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7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

THE LIVING ROOM SERIES

WHAT LOVE IS

The Letters of 1, 2, 3 John

kelly minter

 LifeWay

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LifeWay Press® Nashville, Tennessee



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

5 MEET THE AUTHOR

6 INTRODUCTION

8 SESSION 1 THE FINEST INGREDIENTS

36 RECIPE: Nonna's Meat Sauce

37 RECIPE: Strawberry Romaine Salad

38 SESSION 2 LIVING FOR WHAT LASTS

64 RECIPE: Black Bean and Chicken Chili

65 RECIPE: Classic Chocolate Chip Cookies

67 SESSION 3 TO REMAIN

94 RECIPE: Big Fat Greek Salad

95 RECIPE: Christmas French Toast

96 SESSION 4 EASTER EVERYDAY

124 RECIPE: Kale, Sausage, and Cannellini Bean Soup

125 RECIPE: Cream Chicken Avocado Enchiladas

127 SESSION 5 EXPERIENCING THE WORD

152 RECIPE: Coconut Chicken

153 RECIPE: Peanut Butter and Biscoff® No Bake Cookies

155 SESSION 6 THIS BEAUTIFUL BRIDE

182 RECIPE: Aunt Elotia's Blueberry Buckle

184 LEADER GUIDE



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MEET THE AUTHOR

KELLY MINTER IS AN AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND SONGWRITER. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT WOMEN DISCOVERING JESUS THROUGH THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE. SO WHETHER IT'S THROUGH STUDY, SONG, OR THE SPOKEN WORD, KELLY'S DESIRE IS TO AUTHENTICALLY EXPRESS CHRIST TO THE WOMEN OF THIS GENERATION. SHE HAS FOUND DEEP HOPE AND HEALING THROUGH THE BIBLE'S TRUTHS, MAKING HER MESSAGE PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL.

No Other Gods, the first installment of The Living Room Series, helps women unveil the false gods in their lives for the ultimate purpose of discovering freedom in the one, true God. *Ruth: Loss, Love & Legacy* follows the redemptive story of Ruth, displaying God's providence and purpose even in the most trying circumstances. *Nehemiah: A Heart That Can Break* is an unforgettable journey into the missional heart of God. All studies are presented in the same Living Room Series format (studies can be done in any order). Kelly also released her first memoir, *Wherever The River Runs: How A Forgotten People Renewed My Hope In The Gospel*, about her life-changing journeys to the Amazon jungle.

Kelly writes extensively and speaks at women's conferences and events around the country. She has her own event called Cultivate: A Women's Gathering Around The Word. This Biblically based and stylistically simple event is for women of all ages. Kelly also partners closely with Justice and Mercy International, an organization that cares for the vulnerable and forgotten in the Amazon and Moldova. Kelly's music includes *Loss, Love & Legacy*, which complements her Ruth study, and the worshipful *Finer Day*. To view more about Kelly's studies, books, music, and calendar, visit www.kellyminter.com.

INTRODUCTION



Out in the countryside of Northern Virginia, fathers smacked baseballs to the horizon and ran around bases, while moms smashed hamburger patties between buns and children tumbled down hills covered in hay. At a summer church picnic, everyone seemed as light as the clouds floating in the sky. Except, I was not floating. Fear had gripped me—something that not even a good roll down the hillside could shake. Paralyzing anxiety characterized parts of my childhood, and today was one of those days. I remember some calming words visiting me, though—words I must have memorized even earlier in my childhood. “Perfect love casts out fear.” The phrase from 1 John 4:18 (NKJV) is my earliest recollection of God speaking to me from John’s epistles. What did this mean, exactly? My 12-year-old brain wasn’t completely sure. But right there in a sprawling field, the Lord began to take His sword to the giant I knew as Fear.

As a child I was often uncertain of my salvation. At night I’d contemplate eternity, comforting myself with more of John’s words, “so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). I’d stare at the ceiling in the hovering dark, reminding myself that John said we could know, but wishing I knew just a little more. Then there were the Sunday School songs we used to sing with graham crackers in our stubby hands, hardly understanding the weight of what we were proclaiming. “Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God” (3:1). Only we’d hold the “weeeeeeeee” out really long, and it always bothered me that I had to sing “sons” when I was clearly a daughter. As I grew older and guilt or doubts would

overwhelm me I'd fall into that glorious phrase, "Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20 ESV). Who could dream up a line like that but John? Who could make it a reality but Jesus?

As life's lures and temptations became more complex and magnetic I heeded words such as, "Do not love the world" (2:15). I didn't know exactly what it meant to not love the world I lived in, but the Bible made it sound pretty serious. I had hoped this didn't include ice cream cones, but one could never be too cautious. Still, these cautions were tempered by unforgettable lines like, "We love because He first loved us" (4:19, HCSB) and "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (4:10). John was laying the foundations of what I would later come to understand as theology.

In real estate terminology, John's letters do not enjoy the benefits of location, location, location. They're small, tucked back by the concordance, somewhere after Paul and before Revelation. While they're often quoted, full of bite-sized nuggets you can grab in a pinch, as a whole they aren't as well known. Furthermore, John's letters can be hard to understand. I've often struggled with him: *Why did you write that? What do you mean? Can you give this to me in layman terms?* Some of his words shake me to the core and in the next breath wash me with comfort. His warnings are fiery and his affirmations fatherly. Though his letters were written in another era, I've found his message squarely for today.

So whether you've come to these books because you already love John, are a fan of the notable verses, or have always wondered what those books near the back were about, I'm wholeheartedly ecstatic for you. Because I'm not sure if any other study has changed me so. John's themes of fellowship, light, assurance, abiding, and love are wonderfully grounding. And if you've ever heard words like *atonement, propitiation, incarnation* and thought they were only for smart, stuffy academics, you'll discover how the meanings of these words have the power to change all of life for us. John's heart is pastoral, his voice pleading. He's the coach who makes you stay after practice to run the bleachers, but only because he sees your potential. And his message couldn't be timelier.

In an age when opinions fly at us unbridled, John gives us the immutable gift of truth. When science and philosophy and your social circles say you can't really know God, John says, yes you can. Dear child, he continues, I've touched Him. Where we've not only settled for living in the gray, but have formed our identity in it, John points us to light and dark—you're walking in one or the other. And perhaps most importantly, at a time when the word *love* means just about anything under the sun, and therefore almost nothing, John tells us "this is what love is..."

And then he shows us Jesus.

Bread & Butter Pickles

2 gal. pickles
3 Handfuls salt
3 qts. vinegar
4 table spoonfuls
seed
2 table spoonfuls cell
seed
7 Cts. sugar
2 qts. vinegar.

Bring to boiling point
mer pickles. Repeat
point Bring to boil
1. 1.0. a per e
3. 4. M.
scald

egg white, beaten
dm of water. Beat until egg white
foam add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vinegar. 2 to
knead
not
knead
the.

SESSION 01

THE FINEST INGREDIENTS

I once took a cooking class with a friend. We decided on an Italian class since *passami l'olio* (pass the olive oil) could be my life's motto in the kitchen. The instructor was an exuberant and portly woman who was big on personality and apparently on calories. I found this made her more believable—no one wants to eat the food of a skinny Italian. Before us lay piles of plum purple eggplants, sweet onions, and garlic, hunks of crusty bread and imported Romano cheese. Among the other delectable beauties were shiny Roma tomatoes, fresh basil leaves, bulbs of fennel, pancetta, ground veal and pork, live clams awaiting their fate on ice. We would be making *zuppa di vongole* (clam soup), *fette di melanzane ripiene* (baked eggplant and provolone), a salad with homemade dressing, and perhaps my all-time favorite, *ziti al ragu della nonna* (better known as pasta with grandma's meat sauce). Just reminiscing about this evening is sending me into a carb frenzy of cheeriness and warmth.

The eight of us went around the room and introduced ourselves, also sharing why we were interested in the class. Everyone pretty much gave the same response, which was some version of wanting to know how to better cook meat sauces and classic pasta dishes. (Except the one single fellow who said that male Italian cooks on television seem like really cool guys and learning to cook Italian might better his chances of meeting someone. So that was interesting.)

We made several dishes that night, paring vegetables, grating cheese, browning meat, making sure all the clams had opened their little shells assuring us they'd actually died while simmering in the sauce and not sometime earlier—this was as pleasant as it sounds. Our instructor frequently encouraged us to taste-test our various sauces as we went, adjusting seasonings and spices until we were delirious. Every spoonful was an eruption of flavors consisting of savory nuances that I couldn't quite pinpoint but that gave me a sense of home. (I know I have ancestors from Italy.)

Every time our chef crinkled the paper off a garlic bulb or diced the flat-leaf parsley, she'd explain the value of fresh herbs, whole imported cheeses, high-quality meats, trying out different onion varieties, using tomatoes from the vine, or at least ones that were canned during their peak (I had this one covered). She introduced new

herbs into my repertoire, like saffron and ground fennel seed. And she explained the difference between pancetta and bacon—pancetta is cured, but not smoked, while bacon is smoked; subtleties that make a difference in your sauce. She minced garlic and shallots like her fingers were ballerinas, tossing them into a swirl of lemon juice, olive oil, and fine vinegar. “Good balsamic vinegar,” she explained, “will be made from must only. Not caramel or vinegar.” I was scribbling as fast as she was talking—that is, when I wasn’t carrying on the all-important task of taste testing.

I was adamant about following her every move, but every time I turned around she was veering from the recipe, adding more of this or less of that, rummaging for ingredients that weren’t even on the list in the first place. “It’s not mentioned on your sheet,” she’d say, “but do you know how good a hint of orange juice is in a red sauce?” Then she’d ask me to peel an orange and squeeze in an unmeasured amount of juice. The chef was killing me! I wanted step-by-step instructions on how to make a meat sauce that would make someone’s Tuscan grandmother proud. I wanted people to cry at my dinner table and embrace one another for long periods of time. I couldn’t accomplish this by having a mere “feel for things,” a phrase she often used. Didn’t she understand that I needed measurements, temperatures, tools, and pretty much for her to live in my pantry? But what I realized at the end of the evening was that she’d given me all I really needed: the ingredients.

When reading through the letters of John, especially 1 John, sometimes I feel like I’m back in that kitchen with a genius chef who doesn’t use recipes. I find myself thinking things like, *Wait ... what exactly do you mean by that?*, or *Could you tell me a little more?*, or *How many tablespoons of love and truth exactly?* But John doesn’t always tell you. His letters are not step-by-step tutorials on how to work out that troubling relationship, what to do with your chronic addiction, how you can beat depression. We won’t get much narrative out of him and sometimes we’ll wish for more explanation. But what we will get are some of the finest ingredients of our faith: love, assurance, fellowship, purification, justification, propitiation, forgiveness, overcoming, knowledge, and so many more.

We’ll find John slipping these tried and true doctrines into the sauce in new ways, or using lesser known ones that add a spice we’ve never before enjoyed. We’ll nourish ourselves at the table of these biblical truths, taking our time with each ingredient. We’ll further understand how the pure extract of the gospel can radically change our lives if we’ll simply taste and see. I can’t wait to begin this exploration with you. I have no idea the sauce we’ll come up with in the end, but I can assure you we’ll use the finest of the gospel’s ingredients. They’re the only kind John cooks with.

VIEWER GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What do you hope to gain from this study and the time spent together?

How do you react to the idea that genuine love has substance and definition?

Which is most difficult for you to grasp or embrace: Jesus' complete humanity or divinity?
Why?

John shares "that which was from the beginning." How does the eternal nature of the gospel ground you in a world that is fleeting and temporary?

In what ways do you struggle in a culture that often communicates that what a person believes doesn't matter, truth is ever-changing, or the gospel is narrow and confining?

How is believing in Jesus a progressive and dynamic process rather than a static past accomplishment?

DAY 1

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Emmett and I sat on the hardwood floor of my parents' home in a pile of puzzle pieces. In keeping with his 4-year-old, red-headed zeal, Emmett jammed together whatever pieces were most convenient to his reach, happy to try one right after the other until two magically pressed together. As his oldest and most experienced aunt, I tried to teach him about corner and flat-edged pieces. I explained in the simplest of terms that if one could identify those corner anchors, then move on to assembling the border, hereby eliminating excess parts to contend with, and finally move on to grouping like pieces by color, imagery, and shape, the puzzle could be solved with ease and expedience (and I could get back to my morning coffee). Emmett looked at me like I was the ruiner of good times; I looked at him like, have you ever had French press?

In most areas of my life I share Emmett's propensity to circumvent pre-work in my excitement, tearing straight into a new project while tossing preparation and directions aside—I so like to get on with things. But when I begin studying a new book of the Bible I have a competing desire to get my bearings, to understand the context of the times, the history of the author. So today I want us to ready ourselves for 1, 2, and 3 John. We'll gather some corner pieces and find the borders of our study. The more we understand about John, the more his heart and message will emerge. While I can't guarantee every space will be filled or every piece will fit perfectly snug at the end of our weeks together, I have no doubt the overall picture will be impossible to miss.

To get a cursory feel for John's life, let's pull some biographical information together.

According to Matthew 4:18-22 who was John's father and who was his brother?

What can you deduce was John's occupation?

According to Matthew 10:1-4, among which prestigious group is John named?

Sometimes I inadvertently split up certain characters of Scripture into several different people depending on what book I'm studying. For instance, I used to have a hard time keeping Mary of Bethany straight. Was she Martha's sister Mary who sat at Jesus' feet in Luke? Mary whose brother Lazarus had died in John? Mary who anointed Jesus' body with perfume in Matthew, Mark, and John? When I finally understood that yes was the answer to all of these I realized I had missed out on understanding the breadth of her story. (I find the number of Marys in the Bible downright challenging.)

I tend to do the same with John. There's John who wrote John's Gospel; John who wrote the letters 1, 2, and 3 John; John who penned Revelation. And, there's John who shows up in all the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) sometimes fishing with Peter and James, or running to the empty tomb, or even arguing about who will be first in the Kingdom. He appears in Acts and is mentioned in Galatians. Who knew these were all the same John?

My point is, when we study books of the Bible it's easy to unwittingly draw circles around each book or story, inadvertently freezing its characters in place. As we study John's epistles, I want us to keep our circles permeable, allowing for John the person—what we know about him from Scripture—to move freely in and out of his letters as we read them. I think we'll get the most from him and his message this way, and we'll keep his humanity more tangibly in mind. I'll help us do this as we go, frequently having us visit other parts of Scripture while offering historical insight. For now, let's grab some corner pieces by looking at a few key moments in John's life from a chronological perspective.

Luke 5:1-11 is one of John's earliest recorded encounters with the Lord. In verse 9, what strong adjective describes John's reaction?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> angry/furious | <input type="checkbox"/> sorry/repentant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed/overcome | <input type="checkbox"/> astonished/amazed |

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Briefly name a time early in your relationship with Christ when Jesus amazed you. Remembrance is a beneficial discipline of our faith, so take time to think back.

Note that John's brother James, one of Jesus' disciples, is different from the James who was Jesus' brother and the writer of the epistle James.

Once we begin our study of John's epistles, these early encounters that John had with Jesus will mean even more to us. We'll discover that the church of John's day (possibly as much as 70 years after Christ's death) was in a crisis of belief because false teachers were undermining the truths of Christ's identity as both God and man. Understanding how closely John walked with Jesus and how deeply he knew Him will give deeper credence to his three letters. It will help us understand why he wrote with such passion and why he vehemently opposed those who opposed the truths about Jesus. John had known Him. Seen Him. Heard Him. Laid his head upon His breast.

Read Mark 5:35-43 and briefly describe the desperate situation into which Jesus was called.

Which disciples did Jesus permit to come with Him?

Peter, _____, and John.

Reread verses 37 and 40 and check the number of people in the room:

five seven eight twelve

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Consider the intimacy and emotion of this experience. How might this have impacted John's faith in Jesus? Briefly record a time when you experienced the Lord's presence in a particularly intimate way.

I don't know of anything more meaningful than when, in the middle of the commotion, God taps us on the shoulder, whispers our name, and welcomes us into the room where He's about to do something special, even secret. Is there a more sacred, more holy place of fellowship than being chosen by Him for a certain work? We tend to think God has invited someone else into the fold, someone nobler, more righteous, more gifted than we are. But Scripture as a whole tells us otherwise. Ephesians 2:8-10 speaks specifically to this.

One of my friends astutely said, "As the channels of social media grow we hear more and more about people doing 'amazing things'. We see how everyone else is leading these 'great lives'. In the Christian realm we feel our faith has to be at a certain level of depth before we can be used or make a difference." Even though the opportunities to draw comparisons

are exponential right now—Facebook, anyone?—remember how the Lord calls each of us to our own unique race, just as He called a fisherman named John. One of the beautiful parts of having a relationship with Jesus is how personal and intimate it is. In John's Gospel we read about another significant encounter John has with Jesus that's as intimate an exchange as anything I can imagine.

What significant responsibility did Jesus entrust to John at the cross? (See John 19:25-27.)

What specifically did John do for Mary?

PERSONAL TAKE: What qualities and characteristics can we surmise John had for Jesus to have asked this sacred task of him?

Now that we've visited John in a few different settings with Jesus before the cross, let's look at a couple of mentions after Jesus' resurrection. We'll do this briefly. In Galatians 2:7-10, the Apostle Paul recounts an experience he had in Jerusalem.

What interesting noun does Paul use to describe James, Peter, and John? (v. 9)

What did John and these men offer Paul?

I don't know why but I've never thought too much about Paul's and John's ministries overlapping. Again, for some reason I had John frozen in the Gospels and Paul in his epistles, forgetting that the two were contemporaries.

Perhaps what's most fascinating to me is that John outlived all the other original twelve disciples, even Paul. When John wrote his epistles, he was the last disciple remaining, something you'll be able to tell from the passion and urgency with which he writes. You'll be able to sense how desperate he is to proclaim and protect the purity of the gospel of Jesus as the last of the original voices of those who knew Him. If you're not yet hooked, look at one last text for today. Read John 20:1-9. Keep in mind how John's experience at the tomb will shape his letters we're about to study. Note that *the disciple Jesus loved/the other disciple* is widely presumed to be John.

When John entered the tomb (v. 8) it says that he saw and
_____.

This word has eluded me at different times in my life. Sometimes my belief is shrouded in doubt, sometimes it's overturned by blatant unbelief, at other times pain and suffering threaten to cut off its oxygen supply. Maybe this is why I love this passage so much.

Certainly John believed in Jesus before stepping into the tomb, but what we gather from the context is that he believed more fully what Jesus had been saying to him all along. This is my prayer for you and for me as we study 1, 2, 3 John—that we might believe! Whether you're a seasoned believer, taking your first steps with Jesus, or without faith at all, I can't wait to journey with you through these letters. As Martin Luther so eloquently said about 1 John: "It can buoy up afflicted hearts."¹ As we go, may we be buoyed both by seeing and believing.

DAY 2

WORD OF LIFE

Settle in. Do your best to put the concerns of the day aside and turn to 1 John. As you read, picture an aged man writing some of his last words to his beloved church. Envision the deep lines etched across John's forehead from his sun-scorching years as a fisherman, a disciple of Jesus, a pastor of the scattered churches at Ephesus. See his tenacious eyes that long to protect his people from the onslaughts of deception—he is the last of the twelve still living and the times are urgent.

For all John's tenacity, don't miss the love, the tenderness he has toward his "dear children," perhaps the same tenderness that prompted Jesus to entrust His mother Mary into John's care. And as you let the opening words of 1 John envelop you, most of all, notice who still remains at the center of this author's heart. Welcome to 1 John.

Read 1 John 1:1-2

Did you notice that John doesn't identify himself? He gives no formal greeting and no indication to whom he's writing. Though this is rare in ancient Hellenistic letters, strong evidence points to John's authorship.

What unique title does John give Jesus in verse 1? The _____ of _____.

My friend Marcie likes to say that every verse in John's epistles is like a drop of perfume, a fragrance that invites you to breathe deep and linger. Given her wisdom, I'm inclined to explore the two words, *word* and *life*, for the rest of the day. But for fear of losing some of you who actually have agendas, we will pause for just a moment.

Turn to John's Gospel and read verses 1:1 and 14 and fill in the blanks. (1) "In the beginning was the _____, and the Word was _____ God and the Word _____ God. (14) The Word became _____ and made his dwelling among us."

PERSONAL TAKE: Why do you think John refers to Jesus as the Word? Give this some thought even if you've never been given a formal explanation.

About John 1:1, A.W. Tozer said: "An intelligent, plain man, untaught in the truths of Christianity, coming upon this text, would likely conclude that John meant to teach that it is *the nature of God* to speak, to communicate His thoughts to others."² (emphasis mine.) The fact that one of Jesus' titles would embody the very essence of communication is one of the most welcoming and astounding of His qualities.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: John begins his letter with the premise that the God he knows is a speaking God. How does this encourage you in a culture that often portrays Him as mysterious, silent, or unapproachable?

The word for *word* is *logos* and can be translated *word* or *reason*. It can even mean *revelation*, since Jesus is the revelation of the Father. *Word* is a beautiful and natural name for our Savior because He literally reveals the Father. Scholars debate whether John is referring to the Word as Jesus

That one of Jesus' titles would embody the very essence of communication is one of the most welcoming and astounding of His qualities.

Himself, or to the word as the life-giving message of Jesus.³ The power of John's meaning is not lost either way. In many respects both the message and the person are the same, "For the life-giving word of the gospel is essentially a proclamation about Jesus who is the living Word of God."⁴ Sometimes I have to remind myself how much God wants to be known.

As you noted earlier, in 1 John 1:1 John refers to Jesus not only as the Word, but also as the Word of Life. The word *life* is a favorite of John's. His writings are responsible for including 66 of the 139 mentions of the word in the New Testament—almost half, for all you math wizards.⁵

In the Gospel of John 1:2-4 and 5:26, what important preposition is used to describe Jesus' relationship to life?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life is with Him. | <input type="checkbox"/> Life is before Him. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life is beside Him. | <input type="checkbox"/> Life is in Him. |

To put an even more personal touch on this, flip over to the Gospel of John 11 and ponder verse 25. This is Jesus speaking to Martha after her brother Lazarus had died. Who does Jesus tell Martha He is? I am the _____ and the _____.

My sister Megan and I talked on the phone last night about a long and hard situation that doesn't seem to be changing. We've prayed for God to do something, but Megan reminded me that when we can't see what He's doing, healing comes from remembering who He is. When Jesus met Martha in her hour of devastation and grief, He didn't tell her what He could do, rather He told her who He is—life itself.

First John 1:1 is the only time in the Bible the title *Word of life* is used. Consider all the options John could have plausibly written to describe Jesus in his opening verse: Word of love, Word of truth, Word of hope, Word of peace, Word of power. But He calls Jesus the Word of life, and this means something special to me.

I know that some women reading these verses right now are barely making it. Real women going through real suffering—women in hard marriages, women in hard singleness, women weighed down by shame or heartbreak or addiction, women desperately afraid that life may never change, women going through the motions who might describe themselves as lifeless. And here—in the opening verse—John describes Jesus as the Word of life. Dear reader, this is as grand an opening as we could hope for.

PERSONAL REFLECTION PART 1: Do you currently feel lifeless in any areas of your life? (Marriage, work, personal relationships, relationship with God, parenting, outlook, etc.) Don't worry about what you should say, just let your pen flow.

PERSONAL REFLECTION PART 2: Write a prayer asking Jesus to breathe His life into your situation. He has the ability to take what is barely breathing and revive it to wholeness. He can take what is dead and raise it to life, because He is the resurrection and the life.

What specific action did this "life" take in 1 John 1:2?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> vanished/disappeared | <input type="checkbox"/> changed/was transformed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> appeared/was revealed | <input type="checkbox"/> hid/was covered |

What John is declaring here is the great doctrinal truth of the incarnation. Though this term is not actually found in Scripture, it describes a scriptural anchor of our faith: God came to us in human flesh. Or more precisely, the incarnation is "The act of God the Son whereby he took to himself a human nature."⁶ John is declaring that the Deity, the one true God has come in the form of human flesh; He has appeared to us.

Your translations may use the word *manifested* or *revealed*. As we continue our study we will see why John makes such a point of establishing this important doctrine of God coming in flesh right at the top. But for now, take a moment to appreciate what it means for the Word of life to have appeared on this earth.

Near the end of verse 2, John throws out an additional adjective to further describe this revealed life. What is it?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> hopeful | <input type="checkbox"/> eternal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> temporary | <input type="checkbox"/> fleeting |

How does Jesus describe this life in the Gospel of John 17:1-3?

The life that Jesus came to bring is so much more than simply living. But I wonder how much we really believe this? I still have moments when I feel like I've somehow missed the last train out of the town of Survival, watching all the happy people waving out the windows on their way to a honeymoon, the career path I've always dreamed of, an awards ceremony, to meet their first grandchild, or to the mall with money in their wallets. I think we sometimes consider having life in terms of physical, sensual, and emotional pleasure, and when we don't get it or can't have it we get angry or resign ourselves to a life of scraping by. We think God has failed us, or life is for all those other people on the train. John is going to plead with us to the contrary!

We tend to think of life in terms of what can be added to us, but one of the characteristics of having eternal life is the removal of something.

Read the Gospel of John 5:24-26, verse 24 says we will not be

_____.

The Jews of Jesus' day thought that they could have eternal life by doing what (see John 5:39-40)?

Instead, what did Jesus say they needed to do to have life?

In John 10:7-10, what kind of life does Jesus say He came to bring?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> abundant | <input type="checkbox"/> comfortable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> spiritual | <input type="checkbox"/> burdensome |

When I read about the Word of life in 1 John 1:1, I can't think of anything more hopeful than this reality—life is a Person. Life is not a career path or an attentive husband or a new home; it's not enlightenment or nirvana or a religious experience; it's not a degree or a philosophy. Life is Jesus, and anyone who comes to Him may have Him and all He offers. My prayer is that Jesus as the Word of life, the very expression of life, will pierce the reality you're living in, awaking your heart and soul to abundant living in Him. Jesus makes this possible.

DAY 3

WITH US

I might as well go ahead and get this out there: I've decided there's just no way to zip through 1, 2, and 3 John. They're not zipping kinds of reads. But taking our time doesn't mean slow as much as it means deep. Perhaps we can think of ourselves as scuba divers swimming down, as opposed to freestylers swimming across. We're going to cover depth as opposed to breadth. Or, if you prefer Marcie's perfume analogy, we'll allow ourselves the pleasure of time while smelling the individual scents throughout John's epistles. I find it helps if we can get ourselves into this kind of mindset, making it easier when I say: turn to 1 John and read verses 1-2—the same verses you read yesterday. (Remember the scuba diver. Or the perfume.)

In what sensory ways did John have contact with Jesus (v. 1)?

- touched Him smelled Him heard Him
 knew Him saw Him

You may have noticed that instead of using the word *I*, John uses *we*, referring to those in Jesus' inner circle. John uses the *we* to establish the weight of his message, because he's not merely out to tell a story, he's "virtually swearing a deposition."⁷ John said that he had heard Jesus, seen Him with his own eyes, touched Him with his hands, all serving as significant support for what he's about to proclaim about the Savior.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Out of the three sensory interactions John had with Jesus, which would mean the most to you at this place in your life. To see Him? Touch Him? Hear Him? (I realize some of these naturally overlap but don't get too technical.)

John's personal interaction with Jesus certainly affected the force and passion of his letter, but there's more to his emphatic proclamation of Jesus' physical and historical presence than what we catch on the surface. At the time of John's writing, approximately A.D. 90, the first seedlings of a heretical belief system known as gnosticism were germinating beneath the soil of the church's foundational teaching. We'll talk more about this as we go, but for now it's important to know

Docetism: the belief that Jesus only seemed to be human.

that the gnostics (or pre-gnostics in John's time) recoiled at the idea of a Savior who took on bodily form. Since they viewed the body as inherently evil, the notion of a supreme god taking on human flesh was an inconceivable, even disgraceful, thought. This eventually led to docetism, which is the belief that Jesus only seemed to be human.⁸

John, on the other hand, celebrated the very thing the gnostics abhorred—the physical nature of a Savior whose face could be beheld with human eyes, whose voice could be known in a crowd, and whose breast could be leaned upon.

Read 1 John 1:3-4. According to verse 3, why did John proclaim what he'd seen and heard about Jesus?

Quick Review: What is docetism?

Women have often expressed to me their loneliness. Wives, single women, mothers, businesswomen all feel like outsiders or that no one really knows them. Having children or grandchildren doesn't seem to be the remedy; neither does being married, or not, because loneliness is pervasive even for the people who supposedly have it all.

I have felt desperately lonely at times, perhaps causing John's words "so that you also may have fellowship with us" to be especially meaningful. Do you hear the call of community? At the core of John's writing we find an invitation for togetherness. Perhaps you've never considered how fundamental community is to the core of the Christian faith. Studying 1 John 1:3-4 has revitalized my own understanding of this.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: What obstacles keep you from having honest and regular fellowship? (For example: insecurities, fears, forms of busyness, bitterness that keeps you removed.)

You may have heard the Greek word for fellowship—*koinonia*. The word means *having in common*,⁹ *joint ownership*, or *partnership*.¹⁰ That John invited his readers to share in the richness of his community is beautiful, but he takes this fellowship an astounding step further.

With whom else did John invite us to share fellowship? "with the Father and with his Son, _____."

At the core of John's writing we find an invitation for togetherness.

You may think John’s invitation for his readers to fellowship with the Father and His Son was specific to that period of history. But read what Jesus prayed for all who would come to believe in Him in John 17:20-23.

PERSONAL TAKE: Jesus prayed that the church would be brought together in complete unity. He also prayed that we would dwell in the Father and in the Son so that the world would know God had sent Jesus. How does our fellowship with other believers and with Jesus serve as an inviting testimony to those who have yet to believe?

A good friend working through this study admitted how hard it can be for her to come out of her shell. “It took all of my being every week to come to Bible study,” she said, “but after every time I felt refueled and encouraged.” Sometimes it’s hard for me to get out of my house for a dinner or coffee, much more a Bible study. As much as we say we long for community we often don’t have it because we’re afraid, have put up walls, or are holding grudges. This not only isolates our hearts, but others miss out on the uniqueness of what only we can bring.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: If you’re retreating from fellowship, can you pinpoint any areas of selfishness?

When I read 1 John 1:3-4, I can sense John’s passion escaping through his repeated and expressive word choices like *testify* and *proclaim*, all for the purpose of extending the hand of fellowship so that not one of his readers—not one of us—would ever have to be alone! I can almost hear his voice through his pen: You’re invited. Join the community. You can be part of the team. Come be with us.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Briefly write about a memorable time of fellowship. What did you talk about? Who specifically encouraged you? How was Christ central to the occasion?

Perhaps the most pronounced picture of fellowship I’ve experienced is when I’m in the Amazon region of Brazil at Justice and Mercy Amazon’s Annual Jungle Pastors’ Conference. I share the deepest bond with these

“I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in Me through their message. May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me. I have given them the glory You have given Me. May they be one as We are one. I am in them and You are in Me. May they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.
John 17:20-23 HCSB

PERSONAL TAKE: What about John's invitation to fellowship means the most to you and why?

pastors and their wives, which is surprising because we're from vastly different backgrounds and cultures, having virtually nothing in common but Jesus. When they tell me their stories of Jesus meeting them in hardship I cry. When they deliver a report about a child being healed my heart swells, and when I ask them for prayer they enter in on my behalf. Their spirits lift my own and my spirit theirs. We share so little in common, yet we share everything, because we share Christ.

We might expect John to say he was proclaiming his message so his readers could have salvation or eternal life or forgiveness of sins. But John offers us community! "Properly understood, this is the meaning of salvation in its widest embrace, including reconciliation to God in Christ ... and incorporation in the church."¹¹ John gives two foundational reasons for writing. The first we've already established: so that we can have fellowship with the community of believers and with Jesus.

What second reason does John give in verse 4?

The absolute, irrevocable result of fellowship is joy. So why are so many of us dragging ourselves to church or Bible study? Why are we bored with religion? Why would we rather do anything than stand around a crusty tin of lasagna making small talk with church people?

Many factors contribute, but one is we've stopped being real with one another. Recently when I ran into a friend and asked the normal "How are you?" She gave me an honest response. She told me she'd just had a really hard conversation with her husband and how painful it was and how God was working in their marriage. Can I tell you that this was the most refreshing 25 minutes of my weekend? A fellow believer was honest with me, which helped me be honest with her. As a result I believe we had fellowship. You'd go to church for this, I promise.

We forget that the Christian life is about our fellowship with a living Person, Jesus. When He's active in our lives and in the lives of others we'll have endless things to talk, dream, and pray about. We'll have fellowship, and fellowship will lead to joy. No fleeting pleasure compares to the joy that comes from fellowship—even fellowship in the midst of suffering. When Jesus is in our midst and we're joined together with Him and with one another, the common bond of our Savior ignites heart-bursting joy. And for this joy, John is writing. Stepping back a moment, let's see how John's perspective on fellowship and its accompanying joy may have changed over the years. Take a look at Mark 9:38-41.

Why did John tell the man who was driving out demons to stop?

- He was not one of the disciples' own.
- He was cursing while he cast out demons.
- He belonged to a different denomination.
- He was wearing a toupee.

PERSONAL TAKE: Reflect on John's exclusive attitude in Mark's Gospel versus his passionate invitation in 1 John 1:3. How has his perspective significantly changed?

If our fellowship with the Lord and other believers is stale we'll tend to become judgmental, draw harsh lines, or go the opposite way and dismiss the need for fellowship altogether. But if we're communing with the Lord on a regular basis, we won't be able to help our desire to invite others into the community of believers. While I want us to be deeply grateful for our invitation into the fellowship of believers, I want us to be equally passionate about inviting others into that fellowship.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: If you are lacking joy, push outside of yourself and ask a coworker who needs you to coffee, invite someone to church who might not normally go, take a few friends and pray over someone who's sick. Write down one tangible way you can extend the hand of fellowship to someone else.

With the advent of social media and the Internet we're in danger of replacing fellowship for something that is merely a shadow of the real thing. We can download a sermon instead of sitting next to someone on a Sunday morning, we can email a prayer instead of physically enfolding another hand in our own, tweets and posts can be our manna instead of communing with God in His Word. Let's push out of our private worlds and embrace the very gift John gives us as his reason for writing: the glory of fellowship.

PERSONAL TAKE: John's physical and tangible experiences with Jesus are vital to the premise of his letter for several reasons. Based on your understanding of the first three verses, why do you think John felt it important to stress that he and the apostles had encountered Jesus so closely? Respond in the margin.

Throughout the study, I'll highlight several theological truths in the margin notated by a picture of an ingredient. Whenever you see one of these ingredients, turn to page 181 and handwrite the theological truth next to its corresponding picture. By the study's end you will have completed a list of biblical "ingredients" foundational to the Christian faith.



God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)

DAY 4

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Today I'm going to encourage you to read 1 John 1:5-7 and then get your thoughts down before I start sharing any of my own. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself to you as you read, remembering that whatever the Spirit reveals to you directly through His Word will be more powerful than anything another person can offer. Also, I want you to read these verses three times through, briefly recording something different that stood out to you after each reading.

First Reading:

Second Reading:

Third Reading:

What new central word has emerged?

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> love | <input type="checkbox"/> light |
| <input type="checkbox"/> life | <input type="checkbox"/> lord |

While John doesn't explicitly say what walking in the darkness means here, he implies something: When we claim to have fellowship with God yet walk in darkness, we do not live by the _____.

According to John, why is it impossible to have fellowship with God while walking in darkness? Explain his logic.

In summary, John has proclaimed the Word of life, which has been from the very beginning and has also appeared in the flesh. John proclaims to us this person, this Savior, whom he's heard, seen, and touched so that we can have fellowship with Him and with one another. And this fellowship leads to joy. But there's more—in verse 5 we discover a message Jesus taught, and John is now proclaiming. Some argue that the rest of the book hangs from this message.

What is the message? God is _____; in Him is no _____.

PERSONAL TAKE: What do you love most about each side of this coin or double truth?

- God is light ...

- no darkness is in Him ...

This means so much more than we can possibly cover in a day's study or even a lifetime. But one reality that really blesses me as a result of God being both light and without darkness is that He has nothing to hide. We can trust Him. "God doesn't have any dark folds in His cloak."¹² So often we're waiting for the other shoe to drop, the hammer to fall. We believe the lie that God is somehow holding out on us. If only we could crack the code we'd finally be accepted and gain His blessing. But we're not dealing with a duplicitous God on the run. We're dealing with Light. He's revealed Himself. Laid Himself bare in the open and in a light so clean and bright only His holiness could withstand it. And He's not just in the light, He is the light.

Re-read verses 6-7. According to those verses ...

What is impossible?

What is possible?

The fixed rule of God being light serves as the basis for John's argument: A person can't have fellowship with a God who is light while walking in darkness. The way John writes sometimes reminds me of those dreaded word problems from Algebra class: If a bus leaves New York at 6:32 a.m. and is traveling at 53 MPH, and a train leaves Chicago at 9:51 a.m. and is traveling at 91 MPH, how many people on the bus from New York are wearing hats? (At least this is how I remember these things going.)

John's reasoning is a little more straightforward: If God is light and there is no darkness in light, you can't say you have fellowship with God while living in darkness. It's a pretty simple formula. A simple formula I have complicated and clouded over the years in an attempt to justify my choices and behavior that were contrary to God's light. It's amazing how easy it is to reason away something so plain. One of my friends brilliantly put it this way, "For a time I really wanted to live in the dark so I tried to make the dark work for me."

Note: John opens this section with "This is the message we have heard from Him [Jesus]." The word *message* in the Greek is *angelia* and is only used two times in the New Testament, once here and the other in 1 John 3:11. The message is what John and the apostles had received directly from Jesus and he passes that message on, beginning with the statement that God is light. Interestingly, there is no quote of Jesus' in the Gospels where He says that God is light in exactly those terms.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Briefly describe a situation where you tried to make living in the darkness “work for you.” Did you simultaneously try to convince yourself you were staying close to God? What were the results?

Light is a prominent concept in both the Old and New Testaments, a visible reality written about and also a metaphor used to describe a spiritual reality. One of my favorite ways to better understand the biblical meaning of a word is to look at its usages in other places in Scripture.

Read the following Old Testament passages and answer the corresponding questions, keeping today’s text in mind.

Genesis 1:3-4: What did God separate from the light, and how might this separation relate to John’s statement in verse 6?

Exodus 13:20-22: What did God’s gift of fire allow the Israelites to do beyond being able to see?

2 Samuel 22:29: What does David call the Lord in his prayer and why?

The passages in Exodus and Samuel remind me of a wonderful insight by the late beloved pastor John Stott, “The effect of the light is not just to make people see, but to enable them to walk.”¹³ I love being able to move in life, both physically and spiritually. But how often I’ve relied on my legs to carry me and my eyes to lead me, all the while taking for granted the light that allows me to know where I’m going in the first place.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Can you think of a time when choosing a path of darkness literally obscured your ability to see where you were going in life?

When you read verse 6, one of two things may have happened: 1) A sin you've struggled with or are currently struggling with may have come to mind. The result may be a sinking sensation leaving you wondering if you really love God or if you're just another deceived casualty who can't actually live life by the truth. Or, 2) you may have immediately thought of someone who claims to love God but who's materialistic, in an immoral relationship, drinks too much, doesn't believe Jesus is the only way to salvation, watches trashy television, or fill in your blank.

Let's address these in order. Without softening what John is saying in these verses, we need to remember the false teaching that had crept into the church at the time. We will continue to gather from John's writings and historical references that certain people who were claiming to have fellowship with God were living in a way contrary to their claim. For the protection of the believers, John clearly addressed this by stating that if someone was claiming to have fellowship (be in partnership, participate) with God, then his or her life would naturally demonstrate that. So while the statement is a truth for all of us, part of John's reason for writing was to alert the believers about these false teachers.

In addition, note John's use of the words *walking in darkness*. This can be translated as *living habitually in darkness*. The phrase "implies determination to choose sin (darkness) rather than God (light) as one's constant sphere of existence."¹⁴ So, if after reading verse 6, you are burdened by a certain sin, something that is affecting your fellowship and communion with God, this is conviction. Conviction is the Holy Spirit working in you and should be heeded. He ultimately leads you to confession and repentance. But experiencing conviction is different than having no remorse or concern for your behavior, claiming to know God while living contrary to His nature. The people John is writing about were walking, living in, and even enjoying, the darkness.

On the flip side, if your mind immediately raced to someone who claims to love God but who seems to be living in opposition to His Word and nature I will ask you a few questions I always have to ask myself. (Keep in mind it's easy to get bent out of shape by someone else's walking in darkness while we are doing the same thing in another area.)

1. How would you best describe your heart toward this person?
Strike a dash along the line.

self-righteous and judgmental genuinely aching and concerned

2. Do you care more about being right than about the person you're concerned for? Are you trying to guard your stance on an issue, hang on to control of a relationship, safeguard your position? Or, are you truly motivated by a heart that longs to see this person free of sin, walking in the light? Write your thoughts in the margin.

3. Are you close enough to the person to gently and lovingly talk to him or her (see Gal. 6:1)? If so, would you pray about doing so?

PERSONAL RESPONSE OPTION 1: If you find yourself convicted over sins you're practicing in the darkness—secret sins you have to cover up from people who are “walking in the light,” would you take time to write a prayer of confession to the Lord while also taking steps to walk in freedom and light? This may be the most important moment for you in this study.

PERSONAL RESPONSE OPTION 2: If you have a friend or acquaintance who claims to love God but who's living a habitual life in the darkness, write out a prayer for him or her, not mentioning any specific names.



The blood
of Jesus purifies
us from all sin
(1 John 1:7)

I can't let you go without another look at the benefits of verse 7. What two gifts of grace come with walking in the light?

Have you ever felt guilt so heavy it threatened to sink you, shame so attached to your being you thought you could never be rid of its disgrace? Maybe you live with a regret that never ceases haunting you. If so, I'm not sure if a more beautiful, more relieving word could greet us than the word *cleanse* or *purify*. Our total cleansing is only possible because of the blood of Jesus given for us at the cross. Reflect on this gift. As you ponder what this means in your life, let me leave you once again with John Stott's insightful words, “The verb [purifies] suggests that God does more than forgive; he erases the stain of sin.”¹⁵ Could a more glorious truth lead us today, tomorrow, and forevermore?

DAY 5

THE THINGS WE SAY

My brother, his wife and two young children have moved to Nashville—please insert all the aunt excitement you can possibly imagine. They arrived during the fortunate months of football season where I can be readily found in the kitchen stirring soups and chilis, happily refilling endless bowls of chips and salsa that could keep Mexico hopping for decades.

Having 3-year-old Will scamper around the living room with both arms barely reaching around his football, pleading “tackle me, tackle me,” is an anchor I had no idea I was missing. And then there was the evening he arrived with his new doctor’s kit full of all manner of plastic tools, doling out shots and listening intently for pulses. At one point when I went to tackle him—because this had been such a fun activity two days earlier—Will halted me with his hand. “No, don’t tackle me,” he said, “I’m a doctor!” Oh, the beauty of being three. You can wake up a soldier, a firefighter, a chef, a drummer, whatever suits your fancy. This works well when you’re a toddler but is not as effective when you’re twenty-four and applying for a job.

Still, as much as we may grow out of certain ways of thinking, I think we all wish to some degree we could snap our fingers and simply decide what we want to be true, or not true, about ourselves. According to today’s reading, believing whatever you want to believe about yourself was an issue during the John’s day as well. Like today, it led to all sorts of wrong conclusions. People were claiming certain ideas about their natures, while John was pointing to the immutable truths about us. We’ll see how this is still happening today.

Read 1 John 1:5-10 (including re-reading your text from yesterday). John uses the statement “If we say” (or “If we claim”) three times in these verses. Fill in the statements below:

Verse 6: If we say/claim _____

yet we _____

we _____

Conviction is the Holy Spirit working in you and should be heeded.

Verse 8: If we say/claim _____

we _____

and the _____

Verse 10: If we say/claim _____

we make _____

and _____

PERSONAL TAKE: How would you describe the difference between being without sin and not sinning? The difference is subtle but do your best.

Choose one of the aforementioned mentalities and write about how we see this belief cropping up in current culture.

Recently a friend was explaining his belief system to me, a worldview that does not include the idea of sin. When I asked him how he accounted for the horrible things that go on in the world, such as murder, abuse, theft, child abandonment, he said that these were a result of ignorance; we don't do bad things because we're sinners but because we're ignorant of God's love. He continued to explain that as we go on in life (even in future lives) our ignorance will eventually mature into enlightenment and we won't want to do these things anymore.

My friend's perspective may represent an extreme end of the spectrum, but whether we are talking about being people who don't sin (closely related: we minimize sin), or inherently being without sin (closely related: we're basically innocent), these ideas are widely adopted. All we have to do is tune into anything pop culture to see people justifying sin or flat-out denying its existence. Because we're so indoctrinated with culture's viewpoint of sin—myself included—let's get specific here so we can see where we may be being deceived.

An example of claiming to be without sin altogether might look like this: "I did some things in my life that maybe weren't the smartest, but we're all basically innocent. I've always tried to love people and my heart is good." This would be to deny the biblical reality of original sin, that we are born into a stream of humanity that is fallen and sinful. (And still very much loved, but this comes in a moment.) While not popular in modern culture, it is biblical to own the sinfulness of our human hearts apart from Jesus.

An example of claiming to not sin might look like this: "I don't feel bad about having an affair on my husband because I'm not in love with him anymore." This is a situation where a person recognizes that sin exists, but explains away her specific sin. She justifies it, rationalizes it, buys a self-help book that excuses it, or sweeps it under the rug.

When I taught through the book of 1 John in my home, one of my dear friends would occasionally cross her eyes and tilt her head back while I was teaching. It was her way of telling me that she was starting to get lost in all the John-isms of "if-this... then-that" and that I should insert a funny story if I wanted one single soul to return the following week. I will admit that John's writings are dense and sometimes difficult to assimilate. So if you're in any way trying to make sense of the three claims, how about the simplicity of one scholar's insight: All three of these claims "are really variations on a single theme: 'sin does not affect me.'"¹⁶ There it is. Sin does not affect me. It's the crux of the three claims and a thousand more. This mentality is what has broken God's heart, destroyed relationships, and wounded our own souls.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Ask the Lord to show you any sin in your life that you believe doesn't affect you. We desperately need Him to shine a light on these areas. Our very communion with God and with others is at stake.

Now let's look at the effects of believing the three claims you've already listed. I've filled in some for you.

Verse 6: We lie and _____

Verse 8: We _____ and the truth is not in us

Verse 10: We make God a liar and His _____ is not in us.

- 1) Some said they knew God but walked in ways contrary to God's nature.
- 2) Some said they were without sin.
- 3) Some recognized sin in the world but believed they had not sinned.

John's words are strong, but we have to keep in mind the context in which he was writing. The ideas of false teachers had infiltrated the purity of the Gospel John and the other apostles preached. At a minimum three false claims were floating around: 1) some said they knew God but walked in ways contrary to God's nature, 2) some said they were without sin, and 3) some recognized sin in the world but believed they had not sinned.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Of the three claims in the margin, which is most difficult for you to handle in society? Why?

The most difficult one for me is the claim to love God while disregarding what the whole of Scripture says about a certain matter or behavior. I know, these are not the three topics of discussion you're anxious to bring up at your next dinner party—I actually tried it recently. But as we move toward the more hopeful side of these verses, keep John's heart in mind. Don't forget his passion. Or even his age. John was at the end of his years, he'd lived a lot of life, seen the death of Jesus, touched Him after His resurrection, taken Jesus' mother into his home, pastored the first generation of believers. At this point, and with so much at stake, John's not about to get fuzzy or soft on his readers. But here's the treasure: As emphatically as John talks about the dangers of walking in darkness or denying sin, he equally proclaims the gifts and graces of walking in the light. If 1 John had a list of celebrity verses, verse 9 would be one of them:

"If we confess our sins, he is _____ and _____ and will forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

PERSONAL TAKE: Why do you think John used these particular two words in relation to God's forgiveness toward us?



When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)

The confession John is talking about is not only agreeing with God that we have sinned, but also expressing a desire to turn away from that sin, to make a plan not to return to it. This doesn't mean we'll never sin again—John will address this shortly—but our heart's attitude should not look for a bit of forgiveness just to vindicate us so we can get back to the sin we were enjoying before we confessed it.

Proverbs 28:13 gives us a good picture of this. What additional action is mentioned? Confession and...

- fasting
- forgetting
- renouncing
- feeling really, really bad

Now I want to circle back to John's use of the words *faithful* and *righteous* (some translations say *just*) in relation to His forgiving us. Earlier I asked you to comment on why you think John used these two words. I'd love to know your thoughts because they're not necessarily words you'd put together. When I think of what it feels like to have sinned, coming before someone who is faithful is a comforting thought, but standing before someone who's looking to mete out justice can be a terrifying idea.

When we sin, we don't really want justice because "Justice is associated in our minds with punishment or acquittal, not with forgiveness."¹⁷ But herein lies the beautiful gift of Christ. Though God does require that justice be served for our sins, Christ's death and resurrection has satisfied those requirements. Because of Jesus, God can remain faithful to His covenant toward us, offering forgiveness toward those who seek Him.

Here's the best part—we can walk in the light. In the light with God and in the light with others. No more hiding, covering up, shirking, or manipulating. We receive a new quality of life and its most impressive characteristic is that it's a life lived in the light.

We've looked at some dense material this week, but my prayer is that, together, we're closing the week more hopeful. The more time I spend with John, the more he reminds me of an elderly grandfather who's seen enough of life to have little use for a filter; he tells it like it is. In a world of howling opinions and shifting sands, I'm grateful and relieved we can exhale at the unshakable thought of clinging to "That which we have heard from the beginning." The Word of Life.

With so much at stake, John's not about to get fuzzy or soft on his readers.

PERSONAL RESPONSE:
When it comes to forgiveness of sins, which word—*faithful*, or *righteous*—means the most to you and why?

NONNA'S MEAT SAUCE

FROM THE KITCHEN OF NONNA

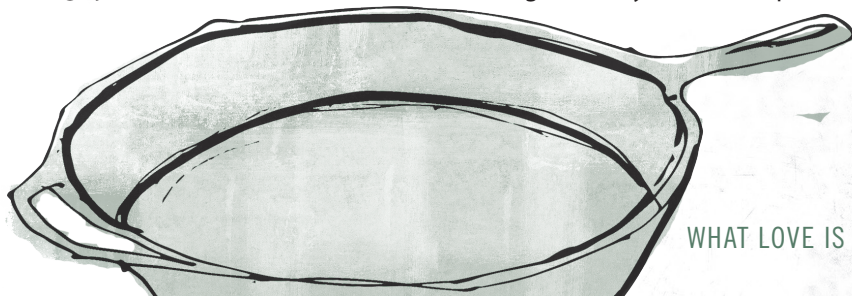
You'll love this pasta sauce recipe for its flavor. I think the ground fennel seed and pancetta are what make the noticeable difference, but you don't have to actually tell people this. Again, just resort to the phrase, this old recipe? It was nothing. Really. Serve with warm bread and a crisp salad.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium yellow or white onion, finely chopped (*about 1 cup*)
- 4 cloves of garlic
- 2 stalks celery, finely chopped (*about 3/4 cup*)
- 1 small carrot, peeled and finely chopped (*about 1/2 cup*)
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground fennel seed (*I like to grind my own seeds for an extra fresh flavor*)
- 1/2 pound ground beef (*or veal*)
- 1/2 pound ground pork
- 2 ounces pancetta, finely chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup dry white wine, good quality
- 2 (*15 ounce*) cans of plum tomatoes with juice
- 3 tablespoons orange juice

DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat a large sauce pan or Dutch oven over medium heat.
2. Add the oil and two tablespoons of butter until melted.
3. Add the onion, garlic, celery, and carrot and lightly sauté, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are soft, but not brown, about 15 minutes.
4. Add the fennel seed and cook until fragrant, about 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Add the ground beef, pork, and pancetta and a pinch of salt. Break up the meat while cooking, until the meat is no longer pink, but not overdone, about 10 minutes.
6. Add the wine and simmer until it has reduced completely.
7. Add the tomatoes and their juices, along with the orange juice, reduce the heat to very low and barely simmer, stirring occasionally, about 30 minutes.
8. Right before serving, and after you've taken the sauce off the burner, add the remaining tablespoon of butter and allow to melt into the sauce.
9. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve over rigatoni, or your favorite pasta.



STRAWBERRY ROMAINE SALAD

FROM THE KITCHEN OF MY MOM

DRESSING

- 1 cup oil
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/4-1/2 cup sugar to your preference
- 2 minced cloves garlic
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp paprika (don't leave this out)
- 1/4 tsp white pepper
- Mix in blender and chill

SALAD:

- 1 large head romaine, chopped.
- 1 head of Boston lettuce or another similar type.
- 1 pint of sliced strawberries
- 1 cup finely shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 1/2 cup toasted chopped walnuts
- Toss salad in dressing and serve.

If you want to mix up the flavor a bit, you can use a little sesame oil, add chopped water chestnuts for crunch, and/or add in some fresh ginger.

