

1-3 JOHN



1 JOHN

Read 1 John 1:1–4

This prologue is strikingly similar to the prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1–18) and the first creation account in Genesis 1. Key themes that emerge here will form the teaching basis for this letter.

Reflect: This prologue concludes with the concept of fellowship. What is your understanding of the phrase, “our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”?

Pray: Pray for the gift of insight to see through the eyes of faith and to recognize the divine presence in ordinary daily life.

Act: Consider how your words and actions testify to who you are. What specific words and actions of yours testify to your spiritual relationship with God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ?

The Word of Life

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our^a joy may be complete.

God Is Light

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

^a Other ancient authorities read *your*

Read 1 John 1:5–10

God is described as light and our relationship with God as walking in the light.

Reflect: How have I personally experienced the fact that “God is light”?

Pray: Light overcomes darkness and provides clear direction for us. Pray that God will enlighten you to walk in the light and follow God’s ways.

Act: Acknowledge some sin or darkness in your life. What do you specifically need to change in order to “walk in the light” rather than remain in the darkness?

Read 1 John 2:1–17

An exhortation is given to live the commandment of love. Our actions need to provide credible witness to our relationship with God. Otherwise, we are “liars” and remain in the darkness.

Reflect: How would I characterize my relationships with others, especially those whom I find it difficult to love?

Pray: Pray for God’s assistance in helping you to overcome any difficulties you are having with relationships at this time in your life.

Act: Identify a specific person with whom you are having difficulties. What actions do you need to take so that you can have a relationship that shows that you “live in the light” rather than the darkness?

Christ Our Advocate

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; ⁵ but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked.

A New Commandment

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because^a the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says, “I am in the light,” while hating a brother or sister,^b is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves a brother or sister^c lives in the light, and in such a person^d there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates another believer^e is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one.

¹⁴ I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶ for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes

^a Or *that*

^b Gk *hating a brother*

^c Gk *loves a brother*

^d Or *in it*

^e Gk *hates a brother*

Read 1 John 2:18–29

A strong warning is given against the antichrists, along with words of encouragement to live by the anointing received as children of God. The promise of “eternal life” made by Jesus in the Gospel of John (5:24; 10:28; 17:2) is recalled in this section.

Reflect: “You have been anointed by the Holy One.” This creates a special type of relationship with God and others. How would you describe that relationship?

Pray: Specifically identify and pray for a person you know who has “deserted” or fallen away from his or her relationship with God.

Act: Consider reaching out to the person for whom you have prayed. Is there any possibility that you could assist that individual? Some gesture of care and concern from you may be a first step in helping that person find God’s light once again.

Read 1 John 3:1–10

The Father’s love for us makes us children of God. This calls for a right order in our relationships and the need to avoid sin.

Reflect: Why does the world not recognize God and God’s love? How am I called to communicate the message of God’s love for the world to others?

Pray: Believers exist in the world, not apart from it. Consider the present situation in the world, whether globally or locally. Pray for a specific area in which the message of God’s love needs to be heard.

not from the Father but from the world.¹⁷ And the world and its desire^a are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Warning against Antichrists

18 Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour.¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge.^b ²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth.²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?^c This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.²⁵ And this is what he has promised us,^d eternal life.

²⁶ I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you.²⁷ As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.^e

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Children of God

²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him.

3¹ See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.² Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he^e is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.⁵ You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.⁶ No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is

^a Or the desire for it

^b Other ancient authorities read you know all things

^c Or the Messiah

^d Other ancient authorities read you

^e Or it

Act: Examine your own life. Seek specific, concrete ways of communicating God's love to help others come to know it. Actions often speak louder than words.

Read 1 John 3:11–24

Christians must love one another, and that love must be evident in the practical world of daily life. Hatred must be overcome.

Reflect: What does it mean to “lay down our lives” for one another? What does the example of Jesus teach us?

Pray: “We have boldness before God, and we receive from him whatever we ask.” Pray for this confidence and for the willingness to ask for God's help in living out this commandment of love.

Act: “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” What area in your life or worldly bad habit that you may have developed needs to be changed? With confidence, bring this need to change before God in prayer.

Read 1 John 4:1–6

The struggle of living in the world while living our Christian faith is considered. We need to actively seek God's ways and “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”

Reflect: Engaging our present world situation is necessary and important. The believer does not flee or try to escape. In what ways does my faith dialogue with the modern world?

righteous, just as he is righteous.⁸ Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.⁹ Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them;^a they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.¹⁰ The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.^b

Love One Another

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.¹² We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.¹³ Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters,^c that the world hates you.¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.¹⁵ All who hate a brother or sister^b are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.¹⁷ How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister^d in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God;²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Testing the Spirits

4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus^e is not

^a Or because the children of God abide in him

^b Gk his brother

^c Gk brothers

^d Gk brother

^e Other ancient authorities read *does away with Jesus* (Gk *dissolves Jesus*)

Pray: Pray for the strength to listen and dialogue with the secular world while at the same time communicating to others that you “are from God.”

Act: Effective dialogue calls for both listening and speaking. You are called to communicate God’s message to others. Examine your listening skills as well as your speech and the words that you use in dealing with others. Where do you need to improve?

Read 1 John 4:7–21

God’s love is relational in communicating with humanity and the world. This passage reiterates Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John 3:1–21. God’s love needs to be made evident for others to see and experience.

Reflect: “Perfect love casts out fear.” How does this happen? In what ways do I “testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world”?

Pray: Love is relational. If we truly love God whom we cannot see, then we must love others whom we do see. This is not easy. Pray for the ability to love someone with whom you find this difficult to do.

Act: The standard of love is high. Love needs to be put into practice and perfected. Identify a specific area or relationship in your life that is lacking in love. Set a goal to be achieved and, trusting in the Lord, take the necessary steps to achieve your goal.

from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. ⁴ Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

God Is Love

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love^a because he first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters,^b are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister^c whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters^b also.

Faith Conquers the World

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ^d has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not

^a Other ancient authorities add *him*; others add *God*

^b *Gk brothers*

^c *Gk brother*

^d *Or the Messiah*

Read 1 John 5:1–12

Believing in Jesus Christ enables us to have faith that overcomes the world. The importance of testimony is emphasized. God's testimony is greater than human testimony.

Reflect: "There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood." To what do these three testify? Read this section carefully and compare it with John 19:28–37.

Pray: Giving testimony is not easy. In your prayer, ask for the strength and courage to testify to the Lord before others who may not be open to receiving this message.

Act: Giving testimony is not always easy, but it is doing what one believes is true and knows is right. Evaluate how you give testimony to God before others.

Read 1 John 5:13–21

This conclusion highlights confidence in prayer and knowing that we belong to God.

Reflect: "Keep yourselves from idols." What are some idols against which I need to be on guard?

Pray: Offer a prayer of confidence that, like the conclusion of this letter, expresses your awareness that you belong to God and need God's help in living your faith each day.

Act: Identify the worldly idols that may affect your relationship with God. Be aware of them and of the steps you need to take not to be led astray.

burdensome, ⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Testimony concerning the Son of God

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ There are three that testify:^a ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. ⁹ If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. ¹⁰ Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God^b have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Epilogue

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

¹⁴ And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. ¹⁶ If you see your brother or sister^c committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God^d will give life to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.

¹⁸ We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them. ¹⁹ We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. ²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true;^e and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.^f

^a A few other authorities read (with variations) *There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.* ^b And there are three that testify on earth:

^b Other ancient authorities read *in the Son*

^c Gk *your brother*

^d Gk *he*

^e Other ancient authorities read *know the true God*

^f Other ancient authorities add *Amen*

2 JOHN

Read 2 John

This short letter offers advice about love and belief. The image of the “elect lady” seems to reflect a Christian community that may be described as being made up of her children.

Reflect: The letter concludes with a reference to speaking face to face to evaluate how the readers are doing in walking according to God’s commandments. Envision yourself having this face-to-face evaluation.

Pray: Instead of considering the negative aspects of evaluating our lives, offer a prayer of rejoicing for those who live and walk by the commandments of God’s love.

Act: Take the time to evaluate how well you are living your faith in terms of love and belief. Where do you need to improve or do better? What steps do you need to take?

Salutation

1 The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, ² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from^a Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, in truth and love.

Truth and Love

4 I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. ⁵ But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another. ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it.

7 Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the anti-christ! ⁸ Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we^b have worked for, but may receive a full reward. ⁹ Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; ¹¹ for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

Final Greetings

12 Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

13 The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.^c

^a Other ancient authorities add *the Lord*

^b Other ancient authorities read *you*

^c Other ancient authorities add *Amen*

3 JOHN

Read 3 John

This brief letter addresses hospitality to missionaries and authority in the early church. A warning is made about Diotrephes, who seems to be creating some divisions and problems.

Reflect: How do I show hospitality to others and “send them on in a manner worthy of God”?

Pray: Pray for understanding and patience in dealing with someone like Diotrephes, who seems to like dominating the group and does not work well with others.

Act: This letter concludes with a specific instruction to greet others, each by name. Take the time and make the effort to get to know the name of a person who is presently only a casual acquaintance or whose name is unknown to you so that you will be able to greet that person specifically by name in the future.

Salutation

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

Gaius Commended for His Hospitality

2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. ³ I was overjoyed when some of the friends^a arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends,^a even though they are strangers to you; ⁶ they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; ⁷ for they began their journey for the sake of Christ,^b accepting no support from non-believers.^c ⁸ Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

Diotrephes and Demetrius

9 I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends,^a and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. ¹² Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him,^d and you know that our testimony is true.

Final Greetings

13 I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; ¹⁴ instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face.

15 Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.

^a Gk *brothers*

^b Gk *for the sake of the name*

^c Gk *the Gentiles*

^d Gk *lacks for him*