

# 1 John

## Leaders Guide



*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

*1 John 3:16*

# Table of contents

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Leaders guide	<b>1</b>	<b>Study 1</b>	A repentant lifestyle	<b>60</b>	Participants guide
	<b>9</b>	<b>Study 2</b>	Freedom for obedience	<b>63</b>	
	<b>16</b>	<b>Study 3</b>	Opposing forces in the battle	<b>66</b>	
	<b>25</b>	<b>Study 4</b>	Our christian identity	<b>68</b>	
	<b>34</b>	<b>Study 5</b>	Called to love	<b>71</b>	
	<b>43</b>	<b>Study 6</b>	Something to rely on	<b>74</b>	
	<b>50</b>	<b>Study 7</b>	Assurance that we belong to God	<b>77</b>	

# 1 John

## A repentant lifestyle

### Study 1 | 1 John 1:1 - 2:2

When you find yourself falling again and again in a certain area, stuck in some habitual sin, what impact does it have on your life? How do you usually try to remedy the situation?

**READ 1 John 1:1-2:2**

- 1. According to 1:1-4, what is the purpose of John's letter? What do these verses (particularly verse 1's reference to "what we have heard..., seen..., and our hands have touched") tell you about the nature of Christian faith generally, and fellowship with God particularly? What is John trying to get across about fellowship with God?**
- 2. How do you think most people would react to the claim that fellowship with God is a genuine possibility? Why might they react that way? How could you respond to their reasons?**
- 3. These verses picture a pure, sweet communion with God that many believers do not regularly enjoy. What are some reasons why our own fellowship with God may be lacking?**

4. **What do verses 5-10 describe as a major hindrance to true fellowship? What claims do people make when they pretend that sin doesn't affect their relationship with God?**
  
5. **If Scripture teaches that there is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1) and our guilt has been removed (Heb. 10:22), why does our sin still get in the way of fellowship?**
  
6. **In 2:1, what does John say is his purpose in writing these things? How do the previous ten verses relate to that goal?**
  
7. **Notice that although John says he has written these words so we "will not sin," he follows that with, "But if anybody *does* sin..." What solution does John offer? How should we pursue this on a day-to-day basis? What are some other ways we seek to deal with our sin? Why do we seek alternatives — and why are they inadequate?**

- 8. Essentially, John is calling us to a life of ongoing faith and repentance. What is repentance? What role does it play in the Christian life? Why is it so important, and why are we doomed to a life of discouragement and depression without it?**

## MAIN POINTS

John's chief concern in this passage is to communicate the wonderful reality that every Christian can have fellowship with God, though that fellowship can be temporarily lost through a life of sin. He wants Christians to face their sin with the utmost seriousness, knowing it can destroy the only communion that brings joy. He goes on to demonstrate how that fellowship can be restored — namely, through the continual application of the gospel to oneself through a daily life of faith and repentance.

Basically, John points out that sin is inexcusable, so we should not seek to justify our sin or blame it on someone else. It should be taken seriously despite its inevitability. Until we die, we will deal with the reality of indwelling sin, but sin is forgivable because of God's mercy through Christ.

## COMMENTARY ON THE PASSAGE AND NOTES ON THE QUESTIONS

- 1. According to 1:1-4, what is the purpose of John's letter? What do these verses (particularly verse 1's reference to "what we have heard..., seen..., and our hands have touched") tell you about the nature of Christian faith generally, and fellowship with God particularly? What is John trying to get across about fellowship with God?**

John states that his reason for writing is to encourage his readers to seek out fellowship with the Father and the Son. There must be "vertical" fellowship with God before there can be "horizontal" fellowship with others. He begins his letter this way to assure people that such fellowship with God is no mere flight of fancy. It is as real as any fellowship we have with human beings. The One with whom they have fellowship is the One they have heard, seen, looked at, and touched. Christian faith refuses to be categorized as a belief system of abstract ideas that can be dismissed by saying, "I'm glad that's true for you; I'm glad it works for you." Christianity claims to be grounded in history and objectively true. It follows, then, that our fellowship with God is a reality to be enjoyed!

**2. How do you think most people would react to the claim that fellowship with God is a genuine possibility? Why might they react that way? How could you respond to their reasons?**

People outside the faith often think that such a claim is foolish, and that those who have this fellowship are, at best, duped by their own psychological needs. As John Newton wrote, "That God is to be worshipped, is generally acknowledged; but that they who worship him in spirit, and in truth, have real fellowship and communion with him, is known only to themselves. The world can neither understand nor believe it... However, they who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses. If they are competent judges whether they ever saw the light, or felt the beams of the sun, they are no less certain that, by the knowledge of the Gospel, they are brought into a state of communion with God." <sup>1</sup> To the skeptic, J.I. Packer has written in *Knowing God*, "I ask you for the moment to stop your ears to those who tell you there is no road to knowledge about God, and come a little way with me and see. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and anyone who is actually following a recognized road will not be too worried if he hears non-travelers telling each other that no such road exists." <sup>2</sup>

**3. These verses picture a pure, sweet communion with God that many believers do not regularly enjoy. What are some reasons why our own fellowship with God may be lacking?**

This question hits much closer to home. Sometimes we doubt that communion with God is a genuine possibility because we have not engaged in the requisite activities. In *Keep in Step with the Spirit* J. I. Packer writes, "[One] reason... why the experiential reality of perceiving God is unfamiliar country today [is that] the pace and preoccupations of urbanized, mechanized, collectivized, secularized modern life are such that any sort of inner life (apart from the existentialist *Angst* of society's misfits and the casualties of the rat race) is very hard to maintain. To make prayer your life priority, as countless Christians of former days did outside as well as inside the monastery, is stupendously difficult in a world that runs you off your feet and will not let you slow down. And if you attempt it, you will certainly seem eccentric to your peers, for nowadays involvement in a stream of programmed activities is decidedly 'in,' and the older ideal of a quiet, contemplative life is just as decidedly 'out.' That there is widespread hunger today for more intimacy, warmth, and affection in our fellowship with God is clear... but the concept of Christian life as sanctified rush and bustle still dominates, and as a result the experiential side of Christian holiness remains very much a closed book." <sup>3</sup> Some convicting food for thought! You might want to read this quote to your group and ask for their reactions.

**4. What do verses 5-10 describe as a major hindrance to true fellowship? What claims do people make when they pretend that sin doesn't affect their relationship with God?**

In verses 5-10, John discusses the effects of sin on our relationship with God and the strategies people use to deal with their sin. His initial statement, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all," is John's way of explaining that sin breaks fellowship with God. The Scriptures are packed with this truth: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab. 1:13); "You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence" (Ps. 5:4-5); "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:2).

John then lists the excuses and strategies we use to avoid facing our sin: either we deny we have any significant sin or we deny that it affects our relationship with God. God wants us to acknowledge and confess our sin. All attempts to justify or deny our behavior are ultimately self-defeating, for they keep us from the one thing that brings fulfillment — confession and repentance, through which God reveals his concern and love for us.

**5. If Scripture teaches that there is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1) and our guilt has been removed (Heb. 10:22), why does our sin still get in the way of fellowship?**

The sensitive believer asks, "Does John mean that God no longer loves me when I sin? If my sin — past, present, and future — is forgiven on the basis of what Christ has done and my standing with God is secure, why does my present sin break my fellowship with God?" The answer lies in the distinction between our *legal* and *personal* relationships with God. *Legally*, we stand completely acceptable to God, clothed in Christ's righteousness. Through Jesus, we are viewed as innocent and completely without guilt. However, in our *personal* relationship with God, fellowship can be broken. A mother's child remains her child no matter what that child might do, but the personal relationship can most definitely be harmed. In reflecting on this problem, John Owen asks the question, "Does God then love his people while they are sinning? Yes! He loves his people, but he does not love their sinning. Doesn't God's love change towards them? Not the purpose of his will to love them, but the working out of his gracious acts and disciplines towards them is changed. He rebukes them, disciplines them, hides his face from them, ...but woe to us if he should change his love, or take away his kindness from us!"<sup>4</sup>





# 1 John

## A repentant lifestyle

### Study 1 | 1 John 1:1 - 2:2

- 1. From what you can tell, what is the major point John is trying to get across in this passage? Summarize it in one or two sentences.**
- 2. According to John, what prevents us from experiencing fellowship with God?**
- 3. Are there other obstacles to fellowship with God? If so, what are they?**
- 4. How can these obstacles be overcome? What concrete steps can you take to establish more consistent fellowship with God?**

**READ Psalm 51**

- 1. What does this psalm teach you about repentance? How essential is repentance to the Christian life and why?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. What does it teach you about the positive effects repentance can have on a person's life?**

**READ 1 John 1:1-2:2**

- 1. What does this passage teach you about sin and the different ways (both legitimate and illegitimate) to deal with it?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. When you find yourself falling again and again in a certain area, when you are stuck in some habitual sin, what effect does it have on your life?**

3. How do you usually try to remedy the situation? Do you find your remedies tend to work? If not, why? What do you suppose John would say is the remedy?

**READ Psalm 63**

1. What does this passage convey about our need for fellowship with God and God's willingness to meet that need?
2. When the psalmist says, "Your love is better than life," what is he trying to get across? How would that belief affect the ordering of his life? What things would he do and what would he avoid?
3. Use this psalm to worship and praise God, making its words your own.