



NG Study Guide: 1 Jn.1:1-4 “The Benefits of Love” [2.25.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** *Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: The apostle John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved [Jn. 13:23]. John wasn't suggesting that Jesus loved him more than the others, nor was he saying that Jesus loved him but not the others. John had discovered the love of God in Christ Jesus, and John's response to that love was transforming. John had been an angry man, and along with his brother James was nicknamed *Boanerges* meaning the “Sons of Thunder” [Mk. 3:17]. Later, John's nickname in the church would be “The apostle of love.” John's three epistles could be called love letters, because in studying them you'll discover the status of your relationship with God. Let's consider an overview of this first letter, and discover some of the benefits of God's love. Ideally, you will know God's love intimately.

Why did John write? Four times John uses the phrase, “These things I write to you ...”

1. So that your joy may be full [1:4]

John wrote this letter from Ephesus between 85-90 A.D. to second and third generation believers. They had no personal experience with Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Nevertheless, their fullness of joy would flow from the love of God, life with God, and the assurance of eternal life.

2. So that you might not sin [2:1]

Following Jesus requires a high degree of moral and ethical purity, love and kindness, forgiveness and service that is distinct from our culture.

3. So that you won't be deceived [2:26]

The threat to the church was not persecution, but seduction from the culture. The seduction to integrate Christian faith, secular philosophy, and a philosophy of the day, Gnosticism. The Gnostics taught that all matter [e.g. the physical body] was evil, and that the spirit was inherently good. The Gnostics sought to liberate the spirit by secret knowledge [gnosis]. They denied the incarnation (birth of Christ), and argued that Jesus only seemed to have a body but was rather pure spirit.

The Gnostics taught the Christ anointing came upon Jesus at His baptism and departed at the cross. Perhaps the greatest heresy was their idea that believers could continue in a lifestyle of sin in the flesh since all matter was inherently evil, and that it would not corrupt the spirit. John, along with every New Testament writer warns of the dangers of this false teaching and encourages believers in the truth of fellowship with God and others.

4. So that you may know that you have eternal life [5:13]

The letter reveals a series of traits of followers of Jesus so that you can test whether you have responded to God's love and the gospel of Jesus. You are either in a life-giving relationship with God, or not, and you can know whether you have eternal life.

Benefits of receiving God's love [1:1-4]

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

1. Real life [1-2]:

Three times we see the word "life" [1-2] which is the Greek word *zoe* meaning the essence of life or spiritual life; and is contrast with *bios* referring to physical life. All true life flows from a proper relationship with Jesus. Life in Christ provides meaning, purpose, hope, and contentment that is not available in the material world. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" [Jn.14:6]. Only God can give real life, because it is a spiritual reality that is experienced in the midst of a material world.

John establishes that Jesus is all God and all man and thus can give us real life. Jesus was from the beginning [1]. It speaks of Jesus' eternal existence. John similarly began his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" [Jn. 1:1]. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" [Jn. 1:14].

John begins to refute the Gnostic philosophers in the very first verse when he declares that the apostles and thousands and thousands of other witnesses *heard, seen, looked upon, and handled* [1]. What we believe is historical, tangible evidence from credible witnesses who had an unimpeachable personal encounter with Jesus. They experienced Jesus' humanity, they beheld the glory of His deity on the Mount of Transfiguration [Matt. 17]. They handled Jesus after his resurrection proving He was not simply spirit, but had a glorified resurrected body perfectly designed to spend eternity in the presence of the true and living God [Lu. 24:39].

Jesus personifies real life and offers real life in this life and the life to come to those who choose to follow Him. John notes twice that this life was *manifested* [2] or made known or evident to man.

How does God reveal Himself to man? God is generally revealed by creation [Rom. 1:20], and specifically through the Old Testament Scriptures [Heb. 1:1]. Yet, it is Jesus who perfectly reveals God to us through His words and works [Heb. 1:2]. If you know Jesus you know the Father [Jn. 14:9]. He became what we are to make us what He is. Martin Luther observed, "It is not Christ walking on the sea but His ordinary walk that we are called on here to imitate."

2. Real relationships [3]: *we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

The purpose of declaring Jesus is to create *fellowship* [2x v.3]. The Greek term *koinonia* refers to sharing and participating with, having in common, community and communion. God loves you and created you for relationship with Him, but it is man's sin and rebellion that obscures and hinders a relationship with God [Gen. 1-3]. When you receive Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit, a spiritual birth, and your sins are forgiven. Thus, you can and do experience relationship with God the Father and God the Son. Religious activity such as reading the Bible, prayer, contemplation, gathering with an assembly of other believers to sing God's praises and learn the Bible, service, and giving are transformed from hollow ritual to genuine worship and adoration. You begin to appreciate and appropriate God's love for you, and you discover that you are growing in your love for God.

Our relationship with God is to be enjoyed and experienced in relationship with other believers (*fellowship with us*). We are called to gather as a larger assembly and as smaller groups where authentic relationships are cultivated with people who will positively influence you and people you can influence to help them grow in relationship with Christ [Ac. 2:42-47]. The Christian life is experienced and enjoyed in community with other believers. Neighborhood Groups [NG] are a great way to grow in your relationships with God and others and experience and share God's love.

3. Real joy [4]: *these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*

God's desire for man to experience life characterized by joy is seen in the Garden of Eden, but is lost in the fall of man. In Christ joy is restored. God wants your joy to be *full* or abundant, complete, and overflowing. Joy flows from relationship with God. King David, the sweet psalmist of Israel wrote, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" [Ps. 16:11]. Jesus, declared, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full" [Jn. 15:11]. Jesus had been speaking to them about His resurrection, Second Coming, the work of the Holy Spirit and their need to simply abide or dwell with Him. Joy flows from proximity to Christ, and the assurance of your ultimate destiny with God.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. *Which of the four reasons that John wrote this letter resonates most with you?*

Q2. *List some of benefits of your relationships with God.*

Q3. *List some of benefits of your relationships with other followers of Jesus.*

Q4. *How would you like to apply the lessons to your life?*

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Read all of the verse references listed in the section, “Why did John Write?” [1:4, 2:1, 2:26, and 5:13]. What did you learn about God, and yourself?

2. Read the entire letter of 1 John. What about this book is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Pray for boldness, and as you’re led by the Spirit, ask a neighbor about their philosophy of life, and listen with gentleness and respect. When the opportunity arises, share your worldview/philosophy with them, and share the gospel.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don’t force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.