



John's Letters: 1, 2, and 3 John

Using these Bible Studies

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values. We think this is a helpful way to have time together that focuses on many different areas of our lives as Christians, and not simply in getting more 'head knowledge' about God.

Live:

The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. The questions in the section will help you get to know the members of your group and help grow that sense of family which we are called into.

Grow:

In this section, the questions are designed to bring you to a deeper understanding of the Bible and to help you consider how the truths of the Bible can impact your life.

Serve:

Nothing is more fulfilling than using your God-given gifts to serve and help meet the needs of others in God's family. This section will help make that desire a reality. You will be encouraged and challenged to take steps to serve those inside and outside of the group.

Build:

The thought of sharing our faith can be scary and can feel awkward. Don't worry: this is a common feeling! However, God wants to use you to reach those around you for Christ. This section is designed to give you and your group practical, manageable steps for sharing Christ that can become a part of your everyday life.

Love:

You were made for God's pleasure. Even when we gather as a smaller group, it is great to have the opportunity to worship and to surrender your heart to God. This could come in a variety of forms such as prayer, singing, or simply sharing what God is doing in your lives. Contribute as much or as little as you feel able to.



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Introduction

Perhaps the account of Jesus' life with the most depth is John's gospel, written after he had meditated on all that Jesus had said and done. It was written '...that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' [John 20:31]. It is often said that to understand John's gospel better, you could do a lot worse than reading his letters 1, 2, and 3 John. In themselves, they are fantastic letters but the links to John's gospel as well are clear and come throughout the letters.

The letters were written around 90 AD (**NB** John's Gospel was probably written around 80 AD) and were almost certainly written by the Apostle John (who wrote the Gospel). 1:1-3 certainly seems to indicate that the author had walked with Jesus and was probably one of the disciples. Around 68 AD persecution was growing in the church and most of the disciples left Jerusalem; John ended up around Ephesus (Western Turkey) and had a significant ministry among the young churches there.

The most likely scenario is that John's gospel was circulating among the churches and a group had split off from these churches, denying some key truths about Jesus in the process. This group denied that Jesus had come in the flesh (4:1-3) and showed that they did not really belong to God's family by splitting off from the churches (2:18-19). John wrote these letters almost as a sermon with his gospel as the text to remind his flock about some core truths and to encourage them to stand firm.

The letters are repetitive and slightly circular, revisiting the same ideas and thoughts time and again. John covers three main topics:

- Knowing God – knowing the truth of who Jesus is and who we are in Jesus.
- Living well – following Jesus requires his followers to live in a certain way.
- Loving each other – God's people are called to love each other deeply, just as God loved them first in Jesus.

A key idea before we start the studies is that these three things – knowing the truth, living well, and loving each other – are not opposite to each other. John insists that ALL of these things are necessary in our walks with God. Truth is not just a mental assent to 'correct things' but is also about living and loving as Christians. Martin Luther King Jr. talked about 'unarmed truth and unconditional love'; everyone needs to know that they have sinned and JC died for them AND that they are loved and are not to go on sinning.

As you read through the letters, reflect on the key themes that keep coming up and enjoy the depth in these letters. We hope they will help you to continue to grow in your relationship with Jesus.

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Study 1: Light and darkness

Live

What is the naughtiest thing you ever did as a child? Looking back, is it funny?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God that we can know him through his Son, Jesus.

Grow

Read John 1:1-2:2 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Looking at 1:1-4...
 - What is the connection with word and life?
 - What does John mean about touching/hearing/seeing etc.?
 - Why is John writing this letter?
- Looking at 1:5-2:2...
 - What does John mean by darkness?
 - How important is what we say about ourselves and our lives? Why?
 - What confidence is there in this passage?
 - Jesus is described as the 'atoning sacrifice'. What does this mean?
- What are the similarities and differences between this passage and John 1:1-18?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- How often do you confess your sins to God? What impact does confession and forgiveness have on your walk with God?
- Do you have someone/a few people you can be honest with about your walk with God? (Is your small group honest?!)
- When did you last see Jesus? Touch him? Hear him?

Serve

How can you keep each other accountable in your walks with God?

Live

1:3-4 – do you feel like you have good 'fellowship' at St James/in your group? Why/why not? What would help you continue to build life together as a community?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray that you would walk in light, not darkness, and that you may be filled with joy.

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Study 2: The Christian and the World

Live

What do you want to be like when you are old? What are you looking forward to?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God that he has overcome the world in Jesus.

Grow

Read 1 John 2:3-29 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Looking at 2:3-11...
 - What does obeying God's commandments look like?
 - What are the old and the new commands?
 - Why does John talk so strongly about loving each other?
- Looking at 2:12-14...
 - Who are the children, fathers, and young men?
 - How do these verses give you hope?
- Looking at 2:15-23...
 - What does 'loving the world' mean/look like?
 - Why is it futile?
 - Who is the antichrist? What context might it refer to? (See the introduction.)
- Looking at 2:24-29...
 - What does John call the church to do instead?
 - What helps us to overcome the world and stand firm? How?
 - What hope do verses 28 and 29 give us.

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- How do you persevere in faith when the world seems to conspire against you?

Serve

How can you show love to the church fellowship this week?

Build

Does this passage encourage you to share your faith with those around you? Why/why not?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: you could use 2:12-14 as a basis for your prayers if appropriate.

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Study 3: Children of God

Live

If you woke up tomorrow as an animal, what animal would you choose to be and why?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Perhaps use the song 'Good, Good Father' and reflect/pray on the words used.

Grow

Read 1 John 3 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Looking at 3:1-3...
 - God calls us his children – what does the world think of us? Why?
 - What will we be one day?
 - What part does purity play in our lives?
- Looking at 3:4-10...
 - If sin is lawlessness, how does/did Jesus take away sin?
 - What does 3:9 mean? Can we really not sin?
 - Since we are children of God, what must we do (3:10).
- Looking at 3:11-24...
 - We have passed from death to life – what does this look like in our lives?
 - 3:15 uses very strong language. Why do you think John wrote like this?
 - Why are truth and action placed together (3:18)?
 - 3:21-22 – what gives us boldness before God? Can we really receive anything we ask for from him?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- 3:23-24 is the heart of John's letter. Spend some time reflecting on what this verse means and how you live it out.

Serve

3:17 is very practical – how can you help those in need this week?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other to know deep down that you are God's children. You could also use 3:23-24 as a basis on which to pray for each other.

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Study 4: God is Love

Live

What item, that you don't have already, would you most like to own?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. You could use the song 'Reckless Love' to help with your prayers and reflections.

Grow

Read 1 John 4 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Looking at 4:1-6...
 - 4:1 – who might false prophets be today? What kind of things would they say?
 - How can we 'test the spirits'? What helps us discern what God is saying through people?
 - What confidence does 4:4-6 give us?
- Looking at 4:7-16a...
 - What are the results of God being love/God's love for us?
 - How is God's love made complete in us (4:12)? What does that look like?
 - How do we know we live/remain in God?
 - 4:16a - What difference does it make to emphasise different words in this verse? (i.e. *God is love* vs. *God is love*.) Is one of them better than the other? Why/why not?
- Looking at 4:16b-21...
 - How does perfect love drive out fear?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- Is there any area of your life where you live in fear? What would it look like for God's love to drive out that fear?
- Are there brothers or sisters at St James who you really struggle to love or don't love? How can you love them better?

Build

Does this passage encourage you to share God's love with those around you? How can you show God's love and talk about God's love to those around you this week?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray for God to pour out his love upon you and for that to overflow to all those around you.

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Study 5: Knowing the Truth

Live

Play 'Two truths and one lie' – each come up with two truths about yourself and one lie and then try to work out for each other which one of the three statements is false.

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Praise God using truths about him, perhaps using a Psalm such as Psalm 146 or any from 96-100.

Grow

Read 1 John 5 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Looking at 5:1-4...
 - What does it mean that God's commands are not burdensome (5:3)?
 - What does conquering the world look like (5:4)? How can we do it?
 - What is the importance of belief in this passage?
- Looking at 5:6-12...
 - How did Jesus come by water and blood (5:6)?
 - How can we discern truth, especially truth about Jesus?
 - What are the various meanings of 'testimony' in this passage?
 - What does eternal life look like (5:11-12)?
- Looking at 5:13-21...
 - What do you make of 5:14-15? Are they easy or hard verses to hear?
 - Do you challenge your brothers and sisters about sin?
 - What might the difference be between sin that leads to death and the sin that does not?
 - If the whole world lies under the power of the evil one (5:19), how do we hold fast to God's truth?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- What are the idols in your life?

Build

Spend five minutes in pairs sharing your testimony. Try to speak for maximum a minute each and say how God has changed you. This is a great skill to have for when someone asks you why you believe in Jesus!

Serve

Pray for spiritual protection for each other and for physical places as well (e.g. homes, workplaces). Pray also for areas of darkness (e.g. St James grounds where Class A drug use often happens).

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray for God to help you all know his truth.

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Study 6: Truth and Love

Live

What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship.

Grow

Read 2 John together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Who are the women, children, and sister mentioned in v1 and v13?
- John is happy that they are walking in the truth (v4), but the church members were not as good at loving each other (v5-6).
 - Do you find loving each other or holding to truth easier?
 - In what situations might truth and love fight against each other?
 - Is there a way to do both together? How?
- What are the deceptions around us today (either within or outside the church)?
 - Why are false teachers so dangerous?
 - What should our response be to them? What does this look like today?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- Are you finding joy in your relationship with God at the moment? Why/why not?
- What truth is God speaking to you at the moment? How is his love reaching you?

Serve

Who have you not seen face-to-face recently at church? Is there someone missing or who you simply haven't caught up with? Why not text them now to see if you can find time to share together.

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray for joy and for God to keep speaking to you all.

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Study 7: Godly hospitality

Live

If I gave you £10,000 right now, what would you spend it on?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship together.

Grow

Read 3 John together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
 - God?
 - Humanity?
 - The church/God's people specifically?
- Who are your most faithful friends? What characteristics do they have? In what ways do they show God's character?
- What role does leadership and authority have in the church?
 - How does this fit with Jesus being the head of the body?
 - How does this fit with the image of the church as a body?
 - Is there ever a place for expelling people from the body/church?
- John places evil and good as clear opposites. Is that your experience? Why/why not?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- How do you practise hospitality?
 - Who are you hospitable to?
 - Is it a spiritual gift or do you find it difficult?
- What have you learnt from studying these books? What are the key things you will take away to change in your own life?

Serve

Is there anyone you can show hospitality to this week? Who, and can you invite them now?

Build

Does this passage encourage you to share God's love with those around you? How can you show God's love and talk about God's love to those around you this week?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray for the lessons from these books to go deep into your lives and for God to continue to work in you.