesus' judgment when he writes of those who do not receive Jesus as the Son of God come into the world as a true human being: "They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them." Then John adds a warning. Believers should not expect the world to recognize or acknowledge them as God's children: "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (v. 6).

Like Father, like child—in the way we regard Christ. That you acknowledge and receive Jesus as the Son of God who came into the world as a man to save us shows that you are a child of God. It is one more bit of evidence, along with your Spirit-planted and Spirit-encouraged desire to do right and your Gospel-motivated

and Spirit-prompted love in action. Together it all adds up to show that you really are God's child. Let the evidence encourage you!

"Am I really a Christian? Am I really a child of God?" We Christians have sometimes wondered about that, especially when our own weakness has caused us to fail the Lord, or perhaps when we find it hard to see God's love in our circumstances. John does not want us to wonder. "Yes, you are a child of God. Here is the evidence to prove it. Like Father, like child."

----- Concluding Activities

Invite the class to make a diary-type list of all the people with whom they come in contact this next week who may not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Encourage them to submit those names to the throne of grace daily in prayer that God might turn the hearts of those people toward Himself. Challenge the class to view their friends and acquaintances with "opportunity eyes," that is, eyes anxious to see these people brought into the Kingdom and seizing every chance to share God's love with those people by word and in action.

Close by reading the Great Commission, Matt. 28:18–20.

Distribute study leaflet 4. Mention that the enrichment magazine contains an article on "The Sin against the Holy Spirit." This article will provide helpful background for their study of a difficult text in the week ahead.

Notes

Called to Abide in God's Love

1 John 4:7–5:21

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

As John closes his letter, he enlarges upon love, identifying God as the source of love and affirming that God's love in us moves us to love one another. He also writes about the faith that gives us overwhelming victory and confidence.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will

1. recognize the crucial role of faith and love in the Christian life;
2. grow in confidence concerning the Day of Judgment;
3. pray confidently, also for fellow Christians who sin.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on p. 45.

For the Presenter

No doubt this journey through 1 John has been a faith walk for you as well as the class. If the time spent in preparation, prayer, and presentation has been a joyful and rewarding experience, that no doubt showed as you communicated God's love in Christ to the leadership team and to the class.

All proclaimers of God's Word need to keep things in proper perspective, especially when it comes to evaluating our own importance to the process. When all is said and done, perhaps we are much like the young boy who came home from school and announced to his mother: "I've got some good news, and I've got some bad news."

"What's the bad news?" asked his mother.

"I haven't done very well on my report card."

Holding back her displeasure, she responded, "So, what's the good news?"

He replied, "I'm one of the three 'Wise' Men in the Christmas play!"

The bad news is that there were many times we did not do a good job with the task of presenting the material in this course. The good news is that we are not responsible for people's growth in faith in the first place! The even better news is that the Holy Spirit used us anyway and worked His work in the people (in spite of us). Remember that. It's humbling; it's also true. And it's reassuring and even freeing.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin with the hymn. Then divide your group into "left side" and "right side" and use the responsive reading from the leaflet. Close with the prayer.

Hymn

Prayer

Lord, we thank You for Your Word, which is true and which never changes. Jesus, You are life, now and forever, and we praise You! Holy Spirit, we thank You for speaking through Your Word as we worked through this LifeLight study. Show us how to truly abide in the Vine, to draw our nourishment, our strength, and our peace from You, Lord Jesus, our Savior. Enable us to bear fruit that lasts, that we may have Your joy. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

An effective teacher knows that learning proceeds from what is already known to what is yet unknown. In other words, you start where people are and build on that. One lesson starts where the previous lesson left off. This is an obvious but critical understanding of how to teach so that people learn.

John knew and practiced that principle. In the previous section we studied, John identified three traits that mark a Christian—righteousness, love, and the acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. In the section we studied this week John built on these points, especially on love and the acknowledgment of Jesus.

1 God's Love in Us Inspires Us to Love One Another (4:7–21)

John has said a lot about love. But as chapter 4 continues, he says still more. He speaks about God as the source of love, about our salvation as the work of God's love, and about the results of God's love in our own lives—our love for one another and our confidence regarding the Day of Judgment.

Love comes from God. In fact, John declares and then repeats, "God is love" (vv. 8, 16). Love lies at the very heart of God's being. His very nature and essence is love. Love has been, is, and always will be the motive that causes God to do what He does. Heaven and the holy angels resulted from God's love. God created our universe as an act of His love. The direction of love is always outward; God created human beings for the express purpose of loving them.

What a wonderful thing to know—that the God who made us and everything that exists is so loving that it must be said that God is love! "Love comes from God" (v. 7). God is as much the source of love as our sun is the source of light and heat for our earth.

Love is the reason for everything that God does. Love is even the reason for God's anger, since His anger is never arbitrary but always a response to the rejection or obstruction of His love. Most important to us, God's

love resulted in our salvation through the work of Jesus. When human beings introduced sin into the world and in so doing frustrated the intentions of God's love, God found a way to save humankind from sin. God's way was to enter this world Himself in Jesus, to fulfill the righteous will of God on our behalf and to pay the penalty of sin—death on the cross. Christ's work of atonement was the supreme demonstration of God's love, the pinnacle of God's efforts on our behalf. No wonder John exclaims in 4:10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Through Jesus God's love prevailed in winning us back from the grip of sin, in rescuing us from death, and in saving us for an eternity of joy and glory with Him in the age to come.

We receive the benefit of God's work of love through faith, which the Holy Spirit has produced in us, a faith that looks to Jesus for forgiveness and new life. John writes in 4:13–16: "We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." John will tell us more about faith in Jesus a little later on.

For now, think about this truth: "We know and rely on the love God has for us!" God's love for us in Jesus produces confidence, especially concerning God's coming judgment. Such confidence is not spiritual arrogance or presumption. It is our birthright as the redeemed children of God! Children of God need never fear God's judgment, for we know that God's love in Jesus has brought about the forgiveness of all our sins. Jesus has atoned for every one of them so that, as Paul declares in Rom. 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We have nothing to fear from God's judgment. No punishment is in store for us, because Jesus has paid all sin's penalties for us. We are now like Jesus Himself in God's sight—righteous and holy, since we were clothed in Christ's own righteousness and holiness in Holy Baptism. If we still fear God's judgment, we do not yet fully trust in

Jesus; God's love has not received full and free access into our hearts. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit would remove every hindrance that would keep God's grace from flowing freely into our hearts. Let's ask Him to remove all fear so that we become fully confident as we think of God's coming judgment.

God's love for us produces confidence. And it produces love. Because of God's love for us in Jesus, we now love one another. "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (v. 7). The fact that we love one another shows that God's redeeming work has been accomplished in us, that we have received faith as a gift of the Spirit. In fact, when someone lacks this love, that deficiency proves that that person does not have true faith in Jesus and does not enjoy a loving relationship with God. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (v. 8).

Someone may claim to live in the love of God, but a lack of love for others denies the truth of that claim. A genuine love for God and faith in Jesus will result in love for one another. "We love because He first loved us" (v. 19). Note the necessary connection. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (v. 20). A lack of love for the brother close at hand reveals that love for God is also lacking, even though someone may proclaim love from the rooftops. The two cannot be separated: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (v. 21). As the Spirit lives in us, He continues to work in us more fervent, more consistent, more Christlike love. We have not arrived at perfect love, and we will not arrive there until we reach the heavenly home. Yet, in love, God works in us those things that please Him as we continue to mature in faith.

2 Faith in Jesus Gives the Victory That Overcomes the World (5:1–12)

Love and faith are closely related in the child of God. God's love produces faith in us; faith in us produces love for God and love for one another. We have thought about what John has told us in this section about love. Now let's think more deeply about what John writes

concerning faith.

Faith rests on the testimony of God. We would not be able to believe if God had not come to us in the Gospel, the testimony that God has given us concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart," John tells us in 5:10. God works faith; it is a product of the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit has spoken to us concerning Jesus. The Holy Spirit's testimony has power, a power that enables us to believe. As he begins his letter to the Romans Paul declares: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (1:16). John writes in verse 9: "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God."

But even though God's testimony enables us to believe in Jesus, it does not compel anyone to believe; people may resist the truth—and many do. John writes: "Anyone who does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about His Son" (v. 10). Someone may resist God's testimony and in doing so call God a liar. But if we believe the Holy Spirit's testimony it is because God has made that faith possible. Faith is a gift, a gift that rests on the testimony of God.

Furthermore, faith is centered in the redeeming work of Jesus, a work that began with His Baptism and was completed by His death and resurrection. John refers to this as "water and blood" (v. 6). In making this reference John contradicted the claims of the Gnostics. We described this anti-Christian sect earlier in this course. Gnostics claimed that Jesus was only a man whom the "Aeon," or "heavenly Christ," took over at His Baptism and—since the "heavenly Christ" could not die—left Jesus before He died on the cross.

To this claim John responds, "He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement" (vv. 6–8).

Our faith, John says, centers in Jesus Christ, the God-man, who redeemed us by taking our sins upon Himself at His Baptism and by paying the penalty for those

sins on the cross. God Himself affirmed Jesus as His Son and declared Himself to be well pleased with Jesus, our Redeemer.

Of course the Gnostics of John's day are long gone. But the idea that Jesus was merely a good man is certainly still with us. There are plenty of people who would deny Jesus' divinity and the claim of Christians that Jesus is the world's only Savior. But the faith that results from God's own testimony affirms Jesus as both Lord and Savior. We maintain with John in verses 11–12: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." Faith is centered in the redeeming work of Jesus.

And such a faith gives us victory; John declares in verses 4–5: "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Faith gives us victory over the world system that opposes God and persecutes His children. The opposition, the false teaching, even the ridicule and persecution we face because we belong to Jesus—none of these things can destroy us or pull us away from His love. We will overcome because He has already overcome by the blood of His cross. The word *overcome* means "to triumph, to conquer." It connotes a true and lasting superiority that inevitably leads to total overthrow of one's enemies. In Jesus, by faith in Jesus, we are world overcomers! Now we anticipate this victory and celebrate it by faith, sometimes through tears; one day Jesus will wipe away those tears and grant us joy for all eternity as true faith overcomes in Him.

There is yet another sense in which our faith gives us victory. In our day-to-day life faith gives us small but significant victories over the power of sin. Anyone who overcomes sinful habits, addictions, and attitudes after a long struggle knows this significant victory of faith. Anyone who overcomes fear and moves forward in faith to accomplish some task for the Lord's kingdom knows this victory. Anyone who puts a trusting hand into the hand of Jesus and steps into an uncertain future knows this victory. Such victories may be hardly seen and seldom heralded, but they are significant victories nonetheless. They may not make the newspapers or win the

admiration of others, but they are not small victories to us—or to heaven. As we experience them, they reveal to us the presence and power of God. Faith—resulting from the testimony of God through the Gospel and centered in Jesus Christ as our Savior—gives us victory!

3 Confidence Flows from Faith (5:13–21)

And from the victory of faith there flows into our hearts confidence and peace. It is a confidence and peace that knows beyond doubt that eternal life is ours through faith in Jesus. This life is ours now, though its present possession is apparent only through faith. But when the Lord Jesus comes to take us to Himself in glory, then its full impact will become real to us as never before.

In the meantime, we express our confidence as we pray. John notes in verses 14–15: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him."

Notice that we are confident that God will give us what we ask for in prayer *in accord with His will* (emphasis added). This is not a pious escape clause to give God a way out in case He decides to renege on His promise. Nor is it a way out for God because He may not be able to give us what we ask. This is no disclaimer. It is simply to say that, because God loves us, He is not going to give us something that is not good for us. You may have heard the little proverb, "Be careful what you pray for; you might get it!" These words imply that God just might give us something that would damage us! That could never be! While we may foolishly ask for something we ought not to have, God is not foolish and will not give us anything evil. We can without doubt count on God to give us what is good for us; such a trust enables us to pray with confidence.

In verses 16–17, John gives an example of praying in accord with God's will as he talks about "the sin that leads to death." We may wonder what that sin might be. In the context of John's letter, we think immediately of the Gnostics. These people have, so to speak, committed spiritual suicide. They once knew the truth about God's love in the God-man Jesus Christ and about God's plan of salvation through the blood of Christ. They knew

God's will—that they believe in Christ and love one another.

And still, they walked away from the truth. With eyes wide open, they chose the darkness. They deliberately left the light. With hearts set on fire by hell, they followed their cravings and lusts into the worst kinds of sin. Their blasphemy, the rejection of Jesus Christ, was "the sin that leads to death."

It would do the remaining believers no good to pray that God would save these people anyway, in some way apart from Christ. There is no way of salvation apart from Christ.

As then, so now. We may pray that God will bring someone to faith in Jesus, but we should not pray that God will save in some other way a person who does not and will not believe in Jesus. Unbelief is the sin that leads to death, since only through faith in Christ do we obtain eternal life. Peter declared in Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." We can and do pray for unbelievers and witness to them. We may not pray that God will save people in spite of their unbelief, but we may and certainly ought to pray for fellow believers who, in their weakness, have fallen into sin.

In verses 18–21 John concludes with a grand summary of everything he has taught in this letter. He begins each of these truths by declaring, "We know ..." We conclude our own study of John's first letter with these affirmations of what "we know."

(Verse 18) We know that Christ will keep His own in faith and will protect us from the attacks of Satan and his lieutenants, the antichrists and the unbelieving world. Jesus said, in John 10:27–28: "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand."

(Verse 19) We know that, while the world around us is under the control of the devil, we are God's children. Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:14–17: "They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are

not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth."

(Verse 20) We know that Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior and that God has brought us to faith in Him through the Gospel. As Jesus said in John 14:6–7: "I am the way and truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."

What a note on which to end! You are God's dear children! Take care that you remain with your Father! May God help us to receive John's admonition and to believe the Gospel of which he has reminded us!

----- **Concluding Activities**

Thank participants for taking part in this course. Announce the beginning of the next LifeLight course, provide information about registration, and encourage them to invite others to participate. You may wish to conclude with the Apostles' Creed.

----- **Notes**

Notes

Small-Group Leaders Sessions

Called to Rejoice in Jesus Christ

1 John 1:1–2:6

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

In Jesus Christ, God removes our sin and darkness, so that we can live with Him in the beauty of His holiness.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. grasp a fresh vision of Christ's atonement for us;
2. appreciate the importance of confession and forgiveness, by which God in Christ sustains the eternal life God has given us;
3. experience the joy of life with God through Jesus Christ.

For the Small-Group Leader

It's good to emphasize that even if group members were *assigned* to this particular group, the Holy Spirit has something for them to learn from each other during these four weeks. So encourage everyone to maintain an expectant attitude and an open mind, and to accept each other in love. (Better to say this at the beginning of this session—as an “introductory” remark, rather than a lesson or two later.)

The questions in the first study leaflet immediately lead participants into Scripture, but you should have time, too, to handle organizational details typical of the first session.

Subsequent lessons in these weekly sessions will be challenging for some. LifeLight is called *in-depth* for two reasons: Participants dig deeply into God's Word, in a manner new to many; that digging implants the truth of Scripture into our hearts in a deeper manner. Stress to your group the importance of self-discipline—

of setting aside time *each day* to do the daily lessons. Otherwise they may fall behind, become discouraged, and drop out. Daily study also enriches daily life and imparts a clearer focus to deal with everyday situations and relationships as God's people.

Because LifeLight material aims to show how Scripture interprets Scripture, questions often have additional cross-references to look up. *Do not read all references during the discussion session.* Class time is limited, deliberately. Sometimes you—and your group members—may find that frustrating. But consider the advantage to leaders. When discussion veers off track or a dominant class member gives five-minute answers, you can gently interrupt, citing the obvious need to move on.

And you *do* need to get to the end of each lesson. If your group seldom has time for the last couple of questions, few participants will feel it necessary to answer them.

How do you ensure completion? First, at your leaders meetings, pay attention; if a particular question engenders extra discussion, expect that your small group may need extra time, too. Second, be realistic about actual time available. For example, of the allotted 55 minutes, only 45 to 48 minutes may be spent in discussion. With three pages of questions, that allows approximately 16 minutes per page, 8 minutes per column. (Not very much, is it?) So write your target time at the bottom of each column, using a colored marker. Although you'll seldom hit it exactly, this handy visual aid reminds you where you need to be.

You'll notice that some questions have obvious answers; new Bible students can answer these with confidence. Some are fact questions, while others solicit opinions or feelings. Even when an answer misses the mark, be careful not to embarrass that individual. Rather, ask whether someone else has a different answer. Then affirm the correct answer.

The LifeLight combination of personal study, group discussion, the presenter's wrap-up talk, and the enrichment magazine assures that participants are presented

with needed information. Your task is to be more a facilitator than an “answer person.” (If you sense that some remain confused, talk with them later in private, either in person or by telephone.)

Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references in the study questions are based on the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, which may affect the answers of some questions.

Although your leaders manual contains answers and additional information as a resource to you, be faithful to study your own weekly lesson in the same manner as your small-group members: first using Scripture alone. Like them, begin by asking the Holy Spirit’s guidance and enlightenment.

Pray regularly, by name, for individuals in your small group. Be assured that God’s Holy Spirit will grant you fruitful times together in His Word, as well as personal spiritual growth (John 6:63; 7:37–39).

Small-Group Discussion Helps

Day 1

1 John 1:1–2; John 1:1–5, 14

1. Think of it! Before the beginning, Jesus was already there. Our minds cannot grasp even the concept. The New English Bible translates John 1:1: “When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was” (NEB). John 1:14 beautifully sums up Christ’s incarnation. John and the others saw, heard, and touched Jesus, God in-the-flesh (1 John 1:1). And, according to John’s gospel, all creation took place through Jesus.

2. **Challenge question.** John wants to emphasize, in opposition to the Gnostics (see the enrichment magazine articles “Two Heresies, Old and New” and “Gnostics Today”), that Jesus is indeed true man—verified by the sense perception of those who saw, heard, and touched Him. Each verb multiplies the effect of his witness (to see is more than to hear, etc.). John speaks with the authority of one who had made a careful examination of the Word of life. He also enjoyed fellowship with the flesh-and-blood Jesus, as well as the resurrected Savior

(John 21:20–25).

3. Here John refers to eternal life, with which this book begins and ends (5:20). Jesus is the living one who has life in Himself (John 11:25). He is also the source of life and is sovereign over life (5:11).

4. Christ’s words are unequivocal. Clearly, this is not a matter of choosing between alternative “roads” to God or to heaven.

5. This is a self-examination question, so after a short pause, move on.

Day 2

1 John 1:3–4

6. (a) Now John tells us the why of his message: “so that you also may have fellowship with us” and “to make our joy complete.” He wants to make his experience “come alive” for his readers, so that they, too, will catch a fresh glimpse of Jesus Christ, truly God and truly human. The incarnate Christ is the basis for all fellowship—with God and with other believers. The word for fellowship (*koinonia* in the Greek; sometimes translated “communion”) has the sense of a partnership, a participation both recognized and enjoyed. John speaks of the bond between Christians and also the bond each of us enjoys with Jesus and the Father. As we realize these truths more and more, our joy will become complete. (b) Allow time for sharing by those who have had this edifying experience.

7. (a) Let participants share their definitions. The salient point is this: Those who have eternal life in Jesus have a unique relationship with God and with other believers. We belong to our Lord and to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ for now and forever. (b) There is no better word picture of the spiritual union of the believer with Christ than the one John uses in his gospel (15:1–5). Depending on the translation used, you may hear “abide,” “remain,” or “dwell” in Jesus. None of these words conveys the exact sense of the branch depending on the vine not only for strength and fruit-bearing but for life itself. (c) Answers may vary. Possible answers are staying in the Word (John), counting on our Lord to work His holiness in us (1 Thessalonians). The point is

that regular nourishment of our faith is essential if our sense of closeness to God is to flourish. We cannot, of course, make that happen, but as we drink deeply from the waters of life—the Word and sacraments—the Holy Spirit has a growing influence in our hearts and lives.

8. (a) John's fatherly heart longed to see that his children (his spiritual children) believed in Jesus Christ and walked in faith. (b) Don't ask anyone to share names, but let volunteers comment on the joy they receive from seeing the heavenly Father's faithful love in Jesus.

Day 3

1 John 1:5–7

9. Light represents what is good, true, and holy, while darkness represents what's evil and false. It is impossible that there be even a shadow of darkness (sin) in God.

10. God Himself, through His Word, brings this light into our lives.

11. **Challenge question.** The inescapable fact is that our lives—our words and our actions—reflect what we truly believe. Christians are called to holiness and truth, as revealed in God's Word and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Our godly attitude and lifestyle evidence the living, spiritual union we have with Him. (Note: The point is the union with the Father, not "keeping up appearances" as a Christian or as a member of a local church.) Fellowship with other Christians is based not on personalities or on similar tastes, but on our mutual walk in the light of Jesus Christ.

Day 4

1 John 1:8–10

12. Denying our sinful nature means that we're deceiving ourselves (v. 8) and also making God a liar (v. 10). Knowing that the teaching of the Gnostics was popular—and appealing—John takes pains to refute it. Today the world considers *sin* a rather quaint and old-fashioned idea. Yet over and over God's Word declares that we are sinners. If we deny that, we lie to our-

selves and to God.

13. (a) In Ps. 51:3–4 we read that all our sin is ultimately an offense against God, that all sins lie open to God's eyes, and that He in justice judges those who sin. (b) Ezek. 18:20 reveals the penalty we by our sins have deserved—eternal death. (c) Matt. 15:19–20 shows us that our sinful, outward actions and attitudes come from a sinful heart. Sin is more than what we do; it is at root who we are. Our sinful nature defiles us.

14. Let volunteers comment. All four passages promise our Lord's full and free forgiveness to penitent sinners.

15. By Christ's blood we are purified (1 John); we are justified by His grace (Rom. 3:24); our sins are atoned for (3:25), and we have His righteousness (3:21); we are free of condemnation and from the law of sin and death (8:1–2). Because we believe in Jesus as our Redeemer, the Father views us as pure and righteous.

Day 5

1 John 2:1–6

16. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice "for the sins of the whole world"—all people, including Christians—who are sinners still. The word *anybody* in verse 1 reminds us that we each sin individually. Jesus atoned for all the sins of the whole world, for all time, when He died on the cross and conquered death and Satan.

17. (a) Nevertheless, only those who believe in Jesus as Savior have eternal life. (b) Those who reject Him are condemned.

18. Therefore, Jesus intercedes for the believer. He who is without sin, seated at God's right hand, speaks on our behalf before God (Rom. 8:34).

19. **Challenge question.** (Here's an example of John's "circular" style of writing.) In 2:3–6, John adds these truths: When our lives generally are marked by obedience, our personal conviction of faith is strengthened (2:3). The one who professes to know God yet lives contrary to God's commands is not only a sinner, but a deliberate liar (v. 4). (See Rom. 6:1.) Verse 5 is like a never-ending circle: God's love truly is made complete in us when it moves us to obedience and a godly life.

Our love for God becomes complete when it expresses itself in acts of obedience. (Think of godly living as the fruit that naturally appears on branches rooted in the vine. It is the vine that produces the fruit.)

20. This question is marked for personal reflection. If you could share a new understanding of your own, it might open other volunteers to share their thoughts. Don't call on anyone directly unless they volunteer. This study shows us that Christ's pattern throughout the New Testament was love, humility, and self-sacrifice. All this He did out of love for us, who daily sin much! What a joy it is that He calls us and enables us to walk in His footsteps.

Notes

Called to Choose God's Standards

1 John 2:7–27

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

To know Christ as the sacrifice for our sins is to recognize and adopt new conduct for daily living. Central to this new attitude of life is the love of our Christian brothers and sisters and the hatred of sin and falsehood.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. use these verses to evaluate how much of "the world" has crept into his or her walk of faith;
2. recognize and confess the impossibility of keeping God's standard and to accept His forgiveness in Christ;
3. understand and trust that God's indwelling Spirit gives us discernment;
4. pray for a greater measure of maturity in these matters.

For the Small-Group Leader

Once in a while a group member will persist in interjecting a faulty point of view, anxious to convince the rest of the group. It's a mistake to attempt to "straighten out" such an individual's thinking during class time, even with reasonable conversation. You'll only consume precious minutes and frustrate others in your group. Never allow yourself to get into an argument! You're in charge, so you set the tone. Rather, say something like "We need to move on or we won't finish on time. You and I can talk more about this after class." Then break eye contact with that person and proceed with the lesson.

After class, quietly set a time when you can either call

or meet with that individual. (Perhaps at the end of the LifeLight session, if that's convenient for both.) In the meantime, pray specifically that the Holy Spirit will enlighten that participant and also will bring to your mind appropriate Scripture.

Incidentally, should you conclude that a group member is experiencing deep problems, either spiritual, emotional, or personal, be a friend. First, lift this individual before the Lord daily. Second, offer smiles, hugs, and encouragement. You may want to telephone occasionally, just to express your support as a fellow child of God. Third, speak confidentially with your pastor and express your concern. Do not hint or speculate to fellow leaders or to friends.

Small-Group Discussion Helps

Review question: Answers will vary. Certainly John's words sound fresh and timely as he arms his readers to deal with the movements of the day—both secular and those that appeal to religion—apart from the true teaching of Christ.

Day 1

1 John 2:7–11

Our last study ended with the admonition to "walk as Jesus did." That's our commitment as Christians, and the strength to do so comes from being in vital union with Jesus. John has laid out the basics of the Christian faith. Now he gives us the how-to.

1. Instead of "love your neighbor as yourself," it's now "love one another as I have loved you." Christ Himself—His self-giving love—is the new standard for us who have a relationship with Him by faith. But "as I have loved you" points us to the power that enables us to love: His forgiving love for us, shown especially on the cross. Christian love is the outflow of the intimate relationship between the believer and Christ (as branches in the vine). The phrase "Its truth is seen in Him and you" (v. 8) points us to the reality of the re-

relationship Christ has given us with Himself. This faith relationship results in love.

2. **Challenge question.** Christ is the true light, already shining in the darkness of sin. Sin is the darkness. Jesus won the battle against sin for all time on the cross. But Satan never stops trying to pull us under his influence, and our sinful nature persists in cooperating with him. The pull gradually lessens, however, as the believer faithfully walks with Christ, growing up in grace, by grace.

3. Encourage participants to share their summaries. How we respond to our fellow Christians reveals whether love or hatred, God's light or Satan's darkness, rules in our hearts. The heart where God's love rules through faith in the Gospel will reveal the rule of this love by the love it shows toward others. The heart that is still under the rule of Satan's darkness will show this rule in hatred toward others.

4. John says this individual is in the darkness; walks around in the darkness; does not know where he is going; is blinded by the darkness of sin. Those who follow Jesus may stumble, even fall, but they rise again. As the bumper sticker says, "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven." John knows that, too. Here (2:11) he speaks of one who is not a Christian.

Day 2

1 John 2:12–14

Verses 12–17 are the foundation for what follows and establish the authenticity of John's message. He well knows that the tests of the Christian life are rigorous. So he takes pains to reassure his "dear children" that he is confident of their salvation. Once again there is an overlapping of the points he makes.

5. John here presents unshakable Gospel certainties. (a) By "dear children" John is most likely referring to all Christians. (See, for example, 1 John 3:1, 7.) The "dear children" are forgiven for their sins, through Jesus, and they know their loving Father. (b) The fathers, probably mature Christians, are strong in their faith and know the one who is from the beginning: Jesus Christ. He is the source of their loving fellowship with God. (c)

The "young men," perhaps immature, growing Christians, are the future and the hope of the church. Victory over the evil one typically is most difficult when one is young, whether in years or in faith. Yet they are strengthened by the indwelling Word of God which gives them victory over false teaching and the temptations of Satan.

6. Answers will vary. If a participant responds just with a verse, don't press for a reason why. Let any explanations remain voluntary.

7. Typically, temptations of all kinds run strong in one's younger years. Also, those who are immature in their faith may find it difficult to turn away from the pull of sin. The skirmishes continue. Jesus Christ became a human being, was tempted, and on the cross won the victory. He sets us free from the controlling power of Satan. Strength to resist sin is not our own, but His strength within us, buttressed by His Word.

8. (Keep personal sharing voluntary!) There are no incorrect answers. You may want to write the following references on the chalkboard: Rom. 5:1–2; 8:38–39; Phil. 1:3–6; 1 Thess. 1:4–5. Encourage participants to jot them down in the margin, for their personal reassurance, or to pass them on to those who have doubts about their own salvation.

Day 3

1 John 2:15–17

9. (a) This term does not refer to the people of the world (John 3:16) or to the created world, but to the world of sin, organized as a rival to God. (b) With that meaning of "world" in mind, we can summarize John's thought this way: "Don't allow anything but God to take first place in your heart."

10. Answers will vary. In general, that which appeals to our old sinful nature is what's meant. For example: (a) "Cravings" indicate sinful desires springing from our sinful flesh. (Other Bible versions more literally translate "sinful man" (NIV) as "flesh," referring to our inborn sinful nature.) (b) "Lust of the eyes": The eyes are the gateway from the world to our sinful nature. Usually we see first, then we desire. Envy and covetous-

ness are what are meant. (c) “Boasting” denotes an arrogant attitude that presumes it can direct the course of life without thought of God. It also includes bragging about one’s possessions and abilities. (d) Christians find victory in these areas as we are led by the Spirit; this leading occurs as we continue to permit the Word of Christ, the Gospel, to dwell in us richly.

11. **Challenge question.** Enjoying and appreciating the created universe are not the issue. God gave us this beautiful world, home, family, etc., to enjoy (Eccl. 5:18–19). But that which would influence us to walk away from God, that which would lead us to discount our faith or would erode our commitment to Jesus, is a thing of the sinful world system of values and ideals directly opposite those our Lord holds out to us. James says we must choose either to serve this world system or our Lord Christ.

12. Christ’s words are clear, and they’re the only solid ground on which to build a life, now and forever. God wants all people to be saved from eternal death, and the Son alone gives eternal life. That salvation or new life God desires all to have through faith in Christ makes it possible for us to grow in “sanctification,” in holy living (1 Thess. 4:3, 7). Where God creates the new life, He also stimulates this growth by His Word of grace.

Day 4

1 John 2:18–23

The New Testament tells us that the “last days” began when Christ first came to earth. It had been revealed to the apostles that the Antichrist would appear before Christ’s return. John here speaks of antichrists, forerunners of the coming Antichrist, a great enemy of God who will arise before Christ’s return.

13. There are many antichrists (v. 18). They deny that Jesus came in the flesh (2 John 7) and that Jesus the man is the divine Christ (v. 22). (The Gnostics made Jesus the son of Joseph. Today many deny the virgin birth.) They deny the Father (v. 22) and do not have the Father (v. 23). They are liars (v. 22) and deceivers (2 John 7). They originate in the church (v. 19). The antichrists of John’s time broke fellowship with the church. Now John can see that either they were false

from the start or became so later.

14. (a) In 1 John 4:1–3 John warns us that there are many false prophets and antichrists, and therefore we are to test the ideas concerning God and His will that others present to us. One test is what they say about Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God, who has been sent into the world as our Savior. (b) In Acts 17:11 the Bereans provide a helpful example for us in that they examined what they were told in the light of the Scriptures to see whether or not what they were hearing coincided with God’s Word. (c) From 2 Tim. 4:2–5 we see that our pastors do a great service in guarding us from anti-Christian ideas by faithfully preaching and teaching God’s Word and by admonishing, counseling, and advising us in the light of that Word. We, on our part, are faithfully to hear the Word they preach and teach and to receive their admonition, counsel, and advice.

Day 5

1 John 2:24–27

15. (a) John admonishes us to stay with the Gospel we have come to know. We are to grow in the Gospel, but we must not grow away from it or “beyond” it. The Gnostics were teaching that they offered a more complete religion than what the apostles were proclaiming. In our own day, too, many would offer to help us grow “beyond” the Gospel we have come to know through the Holy Scriptures. (b) John assures us that eternal life awaits those who remain faithful to the Lord until He comes again. (c) We heed John’s admonition when we faithfully read and study the Scriptures, pray, worship, live in the covenant of our Baptism, participate in the Lord’s Supper regularly, and continue in the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

16. (a and b) Personal sharing is voluntary. (c) Encourage participants to continue in prayer as they think about areas in which they would like to see more spiritual growth. Also encourage them to thank God for the growth He has already produced.

17. (a) The anointing that John speaks about is with the Holy Spirit, which we received at Baptism (Acts 2:38). (b) Now the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and guides us into all truth by teaching us the Word and

will of God. (c) We experience this guidance through the teaching of God's Word, which sanctifies us (makes us holy) as we are led to acknowledge and trust Jesus for forgiveness of sins and salvation.

Wrap up the session by acknowledging that this study gives us much to mull over. Thank God that in Jesus Christ we are new people, and that His enabling Spirit lives in each of us!

Notes

Called to Demonstrate Christ's Love

1 John 2:28–4:6

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

John points out three ways in which children of God are like their heavenly Father—in righteousness, in love, and in the way they regard Jesus. John does this to reassure us in times of doubt, especially when we are under attack by the devil, antichrists, or the unbelieving world.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. recognize the evidence that John offers to show that he or she is a child of God;
2. feel reassured that he or she is a child of God;
3. ask the Holy Spirit for a greater faith in Jesus and a greater love for God that he or she may, more consistently and with greater fervor, do right, love others, and believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

For the Small-Group Leader

By now perhaps you've begun to relax as you lead the discussion in your small group. That's good and maybe not so good. Be sure to remain vigilant about completing the study. And ask the Holy Spirit's help in making the last two sessions the most productive of all.

Now that participants are more at ease, they're more likely to share that which touches them deeply. So be sure to mark those questions you judge will engender the most growth-producing responses, and allow extra time for the group to discuss them.

Small-Group Discussion Helps

Review question: Last week's study, detailing the insidious influence of the world on our lives, should have been thought-provoking. Christ's once-for-all victory over both Satan and sin's power is our victory, too. Nevertheless, we face a daily challenge. Satan will continue to tempt us, and our sinful nature will be with us as long as we breathe, even though we belong to Christ. Let volunteers share their thoughts.

Day 1

1 John 2:28–3:3

1. (a) Righteousness is a characteristic of God; God is righteous (1 John 2:29). (b) Jesus, God who appeared among us, is righteous, without sin. When Jesus comes again, He will make us to be without sin, as He is. Now, while we live in this world, we are to turn away from sin and do right things because we are righteous in Christ by faith (1 John 3:5–7). (c) As we come into this world, we are like the rest of sinful humanity in that there is no righteousness in us at all. But through faith in Jesus God gives us the righteousness of Jesus and declares us to be holy before Him (Rom. 3:9–11; 21–24).
2. (a) God makes us His children. Faith in Jesus confers 100 percent of the qualifications needed to be adopted into God's family. John 1:12–13 rules out any natural process; we are born from God! (b) John 3:3, 5 refer to faith and to Baptism. (We don't "earn" the right by our goodness.)
3. Our adoption is a present possession, not only a hope for the future. (Three times in 3:1–2 John emphasizes that we are God's children right now.)
4. **Challenge question.** When Christ returns, God will give us glorified bodies, similar to Christ's. We will, at the instant of His return, be fully transformed into His righteous image—the image of God we lost in Eden. Our sinful nature will be destroyed forever. Sin and Satan will never ravage us again. We will "be like Him"—our precious Savior. We can have absolute con-

fidence in Christ's return. (Note: To turn from habitual sin as a way of life is to "purify himself"; v. 3.)

Day 2

1 John 3:4–10

These verses need to be taken as a whole. It appears that the society in which John's first readers lived was much like our own. "Authorities" (false prophets) pronounced sin harmless self-expression and righteousness as irrelevant. (Obviously, the devil's tactics are the same today as they were in the Garden of Eden.)

5. **Challenge question.** (a) John here equates sin with lawlessness (v. 4), implying more than our imperfection (see above). Rather, he means a continuing state of opposition to God (v. 4) and rejection of all that He stands for. Jesus is without a trace of sin; He came to take away our sins (v. 5) and to undo the devil's work. Those who live in Him do not continue in their disregard of God's Law (vv. 6, 9). Those who continue their opposition to God do not know Him (v. 6); the eyes of their understanding either are blinded by the darkness of sin or have become closed again. (b) Clearly, then, the first statement is the correct one. John is not referring to the imperfections of Christians, the sins that occur because of their weakness; he is referring to the determined opposition and rejection of unbelief. (c) Our attitude and our lifestyle prove whether we are children of God or of the devil (vv. 7–10).

6. Jesus uses illustrations everyone can understand. False teachers may appear harmless, but they seek to destroy our faith. Pay careful attention to their deeds and to their lives, says Jesus. The tree produces fruit in keeping with what it is; it can do nothing else. Just so, our motives and our deeds, consistently observed, reveal what's inside us. ("Good" means God pleasing, in harmony with God's Word; "good" in its character, beneficial in its effect.)

7. (a) Answers will vary, according to individual perspectives. Some possibilities include public figures who present humanistic viewpoints; the teaching of evolution in schools; comparative religion classes that

present all religions as of equal value; that part of the entertainment media that blatantly ridicules the Christian faith; the mind-set that says there is no absolute right or wrong, that each person must decide on a moral code, and so on. The point is that a thing may not at first seem dangerous. But it can destroy our relationship with God if we begin to live a lifestyle based on any system of thought other than what God says in His Word. (b) Jesus came to destroy Satan's works, and He accomplished that. While Satan still uses the sinful world system to try to deceive us, his power has been broken. No one can snatch us out of the hands of our Good Shepherd. (c) *For personal reflection.* Accept voluntary comments. Refer anyone who may be struggling with a specific issue to your pastor.

Day 3

1 John 3:11–20

8. Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith," while Cain's heart and soul belonged to the devil. That allegiance preceded the outworking of sin—jealousy and murder. When Cain offered his sacrifice, some of the crops from his fields, God judged it evil because Cain was just going through the motions.

9. By being who we are, living as Christ's followers, our lives and character are a rebuke to our unbelieving neighbors. (For example, think of the Christian who heads off to church every Sunday, while the neighbor heads for the lake, etc.) We truly are aliens (3:1)!

10. Jesus is the ultimate example of love in action. His self-sacrificial love is our model.

11. John gives several proofs that someone is walking in the light: a lifestyle of righteousness as opposed to the rebellion of "lawlessness" (vv. 7–9); the hatred of the world (v. 13); Christlike love for fellow believers (v. 14); helping the brother in need by sharing material possessions (v. 17). The individual who continues to hate fellow Christians, or to bear them ill will, is not living in the light.

12. The measure of love we possess while here on earth always will be imperfect, and our hearts will always have reason to condemn us when it considers only our perfor-

mance. But “God is greater than our hearts” (v. 20), and this God has given us peace with Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. This Good News gives us confidence in approaching God now through prayer, and it will give us confidence as we approach His throne of judgment on the Last Day. The right actions that the Holy Spirit now inspires in us demonstrate that we are God’s children through faith in Christ, since our deeds give evidence that we have crossed from death to life.

Day 4

1 John 3:21–24

13. As do children of a loving earthly father, we can ask our heavenly Father anything—boldly.

14. (a) In Matt. 7:7–11 Jesus assures us that God’s answers to our prayers are always for our ultimate good, even when they feel like a no. (b) In Heb. 13:20–21 we read that above all, God answers our prayers in ways that equip us for doing His will and for pleasing Him. (c) In 1 John 3:21–22 the apostle assures us that we will receive anything that we ask of the Lord as we pray with faith and in obedience to His will.

15. One commandment, two parts. It is impossible to do one without the other. We cannot believe in Jesus and not love one another.

16. *For personal reflection.* As always, pause for a moment, then move on if no one volunteers a response. You may want to reaffirm that these self-examination questions can sometimes make us squirm, but they move God’s Word off the page and into our personal lives, where it belongs.

Day 5

1 John 4:1–6

17. (a) **Challenge question.** We need to be discerning, for many have been misled by those who professed to present the truth. Those who proclaim Jesus as true God and true man are moved by God’s Holy Spirit. (b) If Jesus is God alone, He could not take our place under the Law to pay the price for our sin. If He is man alone, He could not overcome Satan and death.

18. John says plainly that those who hear him (and by implication the other apostles) are of God (v. 6). We know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error by comparing a teacher’s words with Holy Scripture. Thus we need to examine the individual’s total confession. For example, what does this person teach about the virgin birth; the resurrection; salvation—by God’s grace? by good works? or by a combination? And so on. Many acknowledge the existence of God, but that is not the same as being born into His family. Note that in verse 3, “the world” means the planet earth. In verses 4–5 “the world” refers to the community of those not born of God, including the antichrists.

19. Verse 4 makes it plain: We are born of God and will continue to be victorious over Satan and his evil spirits by Jesus living within us through His Spirit. We can count on it! Jesus within us is always greater and stronger than Satan and his angels. But if we depend on our own learning, intelligence, or strength, we will be pushovers.

20. John says that only those born from God listen to the truth. Paul says that the cross is either a stumbling block or foolishness to the unbelieving world. That was true in the first century; it’s true now. This is proof again that God’s Word is always alive and up-to-date.

21. Plan to allow extra time for this question. Be prepared to list these answers on a chalkboard or a large sheet of paper. (Think of it as a brainstorming session.) Why not encourage your small group to become the spark plugs for the circles of members in which they move? Will you have a “secret corps” that tries to maintain anonymity? Perhaps you could make a pact that you’ll keep each other informed, for mutual support. Think of the transformation that would take place if even a handful of members, motivated by the Holy Spirit, concentrated on promoting a more loving atmosphere within your congregation. Try it. You may decide never to end the experiment!

Called to Abide in God's Love

1 John 4:7–5:21

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

As John closes his letter, he enlarges upon love, identifying God as the source of love and affirming that God's love in us moves us to love one another. He also writes about the faith that gives us overwhelming victory and confidence.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will

1. recognize the crucial role of faith and love in the Christian life;
2. grow in confidence concerning the Day of Judgment;
3. pray confidently, also for fellow Christians who sin.

For the Small-Group Leader

Did your group decide last week that they wanted to form a nucleus of love in action within your congregation? If so, you may want to take a few moments to talk about ways in which you can keep this going once this LifeLight study ends. If there was considerable enthusiasm last week, don't let it dribble away for lack of a plan.

If you haven't done so before, be sure to encourage participants to enroll in the next LifeLight study. Announce the first session's date and ask them to mark their pocket calendars on the spot. Also ask them to call several other people within the next few days and invite them to attend. They may even know someone in their neighborhood or at work who might be interested in attending. Perhaps these people are curious about the Christian faith or perhaps they have recently experienced a personal crisis. If so, they may be "primed" by that experience and open to hearing more about Jesus

and His saving love. Encourage group members not to discount the "come and see" kind of witness that Jesus Himself used with Andrew (John 1:37–40).

But whether they witness to fellow congregation members or to those outside the congregation, it will be important for them to explain that they've found LifeLight to be a vehicle for personal spiritual growth. They may want to share a couple of specific examples. After all, wouldn't they want their friends to have a similar opportunity? And aren't "satisfied customers" the best advertising?

Small-Group Discussion Helps

Review question: Answers will vary. Some may have thought of additional ways to show love to fellow members of your congregation. Others may have pondered aspects of the media barrage we deal with every day. Another part of last week's study was the God-given ability to discern false teaching.

Day 1

1 John 4:7–21

1. As we all know by now, John keeps returning to the theme of love. In fact, he uses the word *love* in its various forms 46 times altogether in this letter, and 32 times between 4:7 and 5:21. That indicates how important John considers the love of one Christian toward another in the walk of faith. (a) Love comes from God (vv. 7, 16) and originates in God. God's very nature is love (vv. 8, 16), and all His actions are loving. (b) Our love for fellow believers demonstrates that we love the Father and is to be expressed in loving acts and with an attitude of love (vv. 8, 11, 12, 19, 21). (c) God loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son (v. 9) as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (v. 10), that we might live (forever) through Him (v. 9). (d) The key is in verse 11: "Since God so loved us ..." Our love is to be a joyful, thankful response to God's boundless love. (See also vv. 7, 10, 16, 19.) That love also fulfills God's command (v. 21; also John 13:34; 15:12). (e) Love demonstrated

to fellow believers proves that God dwells in us (vv. 12, 16). (No human being has ever looked on God for any length of time, but He is “seen” when we love each other.) When we confess that Jesus is God’s Son, it verifies that He lives in us and we in Him (v. 15), as does God’s gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 13).

2. This is a self-examination question. Simply note that and move on.

Day 2

1 John 4:7–21

3. In His essential nature and in all His actions, God is love. (Even when Scripture documents God’s wrath, His purpose is loving, in that the eventual outcome will draw individuals to Him.)

4. (a) Ponder these unbelievable words! Jesus loves us as much as the Father loves Jesus! (b) God the Father loves each one of us to exactly the same degree that He loves Jesus Christ! Our human reason cannot grasp the enormity of God’s love for us. We can, however, bask in its warmth and be at peace, no matter what our circumstances.

5. When we remain in God’s love, we have total confidence. The Day of Judgment holds no terror for the believer, because our boldness rests on God’s love, not on our own goodness (vv. 17–18). (The believer will not be condemned; see John 3:16–18.)

6. **Challenge question.** (a) We are to bring these individuals before the Lord in prayer and ask God to transform the relationship. We can pray with assurance, since He is the source of love, and since love between brothers and sisters in Christ is His will. (b) Think about the phrase “Put on love.” We simply begin to act in a loving manner rather than wait until we feel loving. In the “new man,” our renewed nature, we obey God in loving action. In the Greek the sense is that of putting on a garment. In a nutshell, to live in love is to act in love. And as we act, we find that indeed it is “God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Phil. 2:13).

7. (a and b) *For personal reflection.* Allow a bit of time, but be sure not to call on anyone for an answer, as this

may be a delicate subject. If no one volunteers a comment, wrap up by reassuring participants that God is in the business of bringing new life out of what is dead, which includes relationships between Christians.

Day 3

1 John 5:1–5

8. John does not imply that God’s commands are light or easy to obey. But when we’re born of God through faith, His indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to obey. By the Spirit’s power at work in us, we “can do everything” (Phil. 4:13).

9. John echoes Jesus in saying that we will show our love for God by obeying His commands. Of course, because of the sinful nature that will be part of us all through this life, we will not be able to obey God’s commands fully. But the believer will desire to do so and will find joy in obedience. With the Holy Spirit’s guidance and help, the believer makes progress in godly living, while never completely reaching the goal.

10. (a) Jesus overcame death and Satan on the cross, once and for all. That eternal victory became ours when we were reborn in Baptism. (b) Still, we live in the world and its day-to-day temptations and ridicule or persecution. Satan, too, keeps trying to lead us astray. So we experience a continuing victory over the world’s sinful pattern of life by faith in Christ, which produces obedience to God as we are strengthened by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Day 4

1 John 5:6–13

Throughout this book John has been addressing the Gnostic teaching that the Jesus who died on the cross was simply a man, a human being.

11. (a) The water refers to Jesus’ Baptism (Matt. 3:13–16a), which occurred at the beginning of His public ministry. (b) The Spirit and the Father both testified that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He was accomplishing God’s saving work through His ministry. (c) The blood refers to Christ’s atoning death on the cross

at the end of His earthly ministry (1 Peter 1:19).

12. The Holy Spirit testified concerning Jesus by descending upon Him as a dove. The Spirit continues to confirm in the hearts of believers that God's Word is true and that Jesus truly is the Father's only-begotten Son, the Savior of the world.

13. In 1 John 5:11–12 the apostle plainly states that Jesus is God's Son and that eternal life is to be found only in Jesus Christ. The words of John 3:14–16, 36 echo that theme and leave no doubt that without the Son we face only God's wrath and condemnation. Simple logic dictates that if there is eternal life, there must be eternal death as well.

14. Eternal life—the highest quality of living fellowship with God—is the believers' possession, now and forever. John the Baptizer (John 3:36) and Jesus Himself (John 11:25–26) also assure us that the believer has eternal life. The certainty of this fact rests on God's promise, which will never fail us. It is true that we can refuse God's gift of eternal life. But Jesus promises that no one can rob us of this treasure (John 10:28–29). While eternal life is the present possession of believers, we shall experience it to the fullest when we dwell with God in heavenly glory.

Day 5

1 John 5:14–21

John's concluding remarks have a fatherly tone, fitting for one who so often addresses his "dear children."

15. As Eph.3:12 tells us, in Christ and through our faith in Him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

16. God answers all prayers. But if our requests differ from His will for us, His response may not be what we ask. As Jesus said (Matt. 7:11), even human parents know how to give good gifts to their children. And, because parents are older and more experienced than their children, they recognize when a child's wish would be harmful. A loving parent would not give a child a loaded gun, even if the child pleaded and begged to have it. Our loving, all-knowing heavenly Father knows what truly is for our good and answers accordingly.

17. **Challenge question.** The "sin that leads to death" is denying the Son of God. It is the persistent refusal to repent demonstrated by the Gnostics who showed by their words and actions they had walked away from the truth and shut the door on Jesus Christ's atoning blood. That road ends inevitably in eternal death. Verses 16b–17 likely refer to the Gnostic teaching, which allowed gross immorality. Such blasphemy and chronic, unrepentant sin against the Holy Spirit leads to spiritual death. Refer to the article in the enrichment magazine on "The Sin against the Holy Spirit." It provides an in-depth review of this and related Bible texts.

18. We are to intercede for the Christian brother or sister who is sinning (perhaps, for instance, by not worshiping regularly). When God gives life (v. 16), He does so by granting the gift of repentance.

19. The five certainties believers enjoy are these: (v. 13) we know we have eternal life; (v. 15) we know God hears and answers our prayers; (v. 18) we know we have victory over sin and Satan; (v. 19) we know we belong to God; and (v. 20) we know Jesus Christ is true God.

20. *For personal reflection.* Note the private nature of this question and move on.

21. Answers will vary. Allow extra time for volunteers to share their thoughts.

Notes