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ABIDE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jen Wilkin is an author and Bible teacher from Dallas, Texas. She has organized and led studies for women in home, church, and parachurch contexts. Her passion is to see others become articulate and committed followers of Christ, with a clear understanding of why they believe what they believe, grounded in the Word of God. Jen is the author of *Ten Words to Live By: Delighting in and Doing What God Commands*, *Women of the Word*, *None Like Him*, *In His Image*, and Bible studies exploring the Sermon on the Mount and the books of Genesis, Exodus, Hebrews, and 1 Peter. You can find her at jenwilkin.net.

FOREWORD: HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD'S WORD?

OUR PURPOSE

The Bible study you are about to begin will teach you an important passage of the Bible in a way that will stay with you for years to come. It will challenge you to move beyond loving God with just your heart to loving Him with your mind. It will focus on answering the question, “What does the Bible say about God?” It will aid you in the worthy task of God-discovery.

You see, the Bible is not a book about self-discovery; it is a book about God-discovery. The Bible is God's declared intent to make Himself known to us. In learning about the character of God in Scripture, we *will* experience self-discovery, but it must not be the object of our study. The object must be God Himself.

This focus changes the way we study. We look first for what a passage can teach us about the character of God, allowing self-discovery to be the by-product of God-discovery. This is a much better approach because there can be no true knowledge of self apart from knowledge of God. So when I read the account of Jonah, I see first that God is just and faithful to His Word—He is faithful to proclaim His message to Nineveh no matter what. I see second that I, by contrast (and much like Jonah), am unjust to my fellow man and unfaithful to God's Word. Thus, knowledge of God leads to true knowledge of self, which leads to repentance and transformation. So are confirmed Paul's words in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Most of us are good at loving God with our hearts. We are good at employing our emotions in our pursuit of God. But the God who commands us to love with the totality of our hearts, souls, and strength also commands us to love Him with all of our minds. Because He only commands what He also enables His children to do, it must be possible for us to love Him well with our minds or He would not command it. I know you will bring your emotions to your study of God's Word, and that is good and right. But it is your mind I am jealous for. God intends for you to be a good student, renewing your mind and thus transforming your heart.

OUR PROCESS

Being a good student entails following good study habits. When we sit down to read, most of us like to read through a particular passage and then find a way to apply it to our everyday lives. We may read through an entire book of the Bible over a period of time, or we may jump around from place to place. I want to suggest a different approach, one that may not always yield immediate application, comfort, or peace, but one that builds over time a cumulative understanding of the message of Scripture.

READING IN CONTEXT AND REPETITIVELY

Imagine yourself receiving a letter in the mail. The envelope is handwritten, but you don't glance at the return address. Instead you tear open the envelope, flip to the second page, read two paragraphs near the bottom, and set the letter aside. Knowing that if someone bothered to send it to you, you should act on its contents in some way, you spend a few minutes trying to figure out how to respond to what the section you just read had to say. What are the odds you will be successful?

No one would read a letter this way. But this is precisely the way many of us read our Bibles. We skip past reading the “envelope”—*Who wrote this? To whom was it written? When was it written? Where was it written?*—and then try to determine the purpose of its contents from a portion of the whole. What if we took time to read the envelope? What if, after determining the context for its writing, we started at the beginning and read to the end? Wouldn't that make infinitely more sense?

In our study, we will take this approach to Scripture. We will begin by placing our text in its historical and cultural context. We will “read the envelope.” Then we will read through the entire text so that we can better determine what it wants to say to us. We will read repetitively so that we might move through three critical stages of understanding: comprehension, interpretation, and application.

STAGE 1: COMPREHENSION

Remember the reading comprehension section on the SAT? Remember those long reading passages followed by questions to test your knowledge of what you had just read? The objective was to force you to read for detail. We are going to apply the same method to our study of God's Word. When we read for comprehension, we ask ourselves, *What does it say?* This is hard work. A person who *comprehends* the account of the six days of creation can tell you specifically what happened on each day. This is the first step toward being able to interpret and apply the story of creation to our lives.

STAGE 2: INTERPRETATION

While comprehension asks, *What does it say?*, interpretation asks, *What does it mean?* Once we have read a passage enough times to know what it says, we are ready to look into its meaning. A person who *interprets* the creation story can tell you why God created in a particular order or way. She is able to imply things from the text beyond what it says.

STAGE 3: APPLICATION

After doing the work to understand what the text says and what the text means, we are finally ready to ask, *How should it change me?* Here is where we draw on our God-centered perspective to ask three supporting questions:

- *What does this passage teach me about God?*
- *How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self?*
- *What should I do in response?*

A person who *applies* the creation story can tell us that because God creates in an orderly fashion, we, too, should live well-ordered lives. Knowledge of God gleaned through comprehension of the text and interpretation of its meaning can now be applied to my life in a way that challenges me to be different.

SOME GUIDELINES

It is vital to the learning process that you allow yourself to move through the three stages of understanding on your own, without the aid of commentaries or study notes. The first several times you read a passage, you will probably be confused. In our study together, not all the homework questions will have answers that are immediately clear to you. This is actually a good thing. If you are unsure of an answer, give it your best shot. Allow yourself to feel lost, to dwell in the “I don’t know.” It will make the moment of discovery stick. We’ll also expand our understanding in the small-group discussion and teaching time.

Nobody likes to feel lost or confused, but it is an important step in the acquisition and retention of understanding. Because of this, I have a few guidelines to lay out for you as you go through this study.

1. **Avoid all commentaries** until *comprehension* and *interpretation* have been earnestly attempted on your own. In other words, wait to read commentaries

until after you have done the homework, attended small-group time, and listened to the teaching. And then, consult commentaries you can trust. Ask a pastor or Bible teacher at your church for suggested authors. I used the following commentaries in creating this study: *1, 2, and 3 John* by Karen Jobes, *The Epistles of John* by James Montgomery Boice, and *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Volume 31), 1-3 John* by John MacArthur.

2. For the purposes of this study, **get a Bible without study notes**. Come on, it's just too easy to look at them. You know I'm right.
3. Though commentaries are initially off-limits, here are some **tools you should use**:
 - **Cross-references.** These are the Scripture references in the margin or at the bottom of the page in your Bible. They point you to other passages that deal with the same topic or theme.
 - **An English dictionary** to look up unfamiliar words. A good online dictionary is *merriam-webster.com*.
 - **Other translations of the Bible.** We will use the English Standard Version (ESV) as a starting point, but you can easily consult other versions online. I recommend the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Version (NASB), and New King James Version (NKJV). Reading more than one translation can expand your understanding of the meaning of a passage. Note: a paraphrase, such as *The Message*, can be useful but should be regarded as a commentary rather than a translation. They are best consulted after careful study of an actual translation.
 - **A printed copy of the text**, double-spaced, so you can mark repeated words, phrases, or ideas. A complete copy of 1, 2, 3 John is provided for you to mark at the back of this workbook.

STORING UP TREASURE

Approaching God's Word with a God-centered perspective, with context, and with care takes effort and commitment. It is study for the long-term. Some days your study may not move you emotionally or speak to an immediate need. You may not be able to apply a passage at all. But what if ten years from now, in a dark night of the soul, that passage suddenly opens up to you because of the work you have done today? Wouldn't your long-term investment be worth it? In Matthew 13 we see Jesus begin to teach in parables. He tells seven deceptively simple stories that left His disciples struggling for understanding—dwelling in the “I don't know,” if you will. After the last parable, He turns to them and asks, “Have you understood all these things?” (v. 51a). Despite their apparent confusion, they answer out of their earnest desire with, “Yes” (v. 51b). Jesus tells them that their newfound understanding makes them “like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (v. 52, NIV).

A storeroom, as Jesus indicated, is a place for keeping valuables over a long period of time for use when needed. Faithful study of God's Word is a means for filling our spiritual storerooms with truth, so that in our hour of need we can bring forth both the old and the new as a source of rich provision. I pray that this study would be for you a source of much treasure and that you would labor well to obtain it.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jen Wilkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Jen Wilkin

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

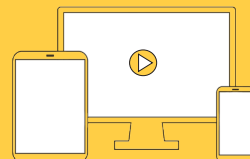
This workbook is designed to be used in a specific way. The homework in the workbook will start you in the process of comprehension, interpretation, and application. However, it was designed to dovetail with small-group discussion time and the video teaching sessions. You can use the workbook by itself, but you are likely to find yourself with some unresolved questions. The video teaching sessions are intended to resolve most, if not all, of your unanswered questions from the homework and discussion time. You'll find detailed information for how to access the video teaching sessions that accompany this study on the card inserted in the back of your workbook. With this in mind, consider using the materials as follows:

- If you are going through the study **on your own**, first work through the homework, and then watch the corresponding video teaching for that week.
- If you are going through the study **in a group**, first do your homework, and then discuss the questions your group decides to cover. Then watch the video teaching. Some groups watch the teaching before they meet, which can also work if that format fits best for everyone. Group leaders, you'll find promotional materials and more tools to help you lead at lifeway.com/abide.

Note: For Week One, there is no homework. The study begins with a video introduction. You will find a Viewer Guide on pages 14–15 that you can use as you watch the introductory material.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am deeply grateful to Jenni Hamm for her editorial help on this study. Her insights, attention to detail, and love for the Lord and His Word have been indispensable to me. She has graciously shared the load of this joyful burden and so fulfilled the law of Christ. She is a sweet friend and “fellow worker for the truth” (3 John 8).



You'll find detailed information for how to **ACCESS THE VIDEO TEACHING SESSIONS** that accompany this study on the card inserted in the back of your workbook.

HOW TO USE THE GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

At the end of each week's homework you will find a leader guide intended to help facilitate discussion in small groups. The group discussion guide includes questions to help group members compare what they have learned from their homework. These questions are either pulled directly from the homework, or they summarize a concept or theme that the homework covered. Each section covers content from a particular day of the homework, first asking group members to observe and then asking them to apply. The observation questions typically ask group members to report a finding or flesh out an interpretation. The application questions challenge them to move beyond intellectual understanding and to identify ways to live differently in light of what they have learned.

As a small group leader, you will want to review these questions before you meet with your group, thinking through your own answers, marking where they occur in the homework, and noting if there are any additional questions you might want to reference to help the flow of the discussion. These questions are suggestions only, intended to help you cover as much ground as you can in a forty-five-minute discussion time. They should not be seen as requirements or limitations, but as guidelines to help you prepare your group for the teaching time by allowing them to process collectively what they have learned during their homework.

As a facilitator of discussion rather than a teacher, you are allowed and encouraged to be a colearner with your group members. This means you yourself may not always feel confident of your answer to a given question, and that is perfectly OK. Because we are studying for the long-term, we are allowed to leave some questions partially answered or unresolved, trusting for clarity at a later time. In most cases, the video teaching time should address any lingering questions that are not resolved in the homework or the small-group discussion time.

NOTES

WEEK ONE | VIEWER GUIDE NOTES

INTRODUCTION | YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Who wrote 1, 2, and 3 John?

To whom were they written?



When were they written?



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your workbook.

In what style were they written?

What are the central themes of the letters?



1 JOHN 1:1-2:2

*Week
Two*





A CREDIBLE WITNESS

As we discussed in our introduction, repetitive reading helps you learn and retain what a book of the Bible has to say. Hopefully, you have taken the opportunity to read through 1, 2, and 3 John already to get a high-level view of what we will be studying. Each week before you begin your study, make it your goal to read through all three letters. As you read, think about what you learned about John the disciple in the introductory lesson. Think about the five questions we answered about the letters.

Your weekly homework will focus in on a particular passage to see what it has to say and how it fits into the greater context of the message. The homework is designed to help you take a closer look at what you are reading. Beginning in Week Six, you'll choose a passage from the text that has been meaningful to you, one that has already had an impact on your relationships or your perspective, and you'll begin to commit it to memory.

On page 176 of your workbook you will find a printed copy of 1, 2, and 3 John. You will need it to complete your homework each week. You will also need a set of colored pens or pencils. We will be marking key words or phrases, as well as looking up some words in the dictionary or thesaurus. A good online dictionary is merriam-webster.com.

Not all the homework questions will have answers that are immediately clear to you. If you are unsure of an answer, give it your best shot. We'll expand our understanding in the small group discussion and teaching time.

Let's get started.



Day One

READ 1 JOHN 1:1–2:2.

1. In two to three sentences, summarize the main ideas of the passage.

2. Remember our premise that the Bible is a book about God? We want to know Him better at the end of our study. At the beginning of each week's homework, we'll take time to read through the text and note everything we learn about God. Your notes might center on one member of the Trinity or the Godhead as a whole. Read asking these questions:
 - What is He like?
 - What has He done? What is He doing? What will He do?
 - What pleases Him? What displeases Him?

Do this now for 1 John 1:1–2:2. Here are some examples to get you started.

God (Jesus) is “from the beginning” (1:1).

Jesus was physically present among us (1:1).

Jesus is life (1:2).

- In two places in our passage for this week, John tells his audience why he is writing to them. As you read through the passage, note the two verses and the reason John gives for writing.

VERSE	REASON

How are these two reasons related to each other?

NOW LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT 1 JOHN 1:1-4.

- The word *proclaim* occurs twice. Specifically, what does John proclaim in this passage?
- In your copy of the text, underline in pink the phrase “from the beginning” (v. 1). Draw a tiny clock face above it. What or who does John mean by “That which was from the beginning” (v. 1)? Compare with the Gospel of John 1:1-5,14.

6. In your copy of the text, underline each occurrence of the word *life* in green.

Who or what is the “life”? _____

7. Look up the Gospel of John 17:3. Note Jesus’s definition of eternal life. How does it expand your understanding of 1 John 1:1-4?

8. **APPLY:** Based on the Gospel of John 17:3, when does eternal life begin?

How has knowing “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [He has] sent” (John 17:3) been life-giving for you? Think of specific areas of your life that have been redeemed from death.

Day Two



NOW LOOK BACK AT 1 JOHN 1:1-4.

9. John repeats twice that the life “was made manifest” (v. 2). Look up the word *manifest* in a dictionary or thesaurus. Write a definition for it that best fits with the way it is used in the passage. Note any synonyms listed.

MANIFEST

10. Reread 1 John 1:1-2, with your definition in mind. How does it add to your understanding of what John is saying?
11. Circle each time John uses the words *heard*, *seen*, or *touched*. Why do you think John expresses himself this way? What does he want to communicate to his readers?

12. Look up the following passages. Read through each one carefully, looking for John's presence in the narrative. For each passage, note what of significance John *saw*, *heard*, or *touched*.

Luke 5:1-11	
Luke 8:40-56	
Luke 9:28-36	
Gospel of John 20:1-9	
Luke 24:36-40	

13. **APPLY:** John was uniquely qualified to testify about the Word of Life. He was an eyewitness to the life of the God-Man, Jesus. No one alive today can make that claim. Consider, though: In what ways are you qualified to testify concerning the Word of Life? How have you witnessed the Word of Life at work?

Day Three

NOW READ THROUGH THE END OF CHAPTER 1.

14. Underline every occurrence of the word *fellowship* in chapter 1 in red.
15. Look up the word *fellowship* in a dictionary or thesaurus. Based on what you find, write a definition that best fits the way the word is used in the passage.

FELLOWSHIP

16. According to John, what enables us to have fellowship with God and each other? What hinders us? Note what you find.

17. In 1 John 1:5-10, what pair of opposites does John use to make his point about fellowship?

_____ and _____



18. How is light an accurate metaphor for God? List some thoughts.

How is darkness an accurate metaphor for sin?

19. **APPLY:** Think about light, darkness, and fellowship as described in 1 John 1:5-10. What keeps us from having deep, real fellowship with our fellow Christians? Why do we settle for surface relationships?

What attitudes or actions would help us to move beyond surface relationships to authentic Christian fellowship with one another?

Day Four

NOW LOOK AT 1 JOHN 1:5-10.

20. Look at verses 8 and 10. Why might someone claim to be without sin?

21. How would saying that we have not sinned make God a liar? Give a specific Scripture reference to back up your answer, if you can.

22. Look at verse 9. Look up the word *confess* in a dictionary or thesaurus. Based on what you find, write a definition that best fits the way the word is used in the passage.

CONFESS

23. If God already knows our sins, why is confession necessary?



24. In verse 9, what two adjectives are used to describe the God who forgives our sins?

_____ and _____

How is God's forgiveness of our sins an act of *faithfulness* on His part?

How is God's forgiveness of our sins an act of *justice* on His part?

25. **APPLY:** Why are we slow to confess our sins to God? To each other?

What lies do we tell ourselves when we avoid confessing our offenses?
How does unconfessed sin break Christian fellowship?

Day Five



CONCLUDE BY READING 1 JOHN 2:1-2.

26. Note how John addresses his readers in 1 John 2:1. What does his choice of address reveal about his motive for writing to them?

27. Two words are used to describe Jesus's role in dealing with our sin. With the help of a dictionary or thesaurus, write a definition for each.

ADVOCATE
(noun)

PROPITIATION

(Hint: look up propitiate and modify the definition to a noun form, or look up propitiatory in the thesaurus.)

28. Paraphrasing a verse or passage (rewriting it in our own words) can help us to focus on its meaning. It is a useful study tool for a student of the Word. We will use it often in this study. Based on your definitions on the previous page, rewrite verses 1-2 in your own words.

29. **APPLY:** Why is it significant that Christ is both your Advocate and your Propitiation? How do these dual truths cause you to worship and spur you on toward holiness?



Wrap-up



What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of 1 John shown you more clearly? *(Note: Each week we will end our homework by focusing on what the text has revealed about God. A list of God's attributes can be found in the back of your workbook on pages 186–187 to help you think through your answer to the wrap-up questions.)*

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

WEEK TWO | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. OBSERVE: (question 7, p. 20) Look up the Gospel of John 17:3. Note Jesus's definition of eternal life. How does it expand your understanding of 1 John 1:1-4?

APPLY: (question 8, p. 20) Based on the Gospel of John 17:3, when does eternal life begin?

How has knowing “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [He has] sent” (John 17:3) been life-giving for you? Think of specific areas of your life that have been redeemed from death.

2. OBSERVE: (question 16, p. 23) According to John, what enables us to have fellowship with God and each other? What hinders us?

APPLY: (question 19, p. 24) Think about light, darkness, and fellowship as described in 1 John 1:5-10. What keeps us from having deep, real fellowship with our fellow Christians? Why do we settle for surface relationships?

What attitudes or actions would help us to move beyond surface relationships to authentic Christian fellowship with one another?

3. OBSERVE: (question 23, p. 25) If God already knows our sins, why is confession necessary?

APPLY: (question 25, p. 26) Why are we slow to confess our sins to God? To each other?

- What lies do we tell ourselves when we avoid confessing our offenses?
- How does unconfessed sin break Christian fellowship?





4. OBSERVE: (question 26, p. 27) Note how John addresses his readers in 1 John 2:1. What does his choice of address reveal about his motive for writing to them?

APPLY: (question 29, p. 28) Why is it significant that Christ is both your Advocate and your Propitiation? How do these dual truths cause you to worship and spur you on toward holiness?

5. WRAP-UP: (p. 29) What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of 1 John shown you more clearly?

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?



WEEK TWO | VIEWER GUIDE NOTES



