

WHERE JOY BEGINS

1 John 1:1-4

January 4, 2026 | Pastor Keith Krell



SCRIPTURE READING

1 John 1:1-4; John 13:1-38; John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27;
John 16:1-33; John 17:1-26; 2 Peter 1:12-21

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How have you personally experienced Jesus in a way that changed your life? What was it that you heard, saw, examined, or touched that influenced you to believe in Christ (1:1-2)? Why is it important to base your faith on the biblical revelation of Jesus?
2. Why is there such a growing interest in theology among young people? Is theology really that important? If so, why? Why must theology and practice always be joined? What can happen when they are separated?
3. When have you experienced genuine Christian fellowship (i.e., fellowship where Christ was central, 1:3)? What factors made this experience so meaningful? What can you do to facilitate fellowship in the lives of believers around you? Who most helps you grow in knowing and following Christ?
4. In what ways are you actively proclaiming your faith (1:3) rather than keeping it private? Who do you desire to experience Christian fellowship with that is currently an unbeliever? Pray for an opportunity to share with that individual what you have experienced in your relationship with God.
5. Joy is the product of fellowship with God (1:4; cf. John 15:11; 16:20, 22, and 24). What is the difference between joy and happiness? In what ways do you struggle with joy? When have you experienced biblical joy? Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Hebrews 12:2; James 1:2; and 1 Peter 1:6. How do these verses remind you to be joyful in all circumstances? Where in your life could deeper fellowship with Christ and His people bring greater joy and transformation?

RECOMMENDED READING

J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity* (David C Cook, [2013] 2023)

Jerry Bridges, *True Community* (NavPress, 2012)

Christine Hoover, *With All Your Heart: Living Joyfully Through Allegiance to King Jesus* (Baker, 2020)

Tim Chester, *Enjoying God* (The Good Book Company, 2018); *Enjoying Jesus* (2024)

Randy Alcorn, *Happiness* (Tyndale Momentum, 2015)

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LIVING IN THE LIGHT: AN OVERVIEW OF 1 JOHN

THE PURPOSE: To emphasize the importance of maintaining fellowship with God and holding fast to apostolic doctrine.

THE THEME: Vertical and horizontal fellowship promotes true joy and keeps believers from doctrinal and moral error.

THE LITERARY GENRE: Although 1 John is typically referred to as an epistle/letter; it is more sermonic in its form. John uses the pastoral phrase “I write to you” a dozen times in his brief book.

THE AUTHOR: From its early history, the church believed the apostle John wrote 1 John. Several ancient writers referred to this letter as John’s writing. Though modern critics have challenged this view; they haven’t destroyed it. From the standpoint of internal evidence, there are some stylistic differences from the gospel of John, but these can be attributed to the differences between an epistle and a gospel. Furthermore, many similarities exist by way of key words (“abide”) or contrasting figures like “light and darkness,” “righteousness and sin,” “life and death,” “love and hate,” and “truth and error.” Additionally, the writer was one of the original witnesses of the Savior who knew Him intimately (1:1-4).

THE AUDIENCE: According to early church tradition, John ministered in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia, for many years after he left Palestine. We know that John knew the churches and Christians in that Roman province well from Revelation 2 and 3. Perhaps his readers lived in that province. It is also possible that 1 John was a circular letter to be distributed among several churches. John’s readers are undoubtedly saved individuals. They are regularly referred to as “little children” (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 5:21), “beloved” (3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11), they are cleansed from their sins (1:7; 4:10), and they have eternal life (5:11-13).

THE FALSE TEACHERS: A number of false teachers had arisen in the churches of that area. The exact form of the heresy facing these Christians is difficult to determine, but from the content of 1 John it involved denial of the reality of the incarnation (i.e., Jesus came in the flesh) and a claim that sinful behavior didn’t hinder fellowship with God. John uses strong terms to describe these men, showing that they weren’t true Christians who merely had different opinions on some minor matters. He calls them “false prophets” (4:1), “antichrists” (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), “liars” (2:22), and “deceivers” (2 John 7; 1 John 2:26 [verb]). He repeatedly implies or states that they are not of God (4:6), but are from the devil (3:8, 10); they are from the world (4:5); and they don’t know God (3:6; 4:6). Their purpose was to deceive the Christians on essential matters of doctrine and practice. John states: “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you” (2:26; cf. 2 John 7). They had at one time been in the church, but they had left to form their own churches, based on their supposedly “enlightened” view of things. John writes: “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us” (2:19). It is likely these false teachers took a number of church members with them and were actively recruiting from those who remained. They probably said, “We used to believe just as you do, but we’ve moved to something better. We have deeper knowledge than we used to have. Come and check it out!” The constant pressure led to doubt and turmoil within the entire church.

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¹E.g., Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian.

²There are many similar expressions and phrases: cf. 1 John 1:1 with John 1:1, 14; 1:4 with John 16:24; 1:6-7 with John 3:19-21; and 4:9 with John 1:14, 18; 3:36.

³Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 413.

DATE AND SETTING: It is difficult to precisely date 1 John, but since many of the themes and words are so similar to the gospel of John, it's reasonable to assume it was written after the gospel but before the persecutions of Domitian in A.D. 95. The consensus of scholars is that John wrote 1 John late in his life (A.D. 90-95). The letter is a polemical discourse against heretics who are explicitly denying that Jesus was/is the Christ (2:22-23). These antagonists claim to have fellowship with the Father apart from Christ (1:6). In so doing, they contend that works may achieve access to the Father and to eternal life.

KEY VERSES: 1 John 1:3-4: "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." See also 5:11-13.

"Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (2:28).

KEY PHRASES: There is a wealth of antithetical parallelism: light vs. darkness, truth vs. falsehood, love vs. hatred, love of the world vs. love of the Father, Christ vs. antichrists, children of God vs. children of the devil, righteousness vs. sin, the Spirit of God vs. the spirit of the Antichrist, and life vs. death.

KEY WORDS: The key concept is intimate fellowship as expressed in the terms "fellowship" (koinonia, 1:3 [2x], 6, 7) and "abide/remain/continue" (meno, twenty-four times 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 24 [3x], 27, 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24 [2x]; 4:12, 13, 15, 16 [2x]). The most prolific word in the letter is "love," which occurs forty-six times. Another especially significant word is the verb "to know," which is used a total of forty times (ginosko [25x]; oida [15x]). The endearing term "brother" (adelphos) or "brothers and sisters" (adelphoi) is also used twenty-eight times in this epistle.

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS:

- The epistle is one of the earliest books to be accepted into the NT canon.
- The epistle contains the simplest Greek in the NT, yet it holds incredibly deep theological truths.
- The epistle lacks the author's name, greetings, wish/prayer, and personal details.
- The structure is described as a braid or spiral, with its major themes recurring in a circular fashion.
- There is a pastoral element to the letter (e.g., 2:12-14).
- John frequently uses antithetical parallelism (e.g., light vs darkness, truth vs. lies).
- There are absolute statements (e.g., 3:6).
- There are no OT quotations, and the only incident referenced is Cain's story in 3:12.
- The doctrine of regeneration is prominent (e.g., 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

CHRIST IN 1 JOHN: The present ministry of Christ is portrayed in this epistle (1:5-2:22). His blood continually cleanses the believer from all sin (1:9), and He is our righteous Advocate before the Father (2:1). The letter places particular stress on Jesus' incarnation (1:1-2), His identity as the Christ (2:22; 4:2-3), and His return (2:28-3:3).

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⁴ All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

⁵ John's repetitive use of three conjunctions "and," "that," and "if" contribute to John's simplistic style of writing.

⁶ Most of the twenty-one NT letters begin by stating who the letter is from, who the letter is addressed to, followed by a blessing or a prayer. In fact, John's other two letters in the Bible—2 and 3 John are models of this ancient letter writing formula. But in 1 John we find something very different, something that almost sounds like the beginning of John's gospel that he wrote before this letter. This unexpected beginning is probably written this way because John is correcting misunderstandings of his gospel, and he knew that as soon as he started writing like this his readers would immediately remember his earlier words, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God" and so forth.

BASIC OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction: A Call to Fellowship (1:1-4)
- II. Conditions for Fellowship (1:5-2:2)
- III. Conduct Consistent with Fellowship (2:3-27)
 - A.The Intimacy of Fellowship (2:3-11)
 - B.The Commandment of Fellowship (2:12-17)
 - C.The Cautions for Fellowship (2:18-27)
- IV. Characteristics of Fellowship (2:28-4:21)
 - A.The Purity of Fellowship (2:28-3:10)
 - B.The Practice of Fellowship (3:11-24)
 - C.The Proving of Fellowship (4:1-6)
 - D.The Pattern of Fellowship (4:7-21)
- V. Consequences of Fellowship (5:1-17)
 - A.The Validation of Salvation (5:1-13)
 - B.The Verification of Answered Prayer (5:14-17)
- VI. Conclusion: The Certainty of Victory (5:18-21)

COMPARISON WITH JOHN'S OTHER MAJOR WRITINGS:

The Holy Spirit used the apostle John to pen the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. Each of these works serves a unique purpose. In the Gospel, John wrote evangelistically, seeking to draw people to faith in Jesus. In his letters, he wrote practically, addressing how Christians should live in light of the gospel. And in Revelation, he wrote prophetically, unveiling the future. As Roy Laurin puts it: "The Gospel of John takes you back to yesterday; the Epistles of John help you face today; and the Revelation of John unveils your tomorrow." These five works are incredibly unique, and because of that, we can expect the letter of 1 John to be different from John's other writings. However, each of John's works complements the others and, together, they provide a complete picture of the Christian life.

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The Gospel of John	1 John	Revelation
Past history	Present experience	Future hope
Justification	Santification	Glorification
Christ died for us	Christ lives in us	Christ comes for us
The deity of Christ is seen in the life, death, and resurrection	The deity of Christ is seen in doctrine and experience	The deity of Christ is seen in the context of eternal glory
The Word made flesh	The Word made real in us	The Word conquering
Christ the Savior	Christ the Shepard	Christ the Sovereign
Christ the Prophet	Christ as High Priest	Christ is King
Psalm 22	Psalm 23	Psalm 24
Foundation of our faith	Assurance of our faith	Culmination of our faith
False shepards over Israel	False teachers in the world	A false king over the earth
The world judged and condemned Christ	The world bids for the believer's affection	The world is judged and destroyed by Christ
Faith	Love	Hope

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⁷For similar language, see Charles C. Ryrie, “The First Epistle of John,” in The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 1465–66 and Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, Talk Thru the Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 489.

⁸Roy L. Laurin, First John: Life at Its Best (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987), 12.

⁹The chart below is revised and adapted from John W. Lawrence, “Hebrews-Revelation Notes” (Portland: Multnomah School of the Bible, 1977), 13–16.