

God's Love Through You



STONECROFT



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GOD'S LOVE THROUGH YOU

Stonecroft Bible Studies

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Welcome to Stonecroft Bible Studies!

It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done...God wants to be in relationship with you. And one place He tells you about Himself is in His Word—the Bible. Whether the Bible is familiar or new to you, its contents will transform your life and bring answers to your biggest questions.

Gather with people in your communities—women, men, couples, young and old alike—and consider the message of John, one of Jesus' friends and disciples. Get to know better the Jesus John saw, lived with, and came to know—the Son of God Himself, the living, human expression of God the Father's love.

Each chapter of *God's Love Through You* includes discussion questions to stir up meaningful conversation, specific Scripture verses to investigate, and time for prayer to connect with God and each other.

Discover more of God and His ways through this small-group exploration of the Bible.

Tips for Using This Study

This book includes several features that make it easy to use and helpful for your life:

- The page number or numbers given after every Bible reference are keyed to the page numbers in the *Abundant Life Bible*. This paperback Bible uses the New Living Translation, a translation in straightforward, up-to-date language. We encourage you to obtain a copy through your group leader or at stonecroft.org.
- Each chapter ends with a section called “Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests.” Use this space for notes or for thoughts that come to you during your group time or study, as well as prayer requests.
- In the back of the book you will find “Journal Pages”—a space available for writing down how the study is changing your life or any other personal thoughts, reactions, and reflections.
- Please make this book and study your own. We encourage you to use it and mark it in any way that helps you grow in your relationship with God!

If you find this study helpful, you may want to investigate other resources from Stonecroft. Please take a look at “Stonecroft Resources” in the back of the book or online at **stonecroft.org/store**.

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Christ—The Word of Life

1 John 1:1-4

I once spoke at a conference center that had a ropes course. Participation was voluntary, of course, but as the speaker, I felt compelled to be a good sport, even though I found it intimidating. First, I climbed a rope ladder 20 feet high to a small platform where a cable was stretched across to another tree about 40 feet away. About 10 feet above that cable was another one that had ropes dangling from it about every 5 feet. The idea was to step out on the lower cable and grab the first dangling rope, then step sideways across the cable until you could grab the next one. As you went sideways across the cable you had to let go of one rope and then keep moving until you could grab another. The dangling ropes were far enough apart that you really had to stretch and even bounce a bit to get them to swing toward you.

I do not possess one ounce of athletic ability, and this process absolutely terrified me. The worst part of the challenge was how wobbly the cable was beneath my feet—it was like walking on marbles. It was an agonizing exercise, and I thought I'd never make it to the other tree.

There was a man waiting on the platform of the other tree, and he could tell I was at the far reaches of my endurance. As I approached the tree he stretched out his arm to me. I will never forget the feeling of his strong, steady hand grasping mine. *It felt like the hand of God.*

Instantly my terror subsided because his grasp held me firm, and the cable beneath me ceased to wobble. I knew that as long as I held on to him I would be safe.

That feeling of being rescued, of being *safe*, never left me. Sometimes, choices I've made or attitudes I've adopted contrary to God's Word have turned my life into a wobbly and unpredictable ropes course. But the minute I reach out and grab God's hand again, my feet are on stable ground. His grip is firm and I know I'm safe.



Prayer

Lord, I listen to your voice; you know me, and I follow you. You give me eternal life, and I will never perish. No one can snatch me from your hand (John 10:27-28, page 819).

John—Disciple, Apostle, and Writer

John is the perfect person to have written the subject we are about to study because he *lived* what he wrote. When he writes about how a relationship with God will transform your life, he writes about something he personally experienced. Although Jesus chose him to be one of His 12 disciples, John was not without his faults. He had an inclination toward intolerance and was quick to pass judgment. He could be harsh and aggressive.

John also expressed a passionate commitment to Jesus, and he determined to set his self-will aside in order to become the man God designed him to be. John knew he was loved. He called himself “the disciple Jesus loved.” And love changed him. As his relationship with Jesus deepened, his attitudes changed, and his reactions to people and circumstances softened. In fact, Jesus so loved and trusted John that He entrusted His mother's care to him just before He died.

Author John MacArthur sums up John in this way:

It is clear from the Gospel accounts that John was capable of behaving in the most sectarian, narrow-minded, unbending, reckless, and impetuous fashion. He was volatile. He was brash. He was aggressive. He was passionate, zealous, and personally ambitious...But John aged well. Under the control of the Holy Spirit, his liabilities were exchanged for assets...his areas of greatest weakness developed into his greatest strengths. He's an amazing example of what should happen to us as we grow in Christ—allowing the Lord's strength to be made perfect in our weakness.¹

John's brother, James, was also one of the 12 disciples, and they must have been quite a pair. Jesus nicknamed them "Sons of Thunder." At the time Jesus called them to be His disciples, they were working with their father, Zebedee, in the Capernaum fishing business. Their mother, Salome, became a devoted follower of Jesus, was present at His crucifixion, and went to the tomb with the other women to anoint His body with burial spices.

John was a fascinating man. If you like, you can learn more about him by reading the verses listed below:

Mark 5:35-43 (page 765)	Luke 22:7-13 (page 804)
Mark 9:2-9 (page 769)	John 20:1-10 (page 828)
Mark 13:3-13 (page 774)	Acts 4:1-4,13-22 (pages 832-833)
Mark 14:32-42 (pages 775-776)	Galatians 2:9 (page 891)

Why John Wrote

John was one of the youngest of the 12 disciples. When he wrote the book of 1 John (around AD 90), scholars believe he was the only disciple still living. This book is actually a letter, although no one knows to which church John wrote it. It appears he may have sent it to a number of congregations of believers in Asia.

Twenty years earlier, Jerusalem had been destroyed and Christians had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. It had been a time of persecution for them, but they had remained strong and faithful to the truth of God. Now, however, many of them began to compromise their faith and take on the values of the world. False teachers infiltrated the church, causing some of the people to waver. John's purpose in writing was to encourage them to stand firm in their understanding of and belief in Jesus Christ.

The book of 1 John is filled with life-changing truths about God. I think you'll be amazed to see how applicable John's writing remains all these years later. As we study it, his words will clarify for you the truth about God and show you how to live a purposeful life pleasing to Him.

One final note about John...he wrote four other books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, and the book of Revelation. The Gospel of John and 1 John complement each other. Interestingly, it is near the end of both books, rather than at the beginning, that John states his purpose for writing them.

Look up the following verses. What is John's reason for writing each book?

John 20:30-31 (pages 828-829)

1 John 5:13 (page 943)

Do you see how closely tied together his purposes for writing are? In the Gospel of John he tells us how to have a relationship with Jesus that will result in eternal life, and in 1 John he tells us what a relationship with Jesus looks like and how it should transform our attitudes and behaviors.

John Tells Us About the *Word*

Both the Gospel of John and 1 John begin by talking about the *Word*. Read John 1:1-4,14 (page 809).

How does John describe the Word?

Now read 1 John 1:1-4 (page 941). What do these verses say about the Word?

Who does *the Word* refer to in both these passages?

In both the Gospel of John and 1 John, Jesus Christ is presented as the living expression of God's love. Just as our words reveal our thoughts and feelings to others, Jesus Christ reveals to us the mind and heart of God. To know Jesus is to know God.

As we read in John 1:14, "*The Word became human and made his home among us.*"

Why do you think Jesus, who created the entire universe, also became an inhabitant of this small planet called Earth?

Jesus did so to best reveal to us what God is like! Jesus, who is God, came down to earth to live as a man so we could know God, know His characteristics, and know His *love*. He removed the barrier of sin that stood between us and God so we could have an authentic relationship with Him. This was so important to God that there was no price He was not willing to pay. By coming to earth, Jesus made it possible for us to receive eternal life with God!

What Friendship with the Father Looks Like

The Word is not the only phrase John used both in 1 John and the Gospel of John.

In the following pairs of verses, what similar concepts are present?

John 16:24 (page 825) and 1 John 1:4 (page 941)

John 3:19 (page 811) and 1 John 1:6-7 (page 941)

John 8:44 (page 817) and 1 John 3:8 (page 942)

John 8:47 (page 817) and 1 John 4:6 (page 943)

John 3:16 (page 811) and 1 John 4:9 (page 943)

John 3:36 (page 811) and 1 John 5:11-12 (page 943)

Do you see how in each example 1 John further illustrates the concepts presented in the Gospel of John? Together they show us what a relationship with God is and what it looks like.

Jesus, the One Who Revealed the Father

Much of what God is like is revealed in His awesome creation. We see His infinite creativity, His exquisite attention to detail, and His love of beauty (Romans 1:20, page 857). The Bible also shows us what God is like—His purity and His righteousness, for example—but still much of His nature remains hidden. The only way God could fully show us what He is like was by coming to earth in human form in order for people to see and know and relate to Him. When Jesus willingly laid down His life to pay for our sins, He revealed the full extent of His love for us. When He then rose from the dead three days later, His divine, eternal nature was clearly revealed.

Christianity is more than a doctrine,
a pattern of conduct, or a way of life.
Christianity is life in Jesus Christ.
Christianity is centered in a Person.
That Person is Jesus Christ, the
Eternal Son of God.

The nature of God was revealed in Jesus Christ. He *is* eternal life. Let's look at Colossians 2:13-14 (page 903).

What did God do for us?

Through whom did He do it?

Jesus' death made the possibility of eternal life a reality for us. How does this truth affect your life?

Does it raise questions for you? If so, write them down and ask God to show you the truth through this study.

John the Eyewitness

Read 1 John 1:1-2 (page 941).

What evidence did John give to establish his credibility as an eyewitness of Jesus?

What difference does it make to you that you are reading the words of someone who actually knew Jesus while He walked this earth in a human body?

Although John wrote these letters to his contemporaries who were being adversely affected by false teachers, everything he said to them then still applies to us today—and will always apply, regardless of our circumstances. That makes the Bible, God’s inspired Word to us, remarkable. It is current and relevant to every culture!

John knew the importance of continuing to teach believers that Jesus was a real person because some people were trying to turn them away from this truth.

In what way is this still happening today?

John had no doubts about the reality of Jesus Christ. He and the other disciples saw Him with their own eyes and heard Him with their own ears. They walked with Him for about three years, and because of this firsthand experience, there was not the slightest doubt in their minds—they knew Jesus was real.

If you look back at 1 John 1:1 (page 941), you will notice that John twice wrote he’d seen Jesus with his own eyes. The significance of his repetition is seen in the meaning of the Greek word *horaō* he uses. It

is translated as *see*, but it does not mean casual observation. You learn very little about someone from seeing them in that way. *Horao* means a steadfast, searching look—a long look.

John *saw* Jesus over a three-year period of time. He saw how Jesus responded to stressful, exhausting, and frustrating situations. He saw how He responded to poor people, wealthy people, sick people, insane people, dishonest people, educated and uneducated people. John watched Jesus around people who worshipped Him and who hated Him. And never once did John see Jesus fail to act in a way that evidenced God. John recognized that Jesus was more than a man—He was God. Because of what John saw, he committed himself to Jesus and determined to follow in His footsteps and experience eternal life.

Because John had *seen* Jesus, the recipients of this letter could trust the accuracy of his teachings. We are like those second- and third-generation Christians. We also know that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16, page 915). We have not personally seen Jesus, but because we have the biblical account of those who did, such as John, we also can trust what John wrote.

John Talks About Fellowship

What are the two reasons John gave for writing this letter in 1 John 1:3-4 (page 941)?

1.

2.

Who does he want us to have fellowship with?

What does he say will result from this fellowship?

John, having experienced a life-changing relationship with Jesus, wanted everyone to experience the same thing. He wanted them to feel the joy and warmth that fellowship with God brings.

Deep Friendship with God the Father

The first step to fellowship with God is accepting His gift of salvation. When we acknowledge our sin and accept the fact that Jesus' death on the cross paid for our sin, our relationship with God begins. But for it to become more than just a surface relationship there are some things we must do.

Think of someone you are casual friends with, and then think of someone you are very close friends with.

What are some differences in the two relationships? Why are you closer to one than the other?

It's difficult for there to be a deep fellowship between two radically different people. It's your similarities that attract you to another person and make you enjoy spending time with them. God took the first step in establishing common ground between us when He took on a human body in order to be like us and to let us know what He was like.

When a relationship is established, the only way it grows is if we spend time with the other person and learn more about them. But building a relationship is a two-way street. If only one person is available to spend time with the other or if only one person is willing to be transparent, the relationship will be unbalanced and unsatisfactory to both. It won't progress beyond the surface. God made His desire for a relationship with us very clear by taking on a human body and going to the cross for us. He has made Himself available to us at all times. If there is no relationship between us, the fault rests with us, not God.

John tells us how to deepen our relationship with God. He shows us the habits and attitudes that interfere with a deepening relationship. As God's grace enables us to see those old ways of thinking and acting, we may form new habits and attitudes, drawing closer to Jesus as a result.

Read the following verses and make a list of what we can do to deepen our relationship with God.

Colossians 2:6 (page 903)

Ephesians 4:2-3 (pages 896-897)

John 14:21,23 (page 823)

Hebrews 10:22 (page 926)

Ephesians 4:31-32 (page 897)

What are some tangible ways you can start implementing this list in your life?

How many items have to do with your relationship with others?

According to John 14:21, what is one result of keeping Jesus' commandments?

That last phrase is very significant: “*I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.*” God wants His relationship with each of us to deepen over time. Jesus wants to reveal Himself to us more and more in greater and greater intimacy! And He does this as we think and act more and more like Him.

While our relationships with friends and family can greatly enrich our lives, they do not *give* us life. Only our relationship with God can do that. Read 1 John 5:11-12 (page 943).

Deep Friendship with Other Believers

Having a personal relationship with Jesus makes true fellowship possible with other believers. Through Jesus Christ in us we have common thoughts and interests with them. We can have fellowship with those of different ages, backgrounds, cultures, and races because the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers.

Fellowship with other believers is an important aspect of our life in Christ.

What does Hebrews 10:25 (page 926) say about this?

Being with others who share our love for God is important. It encourages us and helps keep our commitment to Him strong. But it should never take the place of our own relationship with Him. Friends who also follow Jesus can help us in our faith, but we must take the time to invest personally in our relationship with Him, taking time to be alone with Him.

As we've seen, John clearly wants us to know Jesus as he knew Him. As we study 1 John further, we'll learn more about what it means to have a personal relationship with God.

Personal Reflection and Application

From this chapter,

I see...

I believe...

I will...

