

THE LETTER

1 JOHN

21 DAY DEVOTIONAL



VERSES ARE IN THE ESV TRANSLATION
OF THE BIBLE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

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DAY 1

READ 1 JOHN 1:1-2

The first words of both John and 1 John allude to Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8 in depicting a time during which the world was “formless and void.” It was there, in the midst of dust and potential, that God spoke, breathing a spirit of life into all creation. In John’s language, the Word, translated Logos in Greek, was with God and was God during creation, but was also distinct from God. In becoming a manifest physical presence, Jesus is fully God and fully man; his physical body guides humanity to God yet cannot exhaust all that God is. He embraced the limitations of the human body to redeem all of humanity and to show us a glimpse of who he is. The creator stepped into his creation.

John opens his letter with articulation of the presence of Jesus, personally heard, seen, and touched by himself and the other disciples. The physical manifestation of Jesus precedes contemplation of his teachings because John intends to communicate the significance of Jesus’ immanence. Both fully God and fully man, Jesus entered the world with the intent of restoration of all things. His bodily presence, ministry, death, and resurrection allows for a tangible understanding of divine love, culminating in his willing sacrifice for all of humanity.

HOW does Jesus’ humanness influence your perspective of him?
WHY is it important for us that Jesus entered into creation?

DAY 2

READ 1 JOHN 1:3-4 // READ 1 COR. 1:17-31

Jesus' ministry introduced the disciples to an upside-down kingdom in which socioeconomic statuses of the age were flipped. The radical reorientation of values that Jesus presented altered nearly every belief held by his disciples. His life modeled values of servitude, generosity, and humility, particularly when directed toward those of low social status. Jesus' teachings drastically shifted how his followers viewed the surrounding world and their role within it. In this process of reorientation, the overflow of Jesus' heart filled their own until they couldn't help but pour out the Gospel to others through fellowship and service.

As Jesus makes his home in our hearts, we experience similar value reorientation as the first disciples. Alterations of beliefs and values aligns our hearts with Jesus' in such a way that enables us to see the world through his perspective. His love fills our lives until it can no longer be contained. As our hearts rest in abounding joy, we embrace childlike faith in wanting to share this love with all who cross our paths. Concern over eloquence of speech diminishes as our desire to simply share increases. The sweetness of Jesus is ever on our lips as it begins integrating into the conversations and relationships of daily life.

IS there anyone in your life that you could introduce to Jesus?

DAY 3

READ 1 JOHN 1:5-7

“Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’ – John 8:12

If light embodies all that is good, true, and dignifying, darkness embodies all that is corrosive, isolating, and disorienting. Darkness hardly overwhelms a person in a single instant, rather, it invites itself in moment by moment as it does when the sun sets each night. We rarely acknowledge the value of light until we are left to stumble in the darkness searching for the light switch.

Within this contrast lies the first of 1 John’s amplifications, light is that much brighter given the context of darkness. Though we cannot necessarily control when darkness will knock, we can control the extent to which we invite it in. If light fills the content of our hearts and directs the path of our feet, it can illuminate the reality of situations and ideas presented to us. That which is already light will be further illuminated, while that which is dark will diminish. To walk in light in this manner indicates a pattern, a lifestyle marked by allowing God’s radiance to determine that which we let reside in our hearts. Learning to walk in God’s light is a process, one that must occur step by step and day by day, as a transformative work takes place in our hearts.

HOW does the light that God offers alter the way you approach life?

DAY 4

READ 1 JOHN 1:8-10

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” - Acts 3:19-20

Prior to this passage, John articulates the differences of walking in the light and in darkness. These contrasting statements set up John’s depiction of how humans can walk in the light. Within this passage lies three “if statements” depicting a natural progression of our orientation to sin and the cross. The initial step is acknowledging sin as it arises in our lives. Sin, at its simplest, is a breach in relationship with God; intimacy and sin cannot coexist. By our own strength we cannot mend the relational disruption resulting from sin, but sin lost its stronghold as Jesus hung on the cross. As we set our sins at the foot of the cross day after day, we are reminded of the chains that no longer bind us and a Father whose love is unending.

From this point of awareness, we are freed to share our sins with God. He does not look upon our shortcomings with degradation; rather, he delights in our continual turning to him for guidance and restoration. The final “if statement” restates the need to confess continually because though pursuing Jesus does not eradicate temptations or sin, it frees us of an identity bound by sin. John writes not to condemn, but to emphasize the importance of the Cross.

HOW could naming sins before God restore intimacy with him?

DAY 5

READ 1 JOHN 1: 6-10 // READ 1 JOHN 2:1-2

John 2:1-2 is the conclusion of six neatly paired conditional sentences our author writes beginning in John 1:6. John writes, “my little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” John interrupts his well-structured argument to remind his audience of his dear love for them. This is the first time John will use the language of a caring father as he writes to this community. Throughout 1 John, our author is constantly reminding this church that he loves them dearly. We must remind ourselves that John is writing to a congregation that has been deceived and misguided. How beautiful it is that John does not tell his church “you should have known better” or “how could you believe and do this?” but gently calls them back into right thinking. As we will see, John has a complicated understanding of sin in this letter. John is writing as a father, a tender care-giver, to prevent his kids from being caught up in life that leads to death. As John calls his kids back into a proper understanding of sin, he doesn’t condemn, but corrects and encourages. John reminds his congregation that although we may sin, we have an advocate, a friend, who has not just forgotten sin, but taken care of it.

ARE there things in your life that need correction? Confess these things to a loving Savior.

DAY 6

READ 1 JOHN 2:3-6

If you've grown up in or around the church, you may read verse three and shudder a bit. There is an uncomfortable tension that presents itself when we may read a verse that implies, we must do something to relate properly with our Father. We must remind ourselves here John is writing to a church. These are people that have already recognized Jesus' deity, his life, his resurrection, and have received his Spirit. Further, John is not speaking of salvation but of communion—of “knowing God.” As honest readers of the Bible, we remind ourselves that often times our assumptions and definitions don't fit the context of the ancient letter we are reading. John's definition of “knowing” is far from ours. For John and his world, knowing was not simply tied to information, but intimacy and communion. The Bible even goes as far as to describe sexual intimacy as “knowing” your wife or husband. This is level of depth, intimacy, and experience is the understanding we must bring to knowing God. Knowing God is simply impossible without sharing and experiencing the life he lived. It's not a gate God is putting up between us and him, but a logical impossibility. God has given us a Spirit eager to empower us to live a life that reflects his own. It is by participating in that life where we begin to know the Father, as a Father knows a daughter or a son.

HOW can you tangibly pursue spiritual intimacy?

DAY 7

READ 1 JOHN 2:7-11

In John 13, Jesus says “34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” 2:7 starts with “I’m not writing you a new commandment, but an old one!” Yet just the next verse says, “at the same time, it is a new commandment.” John’s apparent contradiction stems from his assumption that we have Jesus’ words playing in our heads. John’s audience would have quite well known those words. John goes on to discuss themes of love and light as apart from hate and darkness. For us to live in light—in light of the resurrection; in light of the Spirit living in us; in light of how Jesus has loved us—we are called to refuse to live as if these things were not the case. For John, living and acting in darkness is to live as if God had not redeemed us and invited us into communion with him. In contrast, living in light is living in the grand reality that is not always apparent. The reality of the Gospel is that all will be and is being made new in through the work of Jesus. It is for this reason we may live and love as Jesus did.

WHO can you love like Jesus today?

DAY 8

READ 1 JOHN 2:12-17

It is quite easy to read the Bible in a manner that emphasizes atomization and not unification. 1 John, having been broken up into various sections divided by headings, is a perfect example of this. While it would be easy to read 1 John 2:12-14 as one section and then explore 1 John 2:15-17 as another, these two periscopes are beautifully linked. Our author writes in verse 12-14 an encouragement to all believers. John writes “little children” to address all of us as children of God, next he addresses the mature in their faith (the fathers) and then the young (the young men). (It should be said that while the language John is using is quite patriarchal, John is indeed referring to “young people” not just the dudes!). “15 Do not love the world” John writes. John warns us against the desires of our flesh, the desire of our eyes, and the pride of life. John contends with the believer young and old to not be drawn toward what is passing away. John’s tender encouragement is necessary for us to understand the gravity of this situation. John writes as a Father who knows what’s best for his kids. As we live in a world and a body tainted by sin, through the power of the Spirit, we are called to live beyond that.

HOW can understanding eternity influence your perspective of today?

DAY 9

READ 1 JOHN 2:18-27

We must remind ourselves that John is writing in response to a group of secessionists that have left the church because they think they know better. It is through this lens we see how hopeful and encouraging this passage can be, while maintaining respect for the author's intent.

As John is writing to a group of believers that are downtrodden and confused, he reminds them that they already know what is true. John encourages them that what they have been taught from the beginning, the very foundations of their faith, is what they shall stand on. John reminds us that we have the Spirit as our guide and teacher. A comforter and means in which we have fellowship with God. It is now, when we are isolated and only have our screens as a way to communicate where ideas about God, the church, and everything else can come under attack. It is in a time like this we must rely on what we know to be true; what we've been taught from the beginning. The God who loves me and gave himself for me is alive and active in the world. Shame has no place in the Kingdom of God. Jesus will bring redemption, healing and reconciliation and no one else. It is by living in and out of these truths that we "enjoy the eternal life he promised us."

WHAT Scriptural truths can you cling to?

DAY 10

READ 1 JOHN 2:28-29

Again, we are met with John's tender address, "little children." The call to abide is a call to sit in and with God as he is in and with you. John's full understanding of abiding is found in John 15 where he describes fruit connected to a vine as analogous to abiding. It is in abiding, the tender quiet, where we begin to know God. By abiding with and in the god who presents himself with the glory described of Mt. Sinai and the Transfiguration, we take on the life of him. As we abide in God, his final arrival to bring about the New Heaven and New Earth will not appear to us as something to hide from or will invoke fear in us but wonder and joy. For we have been getting tastes of the New Creation as we witness God's renewal in us and through us. We have been gazing upon slivers of God's wonder as we abide. His anticipated arrival will not be shame for us, but wonderous joy. It is because we abide, that we will undoubtedly grow in righteousness. As he is righteous, we will too be righteous.

HOW can you abide?

DAY 11

READ 1 JOHN 3:1-3

The tenderness underlying this passage resembles the tone with which a loving father speaks to his children, an image which is utilized to express the relationship between God and mankind. He uses the term child, indicative of familial origin, likeness, and relationship. Just as a caring father to his child, God speaks over humanity words of love and identity as they cultivate characters which resemble his.

As a child ages, he or she learns how to relate to the surrounding world and the people in it by observation; what is seen becomes what is done. Children with secure attachments grow to mimic the personality, heart, and lifestyle of the parental model. Increasingly so, parents fall short, for the nature of humanity inhibits them from satisfying our every need. Yet, even children lacking worldly parental affection or security are offered a redemptive narrative in allowing God to reparent and renew old scripts engrained in a family of origin. He calls us to step into a new identity as his beloved children, learning to relate to the world in love and sacrifice as he modeled. As we step into the identity of children of God, we grow in likeness of his heart and character.

WHAT qualities were modeled to you in your family of origin?

HOW may God be wanting to redeem your narrative through offering you a new identity as his beloved child?

DAY 12

READ 1 JOHN 3:4-10

John begins this passage with a baseline statement of the negative nature of sin. He then considers the contradictory nature of sin and Jesus, naturally concluding that daily abidance in Jesus leaves no room in our hearts for the effects of sin. John's thought progression culminates in emphasizing the effects of practicing either sin or righteousness on the state of a person's character and lifestyle.

As humans, our brains are malleable by the process of neuroplasticity. Essentially, each mental or bodily repetition strengthens the associated synaptic connection and the brain anticipates future firing of this same pathway. Our habitual thoughts and actions quite literally shape the outcome of our lives. This necessitates paying deliberate attention to how we fill our mind and time, for we are the product of our practices. Sin and discipleship both entail a form of contemplation or behavior and often begin in small increments, each act building on the last. Each repetition reinforces the speed and strength of neural connections toward similar tendencies in the future. Therefore, simple habits leaning into either sin or discipleship prepare our minds to engage in similar behavior later on. Awareness of this allows us to deliberately choose the path that leads to abundant life rather than sin.

WHAT types of thoughts and actions do you participate in daily?

HOW are these thoughts impacting the state of your heart and mind?

DAY 13

READ GENESIS 4 // READ 1 JOHN 3:11-15

There are some situations where the solution is either black and white, right or wrong. For example, Cain killing his brother. It's wrong right? Right. It makes me think how far I would push my morals to get what I want. It's that moment when black and white turns into a grey area. There's no rulebook for the unknown. Verse 12 states, "We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous." Even though Able was doing what was right, he still got punished. Same goes for us when we share that we are followers of Jesus Christ. The world views that as worth punishing or out of the normal. How do we fight that judgement? Even though we are following the righteous path, we still get punished. Doing what is just and doing what is right does not always mean it is easy. Press on.

HOW do you react to judgement and persecution?

WHERE is an area in your life you need to press on?

DAY 14

READ 1 JOHN 3:16-24

“This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us.”

I hope I am not alone in this, but 2020 has forced me to recognize and wrestle with some really ugly parts of myself. Stripped of the familiar, and launched into the wilderness of life today, I have spent most days feeling really raw, and if I am being honest, kind of defensive.

This passage is challenging, but especially in lue of 2020. If you are feeling uncomfortable, it's okay, I am too. It is easy to fall into a pattern of judgement when we are feeling attacked. It is easy to comfort ourselves with comparisons. I think though if we are honest with ourselves, we are craving the love and acceptance God is talking about here. We are yearning for a love that stays; one that laces up its boots, not to walk out the door, but rather to venture on the journey with us. I think a lot of us (calling myself out here) have forgotten how to love with compassion. I want to remind you that God is not asking you to be perfect, but he is asking you to be willing to grow. As we venture further into this wilderness that has been 2020, let's make a commitment to compassionate and committed love, for ourselves and for each other.

HOW can you be compassionate towards yourself and others? Who can you show compassion to?

DAY 15

READ 1 JOHN 4:1-6

It is really easy to write off passages like this as something that was made for a different time. I'll be honest, I had to read a few different translations to grasp what John was trying to warn us about. Phrases like "false prophets" can feel intimidating and hard to relate to. So let's break it down together. In this passage, John is helping us recognize the difference between those who know God, and those who only claim to. He is cautioning us to beware of who we listen to, because Satan knows how to dress like a Christian. John 10:10, "the thief (being Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

The first part of these verses can feel frightening, but John goes on to reassure us that "you already have conquered them." You are of God, and with that comes the ability to discern between a spirit of truth and a spirit of falsehoods. Lean into this power today, consciously examine who you are listening to, and who's words hold weight in your heart. Take a moment to recognize words or beliefs that have taken root that you need to let go of.

HOW does Paul tell us we can recognize a "false prophet"?

HOW can you guard your heart from this spirit of falsehoods going forward?

DAY 16

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-12 // READ JOHN 15:9-17

Love as we understand it, is a little unclear in definition. In conversation we can say we love our mom in one breath and pizza in the next. If love were the same across the board, wouldn't asserting the same worth to pizza as your mom be a little offensive (unless of course you truly do love pizza that deeply).

John's audience wouldn't have been able to look up a definition of love, but as John painted a picture of the love that Christ gave so generously, he also allowed a picture as to what he was asking his friends to do. The type of love that John wrote about in the Greek was "agape" love. It wasn't just a feeling, but a deep-rooted choice rooted in will. In calling the believers to agape love, John called this group and calls us today to love in such a way where we live unconcerned with our selfish wants and desires and seek the best interest and the greater good of others. As believers we are called to love like Jesus.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friend." - John 15:13

WHO has demonstrated agape love to you?

WHO can you love with the same love that Jesus demonstrated for you?

DAY 17

READ 1 JOHN 4:13-21

God calls us to remain in Him, and in this way God and his love will remain in us. In simplicity and in our humanness, we can mistake an easy command and at times come up short. In loving God, I find myself doubting that the only thing the Creator of the universe wants from me is my time and attention. He could have asked for anything, but what he wanted was for me to abide in Him, rest in Him, meditate on Him; and yet, I think a lot of us spend most of our time doing anything but this. In loving others, I have found loving without God extremely difficult. When I start offering people my idea of love, I usually end up hurt and exhausted, or end up hurting those I love in my exhausted state.

This passage reminds me that God did not intend for love to be done alone. He calls you first to be loved, and then to go and love. Our God is so good, knowing our need for love and the joy that is found in giving love from overflow. Today, wherever you're at, take a deep breath, and sink into the comfort of being fully known and fully loved.

WHAT does it look like to remain in the love of God?

WHAT does it look like for you to sit and abide in his presence?

WHAT is something that distracts you from remaining in God's love?

DAY 18

READ 1 JOHN 5:1-5

When rival football teams play against each other it's a pretty big deal. Everyone asks each other, who are you rooting for? People talk about the game for weeks before and after. Fans remember the years their team won and mourn the years that their team lost. There is so much hype around the game year after year. Imagine not just being on the winning team but the undefeated champions without even having to try out. You walk on with no requirements, and no questions asked. As faith filled believers in Jesus, that is what we have!

“And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the son of God” (1 John 5:5). He holds the victory. As believers, we are on the winning team. We are loved by the one who defeated death. Winners don't live as those who've lost the game. Walk with victory, have confidence as a member of the winning team, and live up to the standards of the team. Verse three says, “Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.” We are given clear instructions as to what it means to love God. Our debt is paid, and our sin erased, what we now have left to do is praise God and follow His command.

DO you walk with victory?

WHO in your life needs to be reminded that Jesus always wins, and that they can walk in victory?

DAY 19

READ 1 JOHN 5:6-12

With all that is happening in our world it can be easy to just ebb and flow and forget the power of God, or on the other hand to see our problems and try to brush them off as too small for the all-powerful Creator to worry about. Luke 12:28, “And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?”

Nothing you’ve done or will do will hinder that love and care for you! Verse 11-12, “This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in His son. So, whoever has the son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life.” Whoever means whoever, not just perfect people. Anyone can have a second chance, and anyone can grab hold of the love and care. No one is ever too far gone from eternal life. Give up whatever you’ve been carrying by yourself: the anxiety, the worry, the fear, the sin. Remember no one is ever too far gone for life and no problem is too big or too small for the caring love of Jesus.

WHAT is something you’ve been holding onto?

HOW do you need to allow God to care for you?

DAY 20

READ 1 JOHN 5:13-15 // READ JOHN 14:8-14

Throughout John's letter we see his heart for a community who knew Jesus and yet were being confronted and enticed by false doctrine and teachings that were in opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As John wraps up this letter, a reminder of the assurance of salvation and an encouragement to this community to love others as they were first loved, John encouraged prayer in the same way that Jesus did in John 14. Scholars believe that John's mention of prayer, was in hopes that the community of believers who he wrote to, would pray for the people in their community who were unreceptive of the Gospel and were succumbed to the teachings of the false prophets in their community. If were the community that John were writing to, it would be safe to say that he would be encouraging us to pray for the people in our midst who have yet to know the salvation and hope found in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God hears our prayers for our friends, and family who may not yet know the hope that we have found in the Gospel, and while we may not always see the hand of God working, we can be confident that he hears and that he is faithful.

WHO do you need to be praying for?

IS there someone that you've been praying for, and need to begin praying for again?

DAY 21

READ 1 JOHN 5:16-21 // 2 KINGS 6:16-17

Eugene Peterson in the Message, paraphrases 1 John 5:18, “The God-begotten are also the God-protected.” In the final moments of his letter John encouraged the believers to pray for the salvation of those who were walking towards an agreement with false teachers and a disbelief of the Gospel and then in a tender way reminded these people of what they had themselves.

The people that John was writing to were those who understood the Gospel and believed it for their salvation. These people were “the God-begotten,” they were those who were adopted into God’s family through the working of Jesus on the Cross. John reminded these people, as we ourselves can be reminded that as we are in God’s family that we are also “the God-protected.” We are reminded in Scripture and in understanding eternity, that there is a spiritual battle happening around us each and every day, and in these last few moments John paints such a sweet picture for hope in the midst of that battle. As Christ followers, and as the God-protected, we are safe.

John finished his letter with a single verse to contrast the picture he had given, “keep yourselves from idols.” In a way, John is posing the question to these believers and us today, “why settle for something less than the ‘God-begotten’ and ‘God-protected’ type of life?”

WHAT idols do you face in your life?

WHAT can you tangibly do, to keep yourself from idols?



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