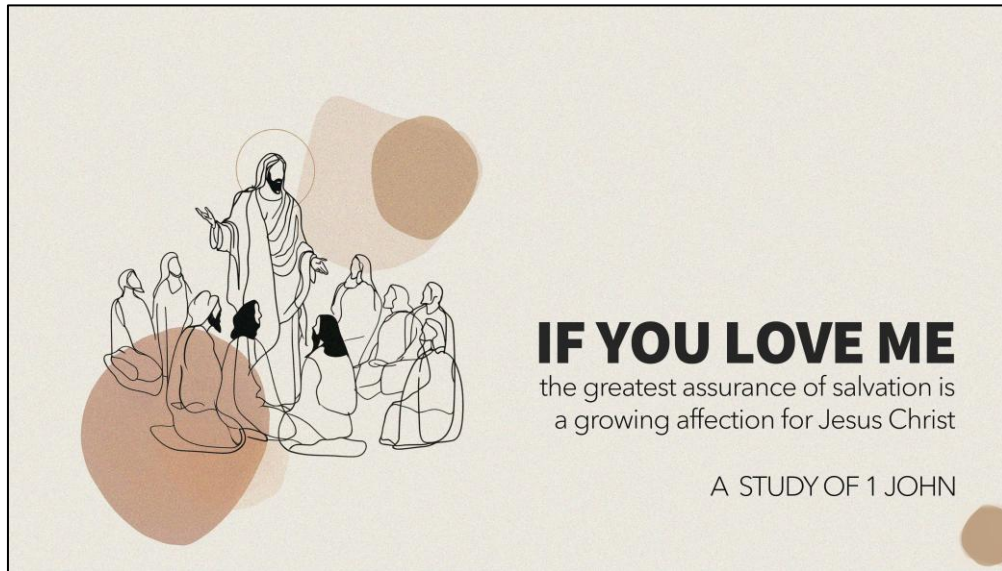




Assurance & Affection

Do you really know Jesus and do you really love Jesus?

1 John 1:1-4

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia

©Monty Watson – September 27, 2026

ASSURANCE & AFFECTION
Do you really know Jesus and do you really love Jesus?
1 John 1:1-4

The Apostle John knew Jesus up close and personal. He walked with Him. He heard every word and witnessed every miracle. In his own words, John said, “I’ve seen Him, I’ve heard Him, and even touched Him.”

First John is a sequel to the Gospel of John. In this short letter, John explained the Gospel to a new generation. He also explained what Jesus meant when He said, “If you love Me ...” In this short letter, John describes what a true Christian looks like. He describes what it looks like to truly believe and to truly love Jesus Christ. And that’s why the theme of 1 John can be summed in this sentence. ***The greatest assurance of salvation is a growing affection for Jesus Christ.***

The Apostle John is called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:7, NAS).¹ Jesus loved John and John loved Jesus. John often heard Jesus say, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NAS). And John heard Jesus ask Peter, “Do you love Me?” (John 20:21, NAS). John heard Jesus emphasize love over and over again. So, as an old man, John wrote a letter to explain to a new generation what it meant to love Jesus.

Christianity is more than believing a list of theological precepts. It’s more than following a list of moral standards. Christianity is about loving Jesus. So, this fall we’re going to study the New Testament book of 1 John to deepen our love for Jesus Christ.

Around the age of 90, and around the year of 90 AD, John wrote this special letter to a new generation.

¹That which was from the beginning (*referring to Jesus*), which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – ²the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – ³that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4, ESV).

¹¹And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13, ESV).

Paraphrasing John’s words, “*The Creator of the universe has appeared. I’ve seen Him, I’ve heard Him, and even touched Him. I’m an eyewitness and I proclaim to you that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And in a human body, He died for our sins on a cross. But then, miraculously, He came back to life. And through Him, we can have eternal life. And I love Him because He has*

invited me into a personal relationship that will never end. And He's inviting you into that relationship as well."

Christianity is not just theological. It's not just moral. It's relational. It's about a personal, intimate, affectionate relationship with Jesus Christ. A day-by-day and moment-by-moment relationship with Him. Jesus is inviting us not only to believe in Him, but to walk with Him, to know Him, and to love Him. We can know Jesus personally!

The greatest assurance of salvation is a growing affection for Jesus Christ.

JOHN & HIS MESSAGE

So, who was John?

John and James were brothers and lived near the Sea of Galilee.² They were fishermen, along with two other brothers, Andrew and Peter. And on the same day, they met Jesus. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, NAS). There was something so compelling about Jesus that both sets of brothers "immediately left their nets, and followed Him" (Matthew 4:20, NAS).

John was one of the twelve apostles. He traveled with Jesus for three years. He heard every word and witnessed every miracle. Several times in the New Testament, John was called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:7, NAS).³

John was the author of five books in the New Testament. The Gospel of John, which is a theological telling of the story of Jesus.⁴ Then 1, 2, 3 John, which describe what a true Christian looks like. And the book of Revelation, in which Jesus gave John a vision of the future.⁵

John is called "the elder" and wrote this letter as a grandfather, a dozen times referring to them as "little children."⁶ His letter is personal and affectionate. But he also writes with authority, as an apostle and as an eyewitness.

First John is a sequel to the Gospel of John and repeats much of Jesus' teaching to a new generation.⁷ The letter is also difficult to follow.⁸ It's not linear, but cyclical. John cycles through several themes, moving from one theme to another with no transition. One moment he writes about the incarnation of Jesus, and the next he writes about loving each other, and the next he writes about breaking the habit of sin. Then he repeats the cycle.

But three themes are obvious. John addressed three problems and called a new generation to three commitments.

First, a commitment to truth, especially the truth about Jesus. "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:2-3, ESV). John repeated the great truth he declared in his Gospel, affirming the incarnation of Jesus. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14, ESV).

John countered the heresy of his day. In Ephesus, there was a Gnostic leader named Cerinthus who denied that Jesus was a real man.⁹ According to the Gnostics, Jesus only seemed to be a man.¹⁰ His body was not a real body, only a divine disguise. The Gnostics believed that all flesh was evil. Therefore, it was inconceivable that the divine could become flesh. But if Jesus did not come in the flesh, then neither did He die in the flesh. Thus an attack on the Gospel. John's letter was a call to truth, written to combat heresy, and to affirm that Jesus was indeed the incarnate Son of God.¹¹

Second, a commitment to obedience. “We know we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3, ESV).¹² John repeated what he had Jesus say so many times. “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:6, NAS).

The Gnostics believed that all flesh was evil, yet they also believed that intellectual enlightenment could elevate a person above sin. So, a person's body could do something immoral, but the soul would not be guilty.¹³ It was rationalized immorality. But John said, “If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves” (1 John 1:8, NAS). Even Christians sin from time to time, and the only way to avoid it is to walk in obedience, to walk in the light, and to walk in fellowship with Jesus.¹⁴

And third, a commitment to love. “If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11, ESV).¹⁵ The Christian historian Jerome wrote about John as old man. When too old to preach, John would be carried into the church on a stretcher and all he would say was, “Little children, love one another.” And when asked why he always said the same thing, John replied, “This is the Lord's command. If we do this, it is enough.”¹⁶

Believe. Obey. Love. These are the three themes of 1 John and sum up the Christian faith. A commitment to truth, believing that Jesus is the Son of God. A commitment to obedience, obeying Him because we love Him. And a commitment to love each other the way Jesus has loved us.¹⁷

Some further context is that John was in Ephesus when he wrote 1 John. He was the elder statesman and spiritual father of the church in Ephesus. In the book of Revelation, John recorded the words of Jesus to the church at Ephesus. Jesus commended the church for their “toil and perseverance” (Revelation 2:2, NAS). He commended the church for taking a stand against false teachers. But Jesus also confronted the church. “But I have this against you, you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4, NAS). The church known for its courage and its theology had left their first love. They substituted doctrine for devotion.¹⁸ They believed all the right things; they just did not love Jesus like they used to.

This is a warning for us. We fall short if we love the book and fail to love the Author of the Book. So to avoid making the mistake the Ephesians made, we're studying 1 John to deepen our love for Jesus Christ.

John was the last living apostle. His letter carried weight because, as John Stott writes, he was an eyewitness to the “historical, visible, audible, tangible manifestation of the eternal.”¹⁹ His letter was so prominent that many of the early church fathers referred to it as the foundation of their churches – Polycarp, Papias, Eusebius, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Cyprian.²⁰

Again, 1 John is a sequel to the Gospel of John, in which the opening words declare, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory” (John 1:1, 1:14, ESV).²¹ John knew Jesus up close and personal. He heard every word and witnessed every miracle. He witnessed both the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. John knew Jesus personally. “I’ve seen Him, I’ve heard Him, and even touched Him.”

“I’VE SEEN HIM”

So what did John see? A quick survey of the Gospel of John tells us.²²

- John saw Jesus turn water into wine.²³ John was at the wedding at Cana when Jesus performed the first miracle, and that was the day everyone realized that Jesus was no ordinary man.
- Jesus was there the day Jesus ransacked the temple.²⁴ He saw Jesus crack a whip, turn over tables, and chase the moneychangers out of the temple.
- John was there the day Jesus healed a cripple at the pool of Bethesda.²⁵ Jesus said, “Pick up your pallet, and walk” (John 5:8, NAS). And John saw the man get up and walk.
- John was in the boat the night Jesus came walking across the water.²⁶ Imagine the impression that made.
- John was in the room the night Jesus got on His knees and washed the disciples’ feet.²⁷ What a humbling night that must have been.
- John, along with Peter and James, witnessed the supernatural transfiguration of Jesus, when Jesus’ face and clothing shined as bright as the sun. When Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking to Jesus. It revealed that Jesus was divine, the bridge between heaven and earth.²⁸ John was there. He saw it.
- John was with Jesus the night He was arrested.²⁹ When the soldiers demanded that Jesus identify Himself, He said, “I am He.” And in his Gospel, John inserted the comment that the soldiers “fell to the ground” (John 18:6, NAS). John was there. He saw it happen.
- John was there when Jesus was crucified.³⁰ He saw Jesus beaten and nailed to a cross. He watched the one he loved die.³¹
- John also saw the empty tomb. He and Peter ran to the tomb that morning and went inside. Jesus’ body was missing, and at that moment, the Bible says, “he saw and he believed” (John 20:8, NAS).
- And later that day, John saw the resurrected Jesus.³²

John is saying, “I love Jesus because I’ve seen Him. I love Him because I saw Him do all these things.”

“I’VE HEARD HIM”

What did John hear? Again, a quick survey of the Gospel of John tells us.

- John heard Jesus tell Nicodemus, “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, NAS). John heard Jesus tell Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).
- John heard Jesus debate the Jewish leaders and say, “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!” (John 5:39, NLT).
- John heard Jesus say, “I give eternal life” (John 10:28, NAS). He heard Jesus dare to say, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30, NAS). He heard Jesus claim to be the Son of God.
- John heard Jesus say time and again, “Love one another. As I have loved you, love one another” (John 13:34, NIV).
- John heard Jesus promise heaven. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms ... and I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1-2, NIV).
- John heard Jesus say, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NAS).
- John heard Jesus say, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NAS).

John is saying, “I love Jesus because I heard Him. I heard the sound of His voice and the truth of His words. I love Jesus because I heard Him say all these things.”

“I EVEN TOUCHED HIM”

And John touched Jesus. A grip of the hand, a pat on the back, a hug. And something else, the word “touched” can also be translated “handled,” and can refer to handling an inanimate object.

When Jesus was crucified, John was the only disciple who did not run away. He stayed.³³ He watched.³⁴ And when Jesus breathed His last, John was with Joseph and Nicodemus as they removed Jesus’ body from the cross. John was with Joseph and Nicodemus as they prepared Jesus’ body for burial. John handled the limp, bloodied body of Jesus.³⁵ John held God in his arms. Do you think he ever forgot that moment? No way! If anyone understood the sacrifice of Jesus, it was John. And that’s why he loved Him.

John is saying, “I love Jesus because I’ve seen Him, I’ve heard Him, and even touched Him.” John loved Jesus because He knew Him personally!

AND SO CAN WE

And so can we. We can't know Jesus physically as John did. None of us have ever seen Him. None of us have ever heard His voice. None of us have ever touched Him. But we can know Him. Peter was right when he said, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8, NIV).

And that's the message of 1 John. ***The greatest assurance of salvation is a growing affection for Jesus Christ.***

Knowing Him means assurance of salvation. John used the word "know" 162 times. Assurance of salvation is a dominant theme in all his writings. He repeated this throughout 1 John and ended the letter with this great conclusion. "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may ***know*** that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:12-13, ESV).

The purpose of 1 John is to give us confidence and certainty that Jesus is the Son of God, and that through faith in Him we belong to God, and that the promise of eternal life is true. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may ***know*** that you have eternal life."

Knowing Him means affection for Christ. We see the word "love" 117 times in John's writings. Why? Because he heard Jesus emphasize love over and over again. So, as an old man, John wrote a letter to explain to a new generation what it meant to love Jesus.

In his Gospel, John quoted Jesus when He said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, ESV). In his letter, John repeated what Jesus said, that we prove we are children of God "when we love God and obey his commandments" (1 John 5:2, ESV).

Love and obedience are like two sides of the same coin. But love comes first. You don't obey your way to love. You love your way to obedience. Love comes first. That's why knowing Him becomes affection for Him. It's delighting in Him, enjoying Him, treasuring Him.

Affection is a deep, intimate love for our Savior. And the greater our appreciation for Him, for what He did for us on the cross, the greater our affection for Him. The cross, the cross, the cross. Oh, the more we return to the cross, and consider how much He loved us, the more we will love Him.

Jesus said, "Abide in Me ... Abide in My love ... for you are My friends" (John 15:4, 9, 14). "Abide in Me" implies relationship. "Abide in My love" implies affection. "You are My friends" implies walking with Him and experiencing a personal, intimate, day-by-day, and moment-by-moment relationship with Him.

John Piper tells us why He loves Jesus. "I admire Jesus Christ more than any other ... I enjoy his ways and his words more than any others ... I want his approval more than anyone else

... I want to be with Him more than anyone else ... I feel more grateful to Him than anyone else ... I trust Him more than anyone else ...”³⁶

CONCLUSION

In this short letter, John explained to a new generation what Jesus meant when He said, “If you love Me ...” John describes what a true Christian looks like. He describes what it looks like to truly believe and to truly love Jesus Christ. ***The greatest assurance of salvation is a growing affection for Jesus Christ.***

One of the church’s most beloved hymns is called “My Jesus, I Love Thee.” Those words were written by a 16-year-old teenager in 1864. William Featherstone lived in Montreal and attended a Methodist church with his family. One Sunday, the Holy Spirit touched his heart and he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. This 16-year-old teenager went home and wrote a poem. “My Jesus, I love Thee.”

Tragically, William died at the age of 27. Long after his death, his aunt found his poem. She was so moved by it that she enlisted help to turn it into a song. And for 150 years, it has been a heart-moving hymn of the church.

*My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine ...
I love You because You first loved me
And purchased my pardon on Calvary’s tree
I love You for wearing the thorns on Your brow
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, ‘tis now.*

NOTES

¹ See also John 13:23, 20:2.

² Jesus nicknamed John and James “Boanerges,” meaning the sons of thunder (see Mark 3:17).

³ See also John 13:23, 20:2.

⁴ In contrast to Luke’s Gospel, which was a more historical approach.

⁵ The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John, who also authored one Gospel and three small New Testament letters. John had been exiled to the island of Patmos, off the coast of modern-day Turkey. He was in his 90s. It had been 60 years since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The emperor Domitian was in power. He was the fiercest of the Roman emperors and demanded that citizens address him as “our Lord and God Domitian.” [William Barclay, *The Revelation of Jesus*, Volume 1, The Daily Bible Study Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), page 19.] When the early Christians refused to call Domitian “Lord,” writes Anne Graham Lotz, “they were sentenced to die by the thousands. Some were thrown to the lions in the great coliseum; some were burned at the stake. Others were wrapped in the skins of wild animals and fed to dogs or dipped in tar and lit as torches for the emperor’s garden. Still others were crucified, including mothers with the babies draped around their necks.” [Anne Graham Lotz, *The Vision of His Glory: Finding Hope through the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996, 1997), page 20.] It was a terrifying time in history when Jesus gave the book of Revelation to John. It was written to comfort, to encourage, and to inspire hope, not only for these first century believers, but for believers in every generation.

⁶ John is called “the elder” in 2 John 1, 3 John 1. He used the phrase “little children” in 1 John 2:1, 2:12, 2:13, 2:18, 2:28, 3:7, 3:18, 4:4, 5:21.

⁷ Stott writes that John was “quoting or echoing the teaching of Jesus” which he recorded in his Gospel. [John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), page 38.]

⁸ See W. Hall Harris III, “Structure and Purpose of 1 John,” www.bible.org, for a fuller explanation on the difficult structure of 1 John and the history of approaches of interpretation.

⁹ Stott, *The Letters of John*, page 50.

¹⁰ Known as Docetism.

¹¹ Stott, page 44, writes that John’s letter is “not a theological treatise,” but an urgent “tract for the times.”

¹² See also 1 John 5:3. John repeated what he heard Jesus say. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15, ESV).

¹³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1-3 John* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), page 8.

¹⁴ See 1 John 1:6-7.

¹⁵ The whole Bible is a call to love. In Deuteronomy 6, the Hebrew Shema called God’s people to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5, ESV). Jesus called this the greatest commandment (see Matthew 22:36-38). John heard Jesus repeat this call to love time and again. So, it’s no surprise that John wrote so much about love.

¹⁶ Stott, page 53.

¹⁷ Stott, pages 55, 58-59.

¹⁸ Quoting Oswald Chambers, see Joseph M. Stowell, *Why It’s Hard to Love Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), page 21.

¹⁹ Ibid., page 30.

²⁰ Stott, pages 18-19.

²¹ John was an eyewitness. Luke wrote about the apostles being “eyewitnesses of the word” (Luke 1:2). Peter called the band of brothers “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

²² The Gospel of John is the most theological of the four Gospels. John recorded only 7 of the 35 miracles of Jesus. John was selective and more contemplative.

²³ See John 2:1-11.

²⁴ See John 2:13-17.

²⁵ See John 5:1-9.

²⁶ See John 6:16-21.

²⁷ See John 13:1-16.

²⁸ See Matthew 17:1-8. See also John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2002), page 102.

²⁹ See John 18:1-11.

³⁰ See John 19:17-37.

³¹ “The disciple whom He loved (was) standing nearby” (John 19:26).

³² See John 20:19, 26, 21:7.

³³ “When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved (John) standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to John he said, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, (John) took her into his home” (John 19:26-27, NIV).

³⁴ MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, page 113.

³⁵ See John 19:38-42.

³⁶ John Piper, “I Love Jesus Christ,” December 31, 2008, www.desiringgod.com.