

Discipleship Letters from John's Letters

Appendix 1. Lesson Handouts

If you're working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the following handouts for your local group at no charge.

Each of these lesson sheets includes:

Discussion Questions. You'll find 4 to 5 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

Key Verses. Each of these passages is rich in Bible verses worth memorizing. The verses here are in the New International Version, but feel free to have your members memorize in any translation you're comfortable with. Scripture memory has a way of fixing God's word in our minds. If you haven't tried assigning verses for memory—and then testing the following week—you'll bless your group members, though they may complain about having short memories.

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11, NIV)

Lessons

1. Walking in the Light (1 John 1:1-2:6)
2. Don't Love the World (2:7-17)
3. Antichrists, Anointing, and Abiding (2:18-27)
4. Sin Is Lawlessness (2:28-3:10)
5. Love in Action (3:11-24)
6. God Is Love (4:1-21)
7. God's Testimony Regarding Jesus (5:1-21)
8. Walking in Love (2 and 3 John)

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Lesson 1. Walking in the Light (1 John 1:1-2:6)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 1:3-4, 6-7) Why is our fellowship with fellow Christians so often just on a surface level? How can we have fellowship at a deeper level in Christ? What would it take in your Christian group or your relationships with other believers to deepen your level of fellowship so it is authentically Christian?

Q2. (1 John 1:5-7) What is the result when a Christian walks in darkness, that is, continues willfully to do what he or she knows to be wrong? How does this involve self-deception? What is the result, according to verse 7, when we walk in the light? How do we get back into the light if we sin?

Q3. (1 John 1:9) How would you define "confession"? Why is confessing our sins so important? What happens to us if we stop confessing our sins? What are the promises given to us if we do confess our sins? How is forgiveness of sins different from cleansing?

Q4. (1 John 2:1-2) What assurance does John give us if we do sin? How does this comfort us? How does it make us want to avoid sin?

Q5. (1 John 2:3-6) How can we be serious about obeying Christ without becoming legalistic and judgmental, and without the self-righteous attitude that the Pharisees had? How do love and legalism differ? How can we be serious about obedience and make love our center?

Key Verses

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:7, NIV)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9, NIV)

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2, NIV)

Lesson 2. Don't Love the World (1 John 2:7-17)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 2:7-11) How does hate and unforgiveness blind us spiritually? If we have been darkened by hurt and hate, how do we come into the light?

Q2. (1 John 2:12-14) John encourages "children," "young men," and "fathers." Why do you think he takes time to encourage them? In what ways does he encourage them?

Q3. (1 John 2:15-16) What is "the world" in verses 15-16? What keeps us from loving both "the world" *and* the Father?

Q4. (1 John 2:15-17) What kinds of sins are covered by the three examples of worldliness that John gives? Why are these sometimes so difficult for us to discern in ourselves? Why is worldliness so harmful to our future?

Key Verses

"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness." (1 John 2:9, NIV)

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world."
(1 John 2:15-16, NIV)

Lesson 3. Antichrists, Anointing, and Abiding (1 John 2:18-27)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 2:18) What is this antichrist that John expects to come? What is the difference between the antichrist and antichrists in the church John is writing to? In what ways do we see the spirit of antichrist at work in our day?

Q2. (1 John 2:20-21) What is the "anointing" that John is talking about? In what way is anointing connected to the Holy Spirit in the Bible? Do you think that each Christian has received this anointing?

Q3. (1 John 2:20, 27) In what ways is the Holy Spirit an internal Guide for us? In what ways does he teach us? In what ways does he point us to Jesus' teaching?

Q4. (1 John 2:24-28) What does it mean to abide/remain/continue in Jesus? Give an example of what a Christian does who is "abiding" in Jesus. What are symptoms in a Christian who is not "abiding" in Jesus?

Q5. (1 John 2:26-27) If we have the Holy Spirit, why do we need teachers in the church? How does the role of the anointing differ from the Holy Spirit's spiritual gift of teaching?

Key Verses

"Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour." (1 John 2:18, NIV)

"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him." (1 John 2:27, NIV)

Lesson 4. Sin Is Lawlessness (1 John 2:28-3:10)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 2:29-3:2) In what sense are we "children of God"? What does the Holy Spirit have to do with this "new birth"? How does the new birth change us?

Q2. (1 John 2:28; 3:2-3) In what way does our expectation of Christ's Second Coming motivate us to purify ourselves from sin? How does purifying ourselves from sin relate to God's grace?

Q3. (1 John 3:4) How does lawlessness show up in a person's attitude and actions? In what sense is an attitude of lawlessness the cause of sin in our lives?

Q4. (1 John 3:6, 9) How does the presence of God's seed in us keep us from habitual lawlessness and sin? How does the Holy Spirit sanctify us and make us like Jesus?

Q5. (1 John 3:3-10) How does John's teaching on sin and righteousness in this passage relate to combating the false teachers? What did they seem to be teaching about sin and righteous living?

Key Verses

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3, NIV)

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4, NIV)

"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." (1 John 3:9, NIV)

Lesson 5. Love in Action (1 John 3:11-24)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 3:12-15) Why did Cain resent Abel? Why did Cain kill Abel? How does the story of Cain and Abel illustrate Jesus' explanation of why the world hates us?

Q2. (1 John 3:15) How can anger turn into hatred in our hearts? In what ways do anger and hatred relate to murder? How can we get rid of stored-up anger in our hearts so that we may love those who have offended us?

Q3. (1 John 3:16-18) What does it mean to "lay down your life for your brothers"? What are some concrete examples of this kind of love in action within the Christian community? If you are in a large congregation, how can you get to know other members so you'll be able to lay down your life for them – and they for you?

Q4. (1 John 3:22) We know that God doesn't "owe" us anything. So what is the relationship between obedience and answered prayer? Do we "earn" God's favor through obedience?

Key Verses

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (1 John 3:16, NIV)

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18, NIV)

"[We] receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him." (1 John 3:22, NIV)

Lesson 6. God Is Love (1 John 4:1-21)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 4:1-3) Why is believing that Jesus was God in the flesh so important? Why doesn't Satan want us to believe that? What are the implications of the fact that Jesus could live out his divine life in a human body like ours? What significance does it bring to the crucifixion and to the resurrection? What is the significance for your Christian life?

Q2. (1 John 4:4) What in us is greater than false prophets and even Satan? In what sense have we overcome them? In what way will we overcome them in the future? How does this truth affect fear in our lives?

Q3. (1 John 4:7-8) Why is the statement, "God is love," so important? What does it say about God's nature? How does love being the essence of God's nature affect us? If we were created in God's image of love, but fell, what does this say about the road to healing in our lives? Why does love demand a willingness to forgive?

Q4. (1 John 4:11-18) What kind of fear should we have towards God? What kind of fear is extinguished by his love perfected in us? What kind of attitude should we have toward future judgment?

Key Verses

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4, NIV)

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7-8, NIV)

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10, NIV)

"We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19, NIV)

Lesson 7. God's Testimony Regarding Jesus (1 Jn 5:1-21)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (1 John 5:4-5) How does a defeatist mentality differ from a belief that in Christ we have overcome the world? What part does faith have in this overcoming? What part does unbelief have in a defeatist mentality?

Q2. (1 John 5:11-12) What is the difference between saying "this life is in the Christian Church" and "this life is in his Son"? What should we be doing differently so that we teach a faith relationship rather than a religion? What is the difference between "faith" and "faith in Jesus"?

Q3. (1 John 5:14-15) What are the two conditions to answered prayer in 1 John? (See also 3:22.) How do we determine God's will so that we can pray boldly, confidently? How often will our prayers be answered when our main motive is to achieve our will?

Q4. (1 John 5:21) Why does John exhort his "children" to "keep yourselves from idols"? What idols distract us from the true God? What idols compete with God for attention in your life?

Key Verses

"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3, NIV)

"Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4, NIV)

"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:11-12)

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him." (1 John 5:14-15, NIV)

Lesson 8. Walking in Love (2 and 3 John)

Discussion Questions

Q1. (2 John 9) What is the danger of "running ahead" of Christ's teachings to "deeper truths"? What is the danger of "running ahead" of Christ's guidance for our lives? What does it mean to "abide" or "continue" in Christ and his teachings? Why is this so important?

Q2. (2 John 10-11) Why does the Apostle John tell his readers to refuse hospitality to the false teachers? What would refusing hospitality mean for a congregation (as opposed to an individual)? What is the border between tolerance and stupidity, when it comes to false teachers? Do the divisions of denominationalism find justification in this verse? Why or why not?

Q3. (3 John 5-8) What are the reasons given in these verses for supporting Christian workers in their ministry? What reward comes with becoming a "co-worker" by assisting Christian workers? How effective can Christian workers be without those who support them?

Q4. (3 John 9-10) What character flaws does Diotrephes exhibit? Can a person be a strong pastoral leader without developing these traits? If you have tendencies in yourself towards pride and a controlling spirit, how can you fight against them?

Key Verses

"Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 9, NIV)

"We ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth." (3 John 8, NRSV)

"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God." (3 John 11, NIV)