



NG Study Guide: Christmas Eve Message - 1 John 1:1-4 :: “Jesus Brings Joy” [12.24.23]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: Our greatest yearnings are to experience real life, real relationships, and real joy. This Christmas, we’ll discover the greatest gift, because Jesus satisfies those longings, and today we’ll discover how.

Subject: Jesus Brings Joy

Object: Experience real life, relationships and joy

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Context: The Apostle John wrote this letter between 85-90 A.D. to second and third generation believers. They had no personal experience with Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Nevertheless, their fullness of joy would flow from the love of God, life with God, and the assurance of eternal life. John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23). He wasn’t suggesting that Jesus loved him more than the others, nor was he saying that Jesus loved him but not the others. John discovered the love of God in Christ Jesus, and John’s response to that love was transforming.

1. Real life (1-2)

Jesus offers spiritual life: Three times we see the word *life* (1-2). The Greek *zoe* means the essence of life or spiritual life, and is contrast with *bios* referring to physical life. All true life flows from a proper relationship with Jesus. Life with Christ offers a sure identity, acceptance, hope and contentment that is not available in the material world. Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Only God can give real life, because it is a spiritual reality that is experienced in the midst of a material world.

Jesus is God: *Jesus was from the beginning* (1). It speaks of Jesus’ eternal existence. John similarly began his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). John makes clear that Jesus is God and can give real life; and Jesus is man.

Jesus is man: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled* (1). At Christmas we celebrate that God became man and dwelt among us. John declares that he, the apostles and thousands and thousands of other witnesses *heard, saw, looked upon, and handled* Jesus (1). What we believe is historical, tangible evidence from credible witnesses who had an unimpeachable personal encounter with Jesus. They experienced Jesus’ humanity, and they beheld His glory (Matthew 17, John 1:14). They handled Jesus after his resurrection proving He was not simply spirit, but had

a glorified resurrected body perfectly designed to spend eternity in the presence of the true and living God (Luke 24:39).

Jesus personifies real life and offers real life in this life and the life to come to those who choose to follow Him. John notes twice that this life was *manifested* [2] or made known or evident to man. How does God reveal Himself to man? God is generally revealed by creation (Romans 1:20), and specifically through the Bible (Hebrews 1:1). Yet, it is Jesus who perfectly reveals God to us through His words and works (Hebrews 1:2). If you know Jesus you know the Father (John 14:9). He became what we are to make us what He is, as we experience life with Him.

2. Real relationships (3):

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus offers a real relationship with God: The purpose of declaring Jesus is to create *fellowship* (twice in verse 3). The Greek term *koinonia* refers to sharing and participating with, having in common, community and communion. God loves you and created you for relationship with Him, but it is man's sin and rebellion that obscures and hinders a relationship with God (Genesis 1-3).

When you receive Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit, a spiritual birth, and your sins are forgiven. Thus, you can and do experience relationship with God the Father and Son. Religious activity such as reading the Bible, prayer, contemplation, gathering with an assembly of other believers to sing God's praises and learn the Bible, service, and giving are transformed from hollow ritual to genuine worship and adoration. You begin to appreciate and appropriate God's love for you, and you discover that you are growing in your love for God.

Jesus offers a real relationship with others:

John declared His purpose was for others to experience *fellowship with us*.

Our relationship with God is to be enjoyed and experienced in relationship with other believers. We are called to gather as a larger assembly, and as smaller groups where authentic relationships are cultivated with people who will positively influence you and you can influence them to help grow in relationship with Christ (Acts 2:42-47). The Christian life is experienced and enjoyed in community with other believers.

3. Real joy (4): *And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*

Jesus offers real joy that transcends circumstances: God's desire for man to experience life characterized by joy is seen in the Garden of Eden, but is lost in the fall of man. Joy endures hardship and difficulties and connects them with purpose and trust in God. People pursue happiness, but choose joy in Christ. In Christ joy is restored. God wants your joy to be *full* or abundant, complete, and overflowing. Joy flows from relationship with God. King David, the sweet psalmist of Israel wrote, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy..." [Psalm 16:11]. Jesus, declared, "**These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full**" (John 15:11). Jesus had been speaking to them about His death, resurrection, Second Coming, the work of the Holy Spirit and their need to simply abide or dwell with Him. Joy flows from proximity to Christ, and the assurance of your ultimate destiny with God.

Study Guide Qs:

Q1. Why might people tend to think that "real life" relates to the material world?

Q2. How have you discovered that spiritual life with Christ is as real (or more real)?

Q3. How can real life be related to relationships with God and others?

Q4. Consider a difficult set of circumstances you experienced during the last year. How are you navigating the circumstances to arrive at real joy in Christ?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Learn how Jesus brings joy to the world here:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/joy-to-the-world.html>.

2. Read an interesting article about Christmas as the great rescue mission: <https://calvarychapel.com/posts/christmas-the-great-rescue-mission/>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:
Invite someone at the church to join your Neighborhood Group.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The “Disciples Who Dig Deeper” section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the “Disciples Who Dig Deeper” section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The “Love your neighbors” section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The “Disciples who make disciples” section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.