

Foundations 1, 2, 3 John

Theme Verse: 1 John 4:11 “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Back Cover Write-up

Love. It’s all about love. Whether we’re talking about God’s love for us, our love for Him, or fulfilling all of His commandments it comes down to this one thing: Love. John and Jude show us how love is what draws us to Christ and should be our motivating factor in everything we do. Whether it’s sharing the gospel with unbelievers, opening our home to believers, or condemning sin in the lives of those who claim to be Christians, God requires that it all be done in love.

JOHN

DAY ONE

READ If your Bible has introduction to the books of 1, 2, and 3 John, please read them.

INTRODUCTION

The books of 1, 2, and 3 John are all written by the Apostle John. John was the disciple who wrote the Gospel of John and referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. (see John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21) Love is a big, big deal to John. It’s not clear why John didn’t name himself in his writings, but he did make it clear that Jesus loved him and he served Him in return.

As we read through John’s letters we see how deeply he was impacted by love. He saw straight past Jesus’ actions, and the rules and systems to the heart of the matter. Yes, Jesus came to set things right and restore everything back to its pre-fall perfection – but He did it because of love. Sure, Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sin – but love motivated Him. John clearly sees God’s love as the foundation for all God does. It’s not surprising then that we would learn throughout his letters that love should be the foundation of our new life in Christ as well.

John goes to great lengths to explain and demonstrate God’s great love for us. He also instructs us to love God. However, the most challenging part of John’s letters is regarding how believers should love others in the Body of Christ. John leaves no room for misunderstanding or strange interpretation. Love should be our measure of whether or not we have truly been saved.

As we grapple with John’s message we will see him demonstrate the practical out-working of love in all kinds of situations. We will have opportunity to evaluate our love relationship with God, and with others. We will have reason to bask in His love and be challenged to love others more fully.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask Jesus to prepare your heart to recognize and receive His love for you during the study of the letters of John.
2. Ask Him for a word, thought, picture, verse or song He might want to give you as a reminder throughout your days about what you are learning.
3. Thank the Lord for this time to focus on His character of Love and the importance of it. Ask Him to make sure you don't miss anything so your foundation of love will be strong, and your character more like His.

DAY TWO

READ: 1 John 1:1 – 2:2

John talks about being in God's light. God Himself is Light, according to verse 5. We know Jesus is also called the Light of the World, so this is more confirmation of the deity of Jesus. Even though God is light, the main point seems actually to be a slightly different angle. Not only is God light, there is no darkness in Him.

God's light (His holiness) drives out the darkness (sin). They cannot exist together. We cannot even fathom how powerful this is because in this world it *seems* like light actually creates shadow. In fact, the shadows are proof that where light is absent, darkness reigns. So when the light can't get behind a tree, or a building, or a person, darkness appears. But when the light creeps around the edges the shadow disappears. This is true to the character of God: His light chases away darkness. There is not even a spot of darkness in Him.

John goes on to say that our sin causes us to live in the dark, separate from God. Even the tiniest amount of our sin and darkness pushes out the light of God. And what is the problem with this? It breaks our relationship with him, because not even a speck of darkness can come close to Him! When we knowingly sin, we can't be close to God, and our relationship with Him is broken.

Our sin also breaks relationship with other believers even if our sin has nothing to do with them directly. How? Those who are living in relationship and fellowship with God are forgiven and have no sin or darkness in them, so they can be together with Christ. But when we have sin in our lives we are separated not only from God but also from true fellowship with other believers.

Then John gives us hope. Beautiful, freeing hope! All we have to do is confess our sins and Jesus will forgive us and welcome us back into His fellowship in the light. He purifies us. He atoned and sacrificed for our sins so we could be in relationship with Him. It really is all about relationship. God desires fellowship with us so much that He goes to great lengths to make it possible.

The grace and reality John writes with is remarkable. He reminds us that we *will* sin. We're supposed to try hard not to – but we will. And when we do we can go quickly and freely to Jesus to be forgiven and restored to that incredible fellowship. It is this fellowship, this sweet fellowship with Jesus and others, that helps motivate us to live without sin. The joy of being in fellowship with God is so great it can counteract the temptation to sin.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to give you a picture in your mind of what it means that God is light and has not even a speck of darkness in Him. Let the truth of God's holiness settle into your heart. Ask Him to grow your love for His holiness and light.
2. Now, ask Him to shine His light on your life (thoughts, actions and motives). If He reveals any sin or darkness confess it. Ask for His forgiveness and restoration. Remember He is quick to forgive!
3. Ask God to create in you a deeper and more full experience of joy in His presence so that your fellowship with Him will act as a deterrent to sin and temptation.

DAY THREE

READ: 1 John 2:3-29

John makes it clear in this passage that your relationship with God must have an effect on how you live. If it doesn't, that alone is sufficient evidence to say you are not in relationship with God.

This is specifically seen in the issue of forgiveness and genuine love for other believers. This challenge for us today is significant. The current religious trend tells us our relationship with God is all that matters. What's between us and God can stay between us and God and nobody else needs to get involved. John says it doesn't work that way! As a matter of fact, God cannot have a good relationship with us if we don't love and maintain fellowship with His people.

This does not mean we have to get together with everyone for social events. What it does mean is there is nothing in our hearts holding us back from full and free relationship. Basically, this means there is no hidden hurt, unforgiveness, or malice in our hearts toward another. When we pass them in the grocery aisle or see them in the church lobby we have a sense of joy to meet them. We don't have to be close, or best friends with everyone, but we cannot hold a grievance unresolved.

Verse 16 is a particularly challenging verse. Not everything in this world is a gift to us from the Father. Yet so often we chase these short-lived experiences and things. Even

the desires are directly related to our sin. We cannot even fathom how amazing it will be in Heaven to not have to fight sinful desires!

John explains in his warnings about the antichrists or false teachers that the anointing the believers have from the Holy Spirit is true and will remain. Yet he challenges them to remain. On one hand he is saying, *“The anointing you received from him remains in you.”* And on the other hand he is saying, *“See to it that what you have heard remains in you ... remain in him.”*

This is a very clear passage explaining how it is possible to walk away from our faith and promise of eternal life. The Holy Spirit will never leave us – He longs for our relationship and will protect us. However, we still must exercise our will and practice remaining in Him. The Holy Spirit will separate from our lives if we do not stay connected to Him. This two-sided relationship is exactly that – a relationship. The Lord will always do above and beyond what is required in order to bridge the gap between us and Him. Yet, He asks us to do our part and put effort into remaining in Him.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to reveal to you any broken relationship in your life, or names of people you do your best to avoid. Ask the Lord to forgive you of any sin toward them. Then ask Him to give you a genuine love for them.
2. Ask God to speak to your heart about something, no matter how small, that you love in the world, or that you desire, that is in direct opposition to the Lord. Ask Him to reveal desires you have that are rooted in sin and not in Him. Confess if necessary. Ask Him to grow your desire for Him and the things He likes.
3. Ask God to give you a picture of what it means for *you* to remain in Him. Thank Him for the joy of His fellowship.

DAY FOUR

READ: 1 John 3

Chapter 3, like much of this book and the other writings of John, focuses on love. God’s love for us is overwhelming. He has lavished his love on us. Grappling with the extensive love of God over us gives us the ability to love others. His love for us is not just about “ooey-gooney” feelings. God’s love for us actually changes our identity. We become children of God through His love. Our heritage, even our likeness is changed. So far-reaching is God’s love for us that we are identified with Him: If people know God they will know us, if they hate Him they will hate us.

In every chapter so far John emphasizes loving each other. This chapter is no exception. As a matter of fact in this chapter love becomes the measuring stick of our faith. If you love other believers you belong to Christ, if you don’t love them without exception, this

is a warning sign. John says if you lack love you are not in relationship with God. Strong words!

It is common in our society and Christian culture to pretend we love each other while holding bitter grievances under the surface. We have so many options of churches to attend we can leave one and attend another if we don't like to see someone every week. We don't have to lean on the Lord to love them, we just leave. And when we can't find a church without people we don't like, we keep it safe and stream a service through the TV or internet thereby avoiding the very people we need to love.

Christian business owners don't do business with others because of unresolved issues. Christian families don't see each other or support each other. Small group and cell groups split up. Entire churches divide instead of loving each other. John's message of love is just as applicable to the church today as it was so long ago when he first wrote it.

The love we have for each other must be very real and practical. It means I provide what they need if I have it. I suffer and sacrifice for them. We have become family and my actions need to show it.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to speak to you about His great love for you. Spend a few minutes listening to Him. Ask Him to speak to you about how He has or wants to change your identity because of His love. Thank Him and worship Him for His love.
2. Reflect on your relationships. Ask the Lord to reveal to you if there are any relationships with other believers that are broken, either from sin in your life, or from unforgiveness toward their sin. Confess it. Ask the Lord to give you the grace and courage to be in loving fellowship with them again, so long as it depends on you.
3. Ask the Lord to bring to mind some way you can practically love someone today. Ask God to give you abundant and sacrificial love for someone today. Take any action He prescribes.

DAY FIVE

READ: 1 John 4

It appears the church John was writing to had undergone some kind of church split. People had left and were now teaching a new message – a false message. He explains in this letter how to discern whether or not someone is speaking from the Lord or from an evil spirit.

This is very relevant in our culture. There are a lot of messengers or preachers who don't measure up to God's standard. John puts the responsibility of following godly, or true leaders, on us. We must test the spirits. Just because they have their name on the cover of a book, their own TV program, or a large following doesn't mean they are from

God. We must evaluate the words they say, the way they live and determine if their lives confess the truth of Jesus and the fullness of His Deity. John also tells us not to be afraid, but to trust the Holy Spirit who lives in us. The Holy Spirit will help us recognize those who are true believers and those who are not. With His help we can be wise and discerning.

John gives us compelling reasons to love others. God's love is our motivation. Because God loved us... it all starts there. Because He loves us He sent His Son. Because He loves us He gave. Because He loves us He invites us into His family. This is why our love for others is so important. God Himself is Love. When we love others and God's love is obvious in us, other people will see God in us. They will be drawn to Him because of our love, just like God's love for us draws us to Him. We cannot look around and see God with our eyes. So when people are searching for Him, they cannot see Him. However, God calls us to love Him with the same compelling love He has for us so that we can literally wear His image and character within us. God wants to draw others to Himself through His love in us! Our love for others might be the only glimpse of God they may ever see.

Verse 16 challenges us to know and believe the love of God. Many people *know* God loves them. It's a fact they've been told so often they know this as fact. However many of those same people don't believe it. The truth and knowledge of God's love has stayed in their heads and not settled in their hearts. To believe God's love for us actually means that our actions will change. This kind of belief is life-transforming belief; to believe so fully that everything we do, think, and say is motivated by God's love for us. When our lives are driven by God's love for us and our love for others, John says this is our confirmation of salvation.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank the Lord for His Spirit who helps you discern the spirits. Ask Him to help you keep your heart closed to false teaching and to help you recognize true believers.
2. Ask the Lord to show you if others can see His love in you. If so, thank Him for revealing Himself through you. If not, ask Him to grow you in demonstrating and exhibiting His love toward others. Ask Him for a specific step you can take to show His love.
3. Spend a few minutes thinking about God's love for you. Ask Him to give you a new picture, words, or thoughts about how vast and complete His love for you is. Ask Him to transform your knowledge of His love into an experiential belief of His love that changes your heart and your actions. Thank Him for being a God who is so intimately in love with His people.

DAY FIVE

READ: 1 John 5

Love is evidently the proof of transformation through Christ. Love is the main characteristic that binds not only people with God, but also God's people with God's people. It is a unifying force. This is the glue that holds the Church together, that unifies the Body of Christ.

This chapter demonstrates to us how important it is to obey God's commandments. Obeying God's commandments signifies to those around us that we are indeed people of God. Yet, with the huge emphasis on love it may seem at first that John has forgotten a huge list of commandments. However, Jesus outlined the commandments very simply for us in Matthew 22:37-40. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls and minds. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus actually said that *all* the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments. Love between us and God, and between us and others, is not a side issue. It is the only issue, the only measuring stick, the only evidence of unity.

Verse 18 is a beautiful description of the way life in Christ works. When we have been born of Christ – given our lives to Him, confessing, repenting and serving Him – we'll no longer live in sin. We'll aim to stop sinning. Our desire will be to be sinless like God is sinless. As this is going on, God is also reaching out His hand of protection over us. As God gets involved, we are given strength to live in His grace and strength. Not only that, as we live under the protection of God Almighty, the enemy, Satan, does not have free access to attack us. That alone is such a relief! There is so much benefit to serving the Lord and living under His grace and love.

Then John ends this book with a simple instruction. *Please keep yourself from idols*. On one hand it seems so out of place. Everything has been about love, now seemingly out of nowhere John starts talking about idols. Such a little sentence, but so much importance. John knows we are easily distracted. When we turn our eyes away from God and His love for us we risk losing not only relationship with God and others, but we risk damaging the reputation of His Church as unity is lost, and most importantly, as love is lost. Only God, who is the definition of love, can fill us with love. When we turn to other idols we become the enemy of love. No wonder John ended on this note.

Journaling and Prayer

1. Ask the Lord to show you how powerful the unity between believers is as a way to draw others to Christ. Ask Him what part you can play in growing in love towards other believers and living in unity so that non-believers will long to be part of Christian community.
2. Ask the Lord if there is an idol in your life that is standing in the way of your complete love and devotion to Him, and unity with the Body. If there is, confess it. Ask the Lord to keep your eyes focused on Him from this point forward, and to give you warning, and even discipline, when you begin to shift your allegiance from Him to an idol so that you can be faithful in love and unity.

3. Thank the Lord for His protection against the Enemy. Thank Him for His overwhelming love for you. Thank Him for His grace, strength, joy and kindness. Spend a few minutes worshiping Him, perhaps in prayer, or in song, or in nature. Pour out your heart of love toward Him.

DAY SIX

READ 2 John

There is much discussion over who the 'lady' mentioned in this letter is. Some say it might be a particular person. Others believe it might actually be a local church. Either way, John lets the readers know how much he enjoys seeing spiritual offspring come from their faith in God. Just like parents are excited and proud when grandchildren come along, John is thrilled about the spiritual grandchildren he has through these believers. This is the fruit of his labor. A true disciple of Christ goes on to reproduce other disciples of Christ. Seeing his disciples raise up more disciples is a spiritual parent's greatest reward.

John is very firm in this letter regarding how to treat those who spread a false gospel. It would seem from this letter that there are people who teach about God but have not accepted Jesus. In our culture we often encounter the opposite of this problem: There are those who would teach only Jesus, but not the Father. There is a trend to follow the 'loving' parts, which many equate with Jesus, and to eliminate or even condemn the 'holy' parts, which many equate with God the Father. John is reminding his readers that you cannot have one without the other. Although the love of God is a huge factor it is not to the exclusion of the rest of His character. We cannot get to the Father unless we go through His Son. If we deny the Father, we have denied the Son. We can't have one without the other.

John tells us not to let false teaching come into our homes. In John's day, that would have meant literally letting them walk into the house. Today false teachers get in through books, magazines, the radio or TV, the internet, Facebook, podcasts and any number of ways. We live in a world where many people believe that if it is in print it must be true, if it is on the internet it must be true. If someone calls themselves a Christian, it must be true. Yet in this book we are warned very sternly to pay attention to what is being taught and to go out of our way to not let it even enter our homes!

John makes a very interesting statement in the second last verse. He says his joy will be complete when he sees them face-to-face. Again, this goes against our individualistic culture that says my joy can be complete with just God and me. Yes, it's true that without God we cannot have joy. He is our joy. Yet, in many places in Scripture we find that our joy is only made complete when we are in fellowship with other believers. God gives us joy, and it is complete when we are in fellowship with His people. Is it any

wonder love and unity are such strong commandments? God wants us to experience not just His joy, but also the joy that comes from being in holy community. Loving others is a way to ensure we will live in complete joy!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank the Lord for those people who have been your spiritual parents. (Those who have somehow played a part in you becoming a Christian, then growing and maturing in Christ.) Ask the Lord if there is some way you can honour them today. If you have children, family members, or friends who are being loved to the Lord by others, thank the Lord for their willingness to be disciple-makers and for everything they are doing and have done.
2. Ask God to open your spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear any false teaching in the world around you, especially to be sensitive to it through those who may claim to be believers. Ask God if there is anything in your house (or on your computer/phone, or that you are subscribed to, etc) that you need to remove because it contains false teaching, or programs you need to stop watching or listening to because of false teaching, etc. Ask Him for wisdom, discernment and His guidance to bring you to the truth.
3. Ask the Lord to fill you with His joy, and to give you opportunity to make your joy complete by spending time in fellowship with other believers. Ask Him to give you ideas right now for how you can actively encourage others, love others, and in doing so have your joy made full. Ask Him if your schedule or priorities need to change so you can be more deliberate and energetic to be with people to share your love and be filled with joy.

DAY SEVEN

READ 3 John

John is such a practical man. His letters are short and to the point. He wants to save the pen and ink and do most of his communicating in person. However, a few things are important enough to him that he writes a third letter. In this case the two issues he addresses are the financial support of ministers, and the sinful behavior of a particular church member.

Even in these two issues, the basic and underlying struggle is a love problem. John wants the church to treat ministers of the gospel well. He wants them to support missionaries who have been ministering to Gentiles. They are doing the work of the Lord, so John says... **SUPPORT THEM!** They are winning people to Christ and if you want to participate in the reward they'll receive, then support them. By supporting people who are reaching others for Christ, we are literally fellow workers with them. It's a privilege to be able to give money, time, energy, resources, whatever is needed... to those who are ministering the Gospel. When we love the Lord and His message of love and freedom, and when we love the Body of Christ, it will be a natural progression to support those who go out to

spread that love and freedom to others. Not only is our support an act of love to those who are hearing the Gospel, but also an act of love and support to those who are going out. It is another way to demonstrate love and unity between believers.

John does not hide the fact that Diotrephes is selfish and full of pride. He is making the rules to suit himself and not in accordance with what God required. The first issue John raises is Diotrephes' unwillingness to submit to the spiritual authority of his leaders. The second issue is his unwillingness to show love to believers who come to visit at his church. To make matters worse, he develops a third issue by not allowing his church members to welcome them either. John is very clear about these things being evil, and also makes it clear that evil is not from God.

It has often been said that John wrote the 'Books of Love'. As we've gone through these letters we have seen him promote love and unity above anything else. This letter is no different, the emphasis is still love. However, unlike the very pointed commands to love others, in this letter John spells it out for the readers by telling them *how* to love others, and is encouraging them for the report he's heard about their love. Love really is the fulfillment of the commandments. John, with what can only be assumed is pure love, devotion, and genuine care, assigns them to greet everyone. He is particular though. He wants each person greeted by name. John loves them and wants them to feel his love, and know that each one of them is personally and individually loved. What a great example he gives us!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord if you are loving Him and His people who are doing ministry work by supporting them with your time, your finances, your energy and your resources. Ask Him if there is anything else He would like you to do, or if there is someone ministering for Him who has a need He would like you to fill.
2. Ask Jesus to speak to you about your willingness to truly submit to the authority of your spiritual leaders. Ask Him how well you take correction from your cell leader, ministry area leader, pastor or spiritual mentor. Ask Him if there is anything you need to change and what areas you are doing well in.
3. Ask the Lord to give you a practical way to love people this week, especially visitors at church. Are there people standing alone, sitting alone, or wandering aimlessly to avoid looking alone? Ask the Lord to give you a heart of love for each person you see at church this weekend, and to use you as a vessel to love them. Ask Him if there are co-workers, business colleagues, neighbours, or even estranged family members who need your kindness and love this week. Journal His answers and then put that love into action! Take a few minutes to thank Him for those who have welcomed you and shown you love.

Day Eight

Jude

Read: If your Bible has an introduction for this book, please read it, and the book of Jude.

Jude is the author of the book of Jude. Likely this was Judas, the half-brother of Jesus. (He was a half-brother because they shared Mary as their mother, but Jude's father would have been Joseph, while Jesus' father was God.) It has been speculated that the author chose to go by the name Jude instead of his full name to avoid the confusion that might come with being associated with Judas Iscariot. We do not know for sure who he wrote this letter to, there are no clues in the book. Neither do we know exactly when he wrote it. However, because he was likely a half-brother of Jesus, and because it was obviously written after Jesus' death and resurrection, we can assume it was likely between A.D. 35 and A.D. 70. Jude did not follow Jesus as a disciple while Jesus was alive. His dedication and powerful conversion came later.

We have recently finished reading through John's 'love' books. Even while John was focused on love he warned us of false teachers, but did so gently. Jude on the other hand, let's us know right in verse 3 how much he loves the people he's writing to (he calls them Beloved) but then gets right down to business. He holds nothing back at all by telling them there are people in their midst who will be condemned. This letter is one of warning, challenge and instruction.

If this letter came to a modern day church we would be appalled, offended and label Jude as intolerant. He is telling the church he's writing to that people within their church are not Christians! Not only that, but they will face the final condemnation. That's the equivalent of saying there are people attending your church who are going to hell. Yikes!

Jude then goes on to remind them that even though Jesus saved the Israelites out of Egypt (this is the love of the Lord) He later destroyed those who didn't believe (this is the holiness of the Lord). Jude gives lots of examples of how God's great love does not mean He isn't also very holy and hard on sin. It seems they may have been in a similar situation to what many churches find themselves in today.

There were sinners in the church, yet the believers seemed to be so afraid of being unloving they were not condemning sinful behaviour. Jude is giving the readers permission to treat people with love and to condemn sin at the same time. He reminds them of the coming last judgment. He encourages them to persevere.

Jude even gives them instructions on how to persevere. He says:

- Build yourself up in the faith,
- Pray in the Holy Spirit,

- Keep yourself in the love of God, and
- Wait for the mercy of the Lord.

So simple. Yet so critical. These are the steps we can take to persevere as well.

Verse 22 is such a verse of love! Here Jude gives us ideas on the different ways we can and should minister to those who need Jesus. For some he says to be merciful, for some he says snatch them from the fire, and for even others he says to hate their sins with all fervency while still loving them! The message in this is also one of love: do not treat everyone the same. Love them enough to listen to the Holy Spirit and follow His direction in how to minister to them. Love them enough to share the gospel in the most merciful and loving way to make the most eternal difference.

Journaling and Prayer

1. Ask the Lord to speak to you about your lifestyle and whether or not Jude is writing to you as one who would have had your lifestyle, or anything within your life, condemned? Or would you be among those who are living rightly but too afraid of offending someone to point out their sin? Or do you have a firm grasp of both God's love and His holiness?
2. How are you doing in the area of growing in perseverance? Journal what the Lord says to you about each of the four points of perseverance. Ask Him what you are doing well and if there is anything you can do to improve or grow to the next level of maturity.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a name of someone who needs salvation who He wants you to pray for. Commit to praying for this person and listening to His voice on how to love them to Christ. Ask for an abundance of His love in you to pour out over them.