

Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith

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Study Through the Bible

Introduction

How do you know you are an authentic Christian? How do we recognize true Christianity in the spiritual maze and religious muddle in which we find ourselves in today?

People might answer these questions in different ways. Some would boldly assert what they believe, telling you about their commitment to Jesus Christ. Others might say that Christians are identified by their love for one another. Someone else might explain that they are not Christians because of the failures and hypocrisies they have seen in the lives of those who claim to be Christians. Others might declare that all religions are essentially the same, all taking different routes to the same God. In these days of religious pluralism and spiritual syncretism, these kinds of questions are both challenging and inescapable.

The small but important letter that we call 1 John presents us with three indisputable “tests” regarding authentic Christianity. We must pass all three tests at the same time to know with assurance that we are living a life pleasing to God.

The Tests

“The Tests of Life” is the title Robert Law used in 1885 for his series of studies in the Book of 1 John. Law said that the letter gives us three tests that we must constantly be applying to our lives.

The Theological Test. John presents us with statements that articulate what we must believe. The Christian faith is tethered to the historical event of Christ and to the apostolic witness. As Christians, we are not free to change or adapt the essentials of the faith. Time after time, John challenges us to consider what we believe. In the midst of the theological relativism of our day, it is vital that we are committed to the truth of God’s Word.

The Moral Test. It is not enough just to believe the right things. Orthodox doctrine must shape and direct how we live. John calls us to a life that can be described as “walking in the light.” There can be no dichotomy between what we say and how we live. If what we believe does not shape how we behave, John says that we have no alternative but to face the truth that we are liars.

The Social Test. Orthodoxy by itself can be sterile. The Pharisees give us ample proof of that. John calls us to the practical and sensitive expression of Christian love. It is not enough to say that we love God. Loving God must stimulate us to love one another. It is not enough to say loving words; we must translate this into loving actions (3:18).

While each of these tests is vital by itself, we must respond to all three questions at the same time. There are people who have kind and loving hearts, but who have no Christian beliefs. Others may live morally, but have no personal commitment to Christ. Sadly, there are Christians who have assented to the orthodox creeds of faith, but whose lives lack love or morality. So it is not enough to pass only one of the tests. The challenge is to pass all three tests at the same time. They are woven together into a single strand. Each stands on the other; each depends on the other; each weaves into the others.



Count the number of times John uses the phrase, “we know,” or, “by this we know.” John also talks about “walking in light,” and its opposite, “walking in darkness.”

This is how John leads us into the path of Christian certainty and assurance.

The opening paragraph of 1 John says:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

We write this to make our joy complete.



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

Jesus Christ Is Central

Jesus is the basis of our faith and fellowship.

In this first study, we will see that John presents Jesus Christ as the basis of our faith and our fellowship. Our faith must be anchored in the historical truth about who Jesus Christ is and how we come to know him.

Scripture:

1 John 1:1-4

Based on:

"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

The 105 verses that comprise 1 John form a powerful statement of Christian truth and life. Their message has lost none of its relevance and impact for our time. For a generation that is being seduced by the bewitching voices of heresy, John begins by rooting us in the historical basis for truth. To those who are trapped in the prisons of subjectivism and relativism—that it is all in the way you see things—John demands that we retrace our steps and get back on solid biblical ground.

To Christians who might easily lose confidence, living in the atmosphere of despair and pessimism that has fallen on our world, John writes not only to inspire spiritual confidence, but to declare with assurance what “we know.” He presents us with ways of proving the reality of the spiritual life to ourselves. To those who are lost in the mists of mysticism, seeing everything only in vague spiritual terms, John challenges us to put love into action, deed, and truth. Whoever we are, we need to listen afresh to the message of 1 John.

Discussion Starters:

- What heresies (spiritual untruths) do you hear most often from those around you?
- Are you confident before God, or full of doubts? Explain.
- Do you feel that you can easily tell spiritual truths from spiritual lies? If so, how? If not, why not?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The Christian faith is founded on the historical reliability of Jesus Christ.

Read 1 John 1:1–4.

These opening verses form a tightly condensed prologue, just as John 1:1–18 forms the prologue to the Gospel of John. They are unusual in that they do not contain any personal greetings or references. It was customary for a writer in the first century to begin a letter by introducing himself. This was Paul's usual format, and it also holds good for the epistles of Peter, James, and Jude. Only the Epistle to the Hebrews and 1 John start without any introduction.

Without any of the normal opening remarks, we are launched immediately into the central truth of John's message—the Word of life. The central truth of the Christian faith is founded on the historical reliability of Jesus Christ.



- [Q] John is talking about physically seeing and touching Jesus Christ in verse 1. Why does he call him the Word of life? What would that mean to our daily lives?
- [Q] He opens with, "That which was from the beginning," and in verse 2 he tells where this Word of life existed before his physical birth on earth. Read John 1:1–5 and Hebrews 1:3.
 - How are all these verses similar?
 - What do they tell you about the nature of Jesus Christ?
- [Q] With increasing force, John presents the audible, visible, and then the tangible expression of God's work in Jesus. What do you think John was trying to get us to understand?
- [Q] Read John 20:24–29. How might these three steps of recognizing and understanding who Jesus truly is be demonstrated in Thomas coming to faith in Jesus Christ?

Teaching point two: Christian fellowship is essential for our maturing in Christ.

The opening four verses of this powerful letter have been called "a grammatical tangle." Only in the third verse do we actually come to the main verb and purpose that John wants to outline.

- [Q] What does he say is the main purpose of his letter?

John introduces us to one of the key words in the Christian life—*fellowship*. The Greek word for *fellowship* is *koinonia*. True *koinonia* cannot be created with coffee and cookies.

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by God in which we may participate."

Fellowship is essential for our maturing in Christ. The fellowship of the local church is the spiritual womb within which we can grow in Christ. Fellowship together is also essential for effective evangelism.

- [Q] With whom does John say we already have the reality of fellowship (v. 3)?
 - How is that similar to or different from fellowship with one another?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us understand the scriptural meaning of fellowship.

Activity: Using a Bible concordance or Bible dictionary (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bible#tools>), find 5 other verses that use the word "fellowship," each with a different facet or meaning—for example, our fellowship with God, with one another, etc.

Teaching point three: The Christian life is one of joy.

A second purpose of John's letter to us is given in verse 4. He says, "We write this to make our joy complete." Notice how this is almost identical to John 15:11.



- [Q] How would you define or describe *joy*?
- [Q] What do you think John means when he says that our joy can be made complete? How have you experienced that in your life?

This is how Eugene Peterson translates these verses in *The Message*:

From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in – we heard it with our own ears, we saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so that you can experience it along with us, this sense of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: we want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Much of the atmosphere of our culture and even current spiritual teaching is marked with subjectivity and existentialism. We have little sense of objective historical truth. Many would argue that as long as something produces the right feelings or responses, then it is sufficient.

The ground of our certainty about Christ has not changed. The fact that we read the epistles of John in the 21st century rather than the first makes no difference. The Christian religion is still anchored in the historical event of Christ and the witness which the apostles bore to it.

Ask several in the group to share how they came to faith in Jesus Christ, testifying how the truth of 1 John 1:1–4 became a reality in their lives.

- [Q] Some today would say that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere. Having read 1 John 1:1–4, how might you respond to this?
- [Q] How would you respond to someone who says that they do not believe in the historical reality of Jesus Christ?
- [Q] If you met someone who said, "I believe in Jesus, but I have no need for the church," how would you reply to them?

Action Point: How can we deepen the reality and strengthen the quality of *koinonia* in our church or small group?

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

To Christians who might easily lose confidence, living in the atmosphere of despair and pessimism that has fallen on our world, John writes not only to inspire spiritual confidence, but to declare with assurance what “we know.” He presents us with ways of proving the reality of the spiritual life to ourselves. To those who are lost in the mists of mysticism, seeing everything only in vague spiritual terms, John challenges us to put love into action, deed, and truth. Whoever we are, we need to listen afresh to the message of 1 John.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The Christian faith is founded on the historical reliability of Jesus Christ.

Teaching point two: Christian fellowship is essential for our maturing in Christ.

Teaching point three: The Christian life is one of joy.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Much of the atmosphere of our culture and even current spiritual teaching is marked with subjectivity and existentialism. We have little sense of objective historical truth. Many would argue that as long as something produces the right feelings or responses, then it is sufficient.

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—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

God Is Light

God illuminates what should be exposed in us.

Light has a demanding quality; it exposes what we sometimes want to hide in the darkness. In the spiritual life, we call this confession.

Scripture:

1 John 1:5–10

Based on:

“The Tests of Life,” by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Light is one of the universal religious symbols. The statement we read in 1 John 1:5, that “God is light,” reverberates all through the Scriptures as it describes the character of God. From Genesis to Revelation this is how God is described. We read in Revelation that “there shall no longer be any night, and they shall not have need of the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them.”

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Have you ever experienced total darkness, such as being in a cave or tunnel? If so, what was that experience like for you?
 - How does that experience help you to appreciate that God is light?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God's light reveals our darkness.

In both his gospel and his epistles, John is able to condense the profound character of God into three simple yet inexhaustible statements. They charm us with their simplicity, yet they challenge us with their depth.

- God is spirit (John 4:24)
- God is love (1 John 4:8)
- God is light (1 John 1:5)

Here are some things we need to keep in mind:

- The nature of God at work in creation is described in terms of the giving of light.
- Salvation is seen in terms of the light of God coming into our lives (2 Corinthians 4:6).
- Our moral character is often described in terms of walking in light, rather than in darkness (see Ephesians 5:8–14 and 1 Thessalonians 5:4–5).
- The light of God is a demanding force in that it exposes the darkness in our lives. It often reveals what we would prefer to keep hidden.

The ability of the divine light to expose our self-deceptions is what we are going to explore in this study. John challenged the people of his day and ours who would seek to live in the illusion of deceit. A society that exists long enough with the distortion of reality can come to believe that the false images they have become so used to are in fact the real thing. Not only that, but the dangerous corollary is that the truth is then thought to be a distortion.

John calls on us to recognize the false ideas we hold.



Read 1 John 1:5–10.

- [Q] God is light. Also read James 1:17. How does this help us to understand the character of God?
- [Q] What does it mean that “in him there is no darkness at all”?
- [Q] Read John 9:5. How did Jesus use this symbol for himself?
- [Q] In the Bible, the idea of light is used to express both intellectual illumination as well as moral expression. Read John 3:18–21.
 - What does Jesus say about light’s activity in this passage?
 - How does this relate to our lives?
- [Q] Read Ephesians 5:8–11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8. What does it mean for us to “walk in the light”?

Teaching point two: We need to agree with God’s assessment of us.

In 1 John 1:6–10, we are given three false claims, each beginning with the phrase “if we claim” (verses 6, 8, 10). Each one is followed by the consequences of accepting and living the lie. Finally, we are given a healthy remedy, as we allow the light of God to be at work in us. Keep this structure in mind as you work through the passage.

- [Q] What is the first deceptive attitude that John outlines (v. 6)?
 - What is the error or misconception of this position?
 - What biblical remedy does he present?
- [Q] What is the second misconception (v. 8)?
 - What are some of the ways that we deceive ourselves?
- [Q] The biblical remedy to this dangerous act of self-deception is confession. What does it mean to confess?
 - What does confession do? What does it accomplish?

We often find confession difficult. In his chapter on confession in *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster says:

The discipline of confession brings an end to pretence. God is calling into being a church that can openly confess its frail humanity and know the forgiving and empowering grace of Christ. Honesty leads to confession, and confession leads to change.

- [Q] Why do we find confession so difficult?



- [Q] What does Psalm 32:1–5 teach us about the work of confession in our lives?
- [Q] What is the third denial we can present (v. 10)?
- What does this do to our relationship with God?
 - The biblical remedy is that we have an Advocate who pleads our case for us before God. His name is Jesus. Why is this truth so important?
 - How does this help us to deal with the reality of sin?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us confess our sins to God.*

Activity: *Write down any of your sins that you are aware of. After writing them down, confess them to God. Then write out 1 John 1:9 and tear the paper up, signifying that your sins are forgiven.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

- [Q] What are some of the ways you see people deceiving themselves?
- [Q] Read James 5:16. When is it right and appropriate to do this?
- What are some of the ways this brings healing?
 - When might this be inappropriate and do more harm than good?

Action Point: If you feel comfortable, confess something to your group that you would like them to pray about with you. Close by praying for each other in these matters.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

God Is Light

God illuminates what should be exposed in us.

Light has a demanding quality; it exposes what we sometimes want to hide in the darkness. In the spiritual life, we call this confession.

Scripture:
1 John 1:5-10

Based on:
"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Light is one of the universal religious symbols. The statement we read in 1 John 1:5, that “God is light,” reverberates all through the Scriptures as it describes the character of God. From Genesis to Revelation this is how God is described. We read in Revelation that “there shall no longer be any night, and they shall not have need of the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them.”

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God’s light reveals our darkness.

Teaching point two: We need to agree with God’s assessment of us.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God’s light reveals the ways we deceive ourselves. We need to be quick to recognize these deceptions and agree with God about our true state.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

Live with Assurance

God knows us, and we can know him.

Christianity stands at the crossroads between two great truths. It declares that God knows us. Then there is the assurance that we can know God. This study will outline for us how we can live with that assurance. It will tell us how we can live in the sure and certain truth of our faith.

Scripture:

1 John 2:1-17

Based on:

"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

One of the constant needs for many Christians is assurance. Our convictions are challenged in many different ways. At times we are confused by the ministry of Satan, who is described as the father of lies. If he cannot get us to disbelieve, then at least he will try to get us to doubt. We are also confronted by the paradoxes and contradictions of life. Some things do not make sense. Finally, we can create our own dilemmas by the way we live. If our lives do not reflect our inner convictions, we are sowing the seeds of doubt, which will eventually undo our own assurance.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Do you feel confident about your Christian faith? Why or why not?
- [Q] Are all doubts bad? What is the difference between a good doubt that furthers your faith and a destructive doubt that destroys it?
- [Q] Do you think your life reflects your inner convictions? Why or why not?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We can be confident in our relationship with God.

In 1885, Robert Law called 1 John "The Tests of Life." He outlined what he called "the three cardinal tests" by which we could assess the reality of our spiritual lives. The first test is theological—whether we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). The second test is moral—whether we are keeping God's commandments. The third and final test is social—whether we are expressing love for one another. These tests are designed to give us the certainty and assurance of our relationship with God.

The Book of 1 John is about knowing God. What are we made for? To know God. What should be our life's goal? To know God. What is the best thing in life? To know God. What gives God the greatest pleasure? That we would desire to know him.

John believes that we can know God. Not only that, but he writes with confidence that we can know that we know God. There are ways we must live that will reinforce the truth we say we believe. This will not only reduce inner confusion in our lives, but will give us the assurance we need.

Read 1 John 2:1–11.

- [Q] John hopes that we will not sin (2:1). But we do sin. So what does he mean?
- [Q] What do we do with our sin? Where do we take it? How does John answer this in 2:1–2?



- [Q] How does John say that we can know God in verse 3?
- [Q] Look up John 14:15 and 15:10. How do these verses relate to one another?
- [Q] What commandment is God calling you to obey right now?
- [Q] What is John's conclusion in 1 John 2:4 about someone who says he knows God but doesn't obey him?
 - How does this refer back to 1 John 1:8?
- [Q] What do verses 5–6 tell us about someone whose life does reflect consistency in his or her spiritual relationship with God?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us understand what an atoning sacrifice is.*

Activity: *Using a Bible concordance or Bible dictionary (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bible#tools>), find out what you can about the Day of Atonement. Also read Leviticus chapter 16.*

Teaching point two: The way we treat others reflects our relationship with God.

Having focused on what we have called “the moral test,” John now turns to what we have called “the social test,” which addresses our relationships with one another.

1 John 2:7 reminds us that this message is not something new at all. It is an old message in the sense that it has always been the message and commandment of God for our lives. But John declares that there is still something “new” about it.

- [Q] What do you think he means by this in verse 8?

Read 1 John 2:9–11. These verses are uncomfortably forthright. They allow no room for compromise.

John says that hate and love are more than verbal statements. We display the real condition of our heart by the way we act toward people. We are either walking in the light, or we are walking in darkness. The contrast is stark and absolute.

- [Q] How would you define “the social test” according to these verses?

Teaching point three: Do not love the world.

In 1 John 2:12–17, John addresses three groups of people whom he refers to as children, young men, and fathers. These may be actual age groups or may refer to Christians at different stages in their spiritual development. God's family, like every human family, has members at different stages of maturity. We also need to remember that our growth as Christians does not necessarily coincide with our chronological age, nor with the number of years that we have



been Christians. Our spiritual growth is not chronological, but relational. It comes from our response to God and obedience to his Word.

Work through verses 12–15, noting the message that John has for each group.

Little Children	Young Men	Fathers

[Q] Now that you see the message that he has for each group, why do you think he writes what he does to them?

Read 1 John 2:15–17.

[Q] What do you think John means in this passage by “the world”?

[Q] How would you relate this to Romans 12:1–2?

[Q] Why is he so emphatic that if we love (the Greek word is *agape*) the world, we will not know what it means to have the love (*agape*) of God in us?

[Q] What three things does John list in verse 16 to describe the pleasures of the world?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us recognize the sin that is so prevalent in our society.*

Activity: *Divide into groups of three or four. Provide everyone with a magazine or newspaper that contains a lot of advertisements. Ask each group to find an example of each of the three things described in verse 16.*



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In this chapter, John addressed an age-old problem—those who say that they know God and have made a profession of faith, but show no evidence of this in their lives. Sadly, we must confess that this situation is still with us today.

- [Q] What happens to the witness of a church when people live like that?
- [Q] How should we address people who say they are Christians, but don't act like it? Should we ignore them or confront them? Explain your answer.
- [Q] What happens both in our lives and in the lives of others when we do reflect the truth that we confess?
- [Q] As you reflect on your spiritual life so far, what has helped and stimulated you the most and caused you to grow?
- [Q] The struggle is that we have to live "in" the world, but we are not to be "of" the world. This is what Jesus prays for in John 17:15. How do we live in this tension?

Action Points:

- In what ways do you need to align your lifestyle with your beliefs?
- How can you change any hurtful attitude you might have toward someone? If you're comfortable doing so, share your answer with the group and pray for each other.
- What practical steps could we take to strengthen our Christian lives against the temptations of the world?

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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Scripture:
1 John 2:1-17

Based on:
"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

One of the constant needs for many Christians is assurance. Our convictions are challenged in many different ways. At times we are confused by the ministry of Satan, who is described as the father of lies. If he cannot get us to disbelieve, then at least he will try to get us to doubt. We are also confronted by the paradoxes and contradictions of life. Some things do not make sense. Finally, we can create our own dilemmas by the way we live. If our lives do not reflect our inner convictions, we are sowing the seeds of doubt, which will eventually undo our own assurance.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We can be confident in our relationship with God.

Teaching point two: The way we treat others reflects our relationship with God.

Teaching point three: Do not love the world.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In this chapter, John addressed an age-old problem—those who say that they know God and have made a profession of faith, but show no evidence of this in their lives. Sadly, we must confess that this situation is still with us today.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 4

LEADER'S GUIDE

Confidence Before God

We can know the truth from a lie.

This study will show what it means to live in the last hour. In a spiritual climate that can easily be marked by despair and disbelief, John writes to us so that we can live with confidence.

Scripture:

1 John 2:18-29

Based on:

"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Many courses available today are designed to teach confidence. But can you imagine a course being offered on how to be confident before God? This is the thrust of this study. As we look at 1 John 2:18–29, we will see that this is the conclusion John is leading to (v. 28). The Greek word for *confidence* (*parrhesia*) means “frankness of speech.” It carries the sense of being able to come before someone and speak boldly.

John’s daring conclusion is that we can live and stand with confidence! This is what Charles Wesley captured in the final verse of his powerful hymn “And Can It Be”:

No condemnation now I dread,
Jesus and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head
And clothed in righteousness divine.
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown through Christ, my own.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Would you describe yourself as a confident person? Why or why not?
- [Q] What is the difference between being confident before humans and being confident before God?
 - How can we be confident before God?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To learn what it means to be confident by New Testament standards.*

Activity: *Break into groups of three or four. Ask each group to look up the following ways the word confidence is used in the New Testament and to come to a consensus about what confidence means according to verses. After about ten minutes, reconvene and discuss.*

1. *There is confidence or fearlessness in witnessing (Acts 2:29; 4:13; 4:29–31).*
2. *There is confidence in having access to God (Hebrews 10:19).*
3. *There is confidence in being able to come before God in prayer (1 John 3:21; 5:14).*
4. *There is confidence in that we will be able to stand before God without shame at the appearance of Christ (1 John 2:28).*



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should be aware of those who teach falsely.

We have seen both the moral and the social tests introduced. We will come back to them again. Now John turns for the first of several times to the theological test.

Read 1 John 2:18–29.

[Q] 1 John 2:18 says, “Dear children, this is the last hour ...” See also 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6. What do you think John meant by this?

- “The last hour” has already been 2,000 years in coming. How relevant is John’s word to us today?

[Q] What do you think “antichrist” means or refers to?

Leader’s Note: You may find a Bible Dictionary helpful (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bible#tools>). See also 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4.

- How does John say we will recognize such people (v. 19)?

Teaching point two: We remain stable by abiding in Christ.

[Q] 1 John 2:20 begins with “But you ...,” indicating that there is to be something unique or different about Christians. What is different?

As we noted in the previous study, the prayer of Jesus in John 17:15 was not that his disciples would be taken out of the world, but rather that they would be kept safe, morally and spiritually. John says that there are two safeguards that will prevent us from being led astray by the influence of antichrists.

1. **The abiding Word (verse 24). Read John 15:1–11.**

[Q] What is the abiding Word?

- What does this “abiding” do in terms of giving us spiritual protection?

[Q] Read 2 Timothy 4:3–4. How does this relate to this warning?

2. **The anointing Spirit (verse 27). Read John 16:13.**

[Q] Why is this a safeguard?

[Q] Read Ephesians 1:13–14. What does this passage tell us about the anointing of the Spirit?



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

1 John 2:28 says that if we maintain our spiritual lives, we will be confident and unashamed at the coming of Christ.

- [Q] Does the end of the world and the coming of Christ excite you or terrify you? Explain your answer.
- [Q] How should we balance the activity of the Word and the Spirit in our lives?

Leader's Note: *The Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word of God. They are always in agreement.*

Action Point: Name some practical ways this study can help you identify who is speaking the truth and who is not.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Confidence Before God

We can know the truth from a lie.

This study will show what it means to live in the last hour. In a spiritual climate that can easily be marked by despair and disbelief, John writes to us so that we can live with confidence.

Scripture:

1 John 2:18–29

Based on:

“The Tests of Life,” by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Many courses available today are designed to teach confidence. But can you imagine a course being offered on how to be confident before God? This is the thrust of this study. As we look at 1 John 2:18–29, we will see that this is the conclusion John is leading to (v. 28). The Greek word for *confidence* (*parrhesia*) means “frankness of speech.” It carries the sense of being able to come before someone and speak boldly.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should be aware of those who teach falsely.

Teaching point two: We remain stable by abiding in Christ.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

1 John 2:28 says that if we maintain our spiritual lives, we will be confident and unashamed at the coming of Christ.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 5

LEADER'S GUIDE

Hope Is Our Bedrock

For Christians, hope is not simply wishful thinking.

In this study we will see how hope is to be a moral force in our lives, influencing the way we live in the present.

Scripture:
1 John 3:1-10

Based on:
"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Jane Garmey, a writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, wrote a piece about Kenneth Helphand, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Oregon. Helphand purchased an old stereopticon at a flea market. It depicted a scene of shelters in French military trenches surrounded by gardens. After a great deal of research, he discovered that gardens were often created in times of war. Gardens flanked the Western front during World War I, Jewish ghettos during World War II, German POW camps, Japanese-American internment camps in the U.S., and war-torn areas of Sarajevo. Today, gardens are sprouting up in the deserts of Iraq.

The gardens symbolize survival—life—in the most difficult of circumstances. They are “an obdurate refusal to give in to the horror of the hell so close at hand.” In fact, Helphand calls them “defiant gardens.”¹

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] How would you define *hope*?
- [Q] Why is hope so important to us as Christians?
- [Q] Mention a time that having hope was important to you.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our hope is as certain as God.

John has given us three major tests for our faith. In the remainder of his letter, we will see how he returns to them in a variety of ways—repeating, reinforcing, and expanding them to give force to his overall message.

1 John 3:1–10 is about hope, which acts as a source of spiritual motivation in our daily lives. It does not refer to hope as we define it today. For many people, *hope* is an uncertain word, such as “I hope something good will happen.” This kind of hope is wishful thinking and lacks certainty. This is not the meaning or emphasis that the word *hope* has in the Bible. *Hope* means that something is certain and sure. It is not a mere wish, but an unshakable confidence in what will happen in the future. Not only that, but this future certainty reflects back onto the decisions we make today.

Think about what that means. We are fond of saying that today shapes the future. The decisions we make today direct the days ahead. To a certain extent this is true. But biblical truth and thinking adds a whole new dimension to that. It reverses it and says that what we believe confidently about the future shapes the present.

¹ Jane Garmey, "Planting Hope: Gardening in Times of War," www.opinionjournal.com (3-21-07).



- [Q] What does it mean that “what we believe about the future shapes the present”?
- How might this be different than mere wishful thinking?

Read 1 John 3:1–10.

- [Q] What is God’s motive for inviting us into his family (3:1)?
- What response should that stimulate in us?
- [Q] John says that we are now “children of God.” How is this truth expanded in Romans 8:14–17 and Hebrews 12:5–6?
- [Q] Why does John say that this is “the reason that the world does not know us”?
- [Q] What do verses 2 and 3 tell us about the final state of the Christian?

Teaching point two: Our certain hope should change the way we live.

As we said in the first teaching point, hope does not mean something that is uncertain. It means the very opposite. It means that something in the future is so certain and so sure that it actually directs the present.

In 1 John 3:4–10, John says that our inner confession is to be in harmony with our lives. We cannot claim the reality of a new life without the reality of a new lifestyle.

- [Q] How does the hope that we have impact our daily lives, especially in the moral realm?
- [Q] In verses 5 and 8, we are given two different reasons for the initial or first coming of Christ. What are they?

Verse 9 contains one of the most powerful and even daring descriptions of the Christian life. John says that if we are truly born of God (see the Gospel of John 3:1–8 about what it means to be “born again”), we will not sin. Yet contrary to his bold assertion in verse 9 that “he cannot go on sinning,” we know only too well that we do sin.

- [Q] How are we to deal with the existence of sin in our lives in light of John’s firm statements in this verse?

Even though we sin, we are born of the seed of God. The Greek word that John uses here is *sperma*. John wrote a daring description of what it means to be a Christian. He says that God has implanted his likeness within us. In the same way that we can often look at children and know who their parents are because we see some family resemblance in them, so John is saying that because we have the seed (*sperma*) of God implanted within us, it is now natural that we should display the characteristics of our Heavenly Father.

- [Q] How does he develop this further in verse 10?



Optional Activity

Purpose: To teach us how hope can transform us.

Activity: List all the difficulties you are facing right now. After each thing, write how having a certain hope in God can transform that difficulty into a blessing. If you're comfortable doing so, share what you wrote with the group.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Hope is far from wishful thinking. Instead, it is the certainty we base our lives on, since it is rooted in an unchangeable, loving God.

- [Q] What are some of the ways that hope should change and shape our lives today?
- [Q] As you work through this passage, does John make it easier or harder for you to be a Christian? Explain.
- [Q] What truth in this study gave you the greatest encouragement? The greatest difficulty?

Action Point: Do you have a strong belief in your hope as a Christian? Why or why not? What would help you have that confidence?

Can you see one aspect of your Christian life that needs to be changed because you realize that God's seed has been implanted in you? How might you be hindering that seed's growth?

John says with confidence that God's children and the devil's children are obvious by their different lifestyles. How does your lifestyle demonstrate without any doubt who your spiritual father is?

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Hope Is Our Bedrock

For Christians, hope is not simply wishful thinking.

In this study we will see how hope is to be a moral force in our lives, influencing the way we live in the present.

Scripture:
1 John 3:1-10

Based on:
"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

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The gardens symbolize survival—life—in the most difficult of circumstances. They are “an obdurate refusal to give in to the horror of the hell so close at hand.” In fact, Helphand calls them “defiant gardens.”²

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our hope is as certain as God.

Teaching point two: Our certain hope should change the way we live.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Hope is far from wishful thinking. Instead, it is the certainty we base our lives on, since it is rooted in an unchangeable, loving God.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan

² Jane Garmey, "Planting Hope: Gardening in Times of War," www.opinionjournal.com (3-21-07).



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

Love Is Action

We prove our faith by our love.

In this study, we will see that the ministry of love is not a mystical feeling, but is to be given practical expression in our lives and relationships.

Scripture:

1 John 3:11-24

Based on:

"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Not long before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the congregation at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church:

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize; that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards; that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody.³

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] How is Martin Luther King Jr. an example of love not being merely a feeling, but an action?
 - Give some other examples of love in action.
- [Q] Why is love a proof of our faith?
- [Q] How do loving God and loving others tie together?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Love is to be the badge of the Christian.

Read 1 John 3:11–24.

In this passage, we have the second of three paragraphs in which John places the “social test” squarely before us. The first time was in 2:9–11, and the third is in 4:7–21. He is working like a composer writing a musical score. The main themes are stated again and again throughout the symphony or the song. So John is coming back to his theme of the need to express love for one another. These passages bring before us the clear truth that love is to be the badge of the Christian. In *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer wrote:

Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts. Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of

³ William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 53.



this, if one feels it is his calling. But there is a much better sign—a mark which has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion or in some specific era. It is a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back.

What is this mark or sign? It is love. 1 John 3:11 tells us that the message has not changed. It is still the same. Read John 13:34–35.

[Q] What did Jesus say about this “badge” as he gave it to his disciples? What did he say it would do?

To show the contrast between a life of expressing love and one of expressing hatred, John uses a story from the Old Testament. Turn back to Genesis 4:1–8 and read about that incident.

[Q] What does John illustrate by using this story?

[Q] Verse 14 opens with a strong emphasis: “We know that we have passed from death to life.” How does John tell us that we can have this assurance of eternal life within us?

[Q] We may respond to verse 15 by saying that we have never murdered anyone. But what are some of the different ways in which we can “murder” people?

➤ What does this do to our own lives?

Teaching point two: We are responsible for our fellow Christians.

John’s purpose is to lead us into a life of assurance and confidence by helping us see that our attitude toward others will change if we are truly following Jesus.

Dr. Scott Kurtzman, chief of surgery at Waterbury Hospital, was on his way to deliver an 8 a.m. lecture when he witnessed one of the worst crashes in Connecticut history. A dump truck, whose driver had lost control, flipped on its side and skidded into oncoming traffic. The resulting accident involved 20 vehicles; four people died.

Thanks to years of emergency-room experience, Doctor Kurtzman immediately shifted into trauma mode. He worked his way through the mangled mess of people and metal, calling out, “Who needs help?”

After about 90 minutes, when all 16 victims had been triaged and taken to area hospitals, Dr. Kurtzman climbed back into his car, drove to the medical school, and gave his lecture—two hours late.

This was not the first time Dr. Kurtzman had assisted those in need. Over the years, he’s stopped at a half-dozen crashes and assisted at three. “A person with my skills simply can’t drive by someone who’s injured,” says Kurtzman. “I refuse to live my life that way.”⁴

[Q] What responsibility do we have toward our fellow Christians?

⁴ Hal Carp, *Readers Digest* (August 2006).



- [Q] We find it easy to say “let me know if you need any help,” but we don’t always mean it. So why do we say it? What are we hoping will happen as a result of our words but not our actions?
- [Q] How should we apply the truth of verses 16–18 in our church?
- [Q] How can we help people who might not ask for assistance but really could use it?
- [Q] What does acting in love do for us (v. 19)?
- [Q] In 3:21–24, we return to the theme of confidence, which we saw in an earlier study. What does verse 22 mean in this context?
- [Q] What two basic commandments does God set before us in verse 23?
 - What will be the result of following these commandments?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To reinforce the fact that we can have confidence and assurance in our Christian lives.*

Activity: *Go back through the first three chapters of 1 John and note every time John says “we know.” Discuss how such confidence and assurance will make us more effective Christians.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Read Matthew 25:31–46.

- [Q] What are some ways you have been helped by the practical ministry of other Christians?
- [Q] What practical ministries are Christians doing in our community?

Action Points:

- What are some ways our church could be more effective in practical ministries?
- What are some ways you can personally be involved in practical ministry to others?

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Love Is Action

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1 John 3:11–24

Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Love is to be the badge of the Christian.

Teaching point two: We are responsible for our fellow Christians.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Read Matthew 25:31–46.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan

⁵ William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 53.



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 7

LEADER'S GUIDE

Telling Truth from Lies

We recognize heresy when we are well acquainted with the truth.

We live in the midst of a cacophony of spiritual voices, each claiming in one way or another to be speaking the truth. Which one are we to believe? Which one should we follow? We will see in this study what points of belief are necessary if we are to validate something as “true.”

Scripture:

1 John 4:1-6

Based on:

“The Tests of Life,” by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

There are strange winds blowing across the land today. How are we supposed to know what is true in the midst of the many conflicting opinions and voices that we hear? Our confusion is increased when so many of these messages lay claim to spiritual authenticity. A parade of preachers fills the pulpits, radio, and television. Each claims that their message is true. How are we to know that another Jim Jones is not spawning his message of confusion and death?

Discussion Starters:

[Q] How do you determine whether something you are being taught is true or not?

➤ Can you trust your gut feelings about truth? Why or why not?

[Q] Why is the phrase "believe what is right for you" an impossible creed to live by?

Leader's Note: *It's impossible to follow what you think is true without coming in conflict with other people who believe differently.*

[Q] What kind of false messages are easiest to spot?

➤ Which are the hardest to spot?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must evaluate all teaching in light of the whole of Scripture.

For many people, the ability to test for truth is lost in the quicksand of doctrinal relativism. It is common for people today to say, "It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere," or, "All religions lead to the same place."

How can we know what is true?

We are also faced with the climate of pluralism in our society. This means that there are diverse convictions that are held freely. No one sect is allowed to have authority over the others. At the same time, we need to recognize that there is a monolithic emphasis going on. This means that even with religious diversity, there is also a move toward uniform religious characteristics. One of the myths of this monolithic emphasis is the myth of neutrality. Strong convictions are often seen as prejudices. Firm convictions are often regarded as biases. In times past, Christian truth was held in high esteem. Today, we have to face the reality that Christian truth has to take its place in the religious cafeteria. So Christians need to have a strong spirit of discernment. They need to know what they believe and why they believe it.



Dr. John Stott writes:

Neither Christian faith nor Christian love is indiscriminate ... we need to preserve the Biblical balance, avoiding on the one hand the extreme superstition which believes everything, and on the other hand the extreme suspicion which believes nothing.

Read 1 John 4:1–6.

- [Q] Why does John tell us in 4:1 to “test the spirits” rather than the preacher or the doctrine?
- [Q] The early Christians had to face the messages of false prophets just as we do. It is not enough to say that you are inspired, or to be inspiring. Who would you list today as a false prophet, and why?
- [Q] How does John say we should discern whether a message is true?
- [Q] Read the Gospel of John 1:14. How does this verse agree with the passage in 1 John?
 - Why is this so critical or important?
- [Q] Many leaders and preachers from other world religions might say, “I believe in Jesus.” Is this adequate or sufficient by itself?
- [Q] In verses 4–6, how are we told to distinguish between those who know the truth and those who do not?
 - What do these verses tell us about the audience that truth gathers?

Teaching point two: We must be on guard against false Christian teachers.

There are many new religious groups arising today. You may be aware of the Moonies, Hare Krishna, EST, and the many variations of New Age teaching, but there are also many false Christian teachers. These are the ones that will most likely tempt us.

Scotland Yard recently conducted a private exhibition of forged paintings for art dealers. The objective was to send a warning to their select audience about the sale of forgeries, which some experts estimate make up 40 percent of the art market. The sale of these fakes can undermine the value of the genuine articles.

The forgeries at the exhibit were created with remarkable proficiency. Reliance on documentation alone won't solve the problem, because even that is often forged! Fiona Ford of the Association of Arts & Antiques Dealers said the level of skill displayed by the forgers was “terrifying.” She added, “If every dealer saw this exhibition, it would further impress on them how careful they have to be.”⁶

- [Q] Do you think it is helpful to know what false teachers teach? Why or why not?

⁶ Associated Press, “Police Display Fakes at Exhibition to Warn Art Dealers,” www.topix.net (posted on 11-23-06).



- [Q] Should we correct those who are teaching a false Christianity, or just ignore them? Explain your answer.
- [Q] How would you respond to someone who said that it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you are sincere?
- [Q] How would you share about Christ with someone who followed another religion devoutly?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us recognize false teaching.

Activity: Before meeting with this group, look online for examples of false Christian teaching and good Christian teaching. Print off several examples of each and pass them around to the group. Ask them to tell you which ones they think are true and to explain why they think that.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Sometimes we talk about "truth" as though it was a pile of lifeless information or inert data, perhaps even information you could get in a university course—as though we could sign up for Truth 101. Truth is not information. Truth is a Person—his name is Jesus.

We will know the truth when we confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, come in the flesh, and that he is Lord.

Action Point: As Christians, we confess that we are often weak in knowing what we ought to believe. What do you need to know more about for your own faith? In what areas does your faith in the truth need to be strengthened? Share your answer with the group and determine to begin to pursue more wisdom in this area.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 7

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Telling Truth from Lies

We recognize heresy when we are well acquainted with the truth.

We live in the midst of a cacophony of spiritual voices, each claiming in one way or another to be speaking the truth. Which one are we to believe? Which one should we follow? We will see in this study what points of belief are necessary if we are to validate something as “true.”

Scripture:
1 John 4:1-6

Based on:
“The Tests of Life,” by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

There are strange winds blowing across the land today. How are we supposed to know what is true in the midst of the many conflicting opinions and voices which we hear? Our confusion is increased when so many of these messages lay claim to spiritual authenticity. A parade of preachers fills the pulpits, radio, and television. Each claims that their message is true. How are we to know that another Jim Jones is not spawning his message of confusion and death?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must evaluate all teaching in light of the whole of Scripture.

Teaching point two: We must be on guard against false Christian teachers.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Sometimes we talk about “truth” as though it was a pile of lifeless information or inert data, perhaps even information you could get in a university course—as though we could sign up for Truth 101. Truth is not information. Truth is a Person—his name is Jesus.

We will know the truth when we confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, come in the flesh, and that he is Lord.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 8

LEADER'S GUIDE

God's Love Overflows

We love through God's acceptance and love for us.

God is love. This is perhaps the most basic statement we can make about the nature of God. But love is not just warm sentiment. God's love demands a practical response from us.

Scripture:
1 John 4:7-21

Based on:
"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

For the third time, John returns to the theme of relational Christianity. We have seen that this epistle calls us to three tests: moral, social, and doctrinal. The way in which John advances these three tests does not move forward in a straight line. It is more like a winding staircase or a helix, always revolving around the same center, dealing with the same topic but moving a little higher each time. In 3:14–18 we were given the obligation of brotherly love. Now we are taken one rung higher on this winding staircase, and are told how to express this unique bond.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What does it mean to have brotherly love?
- [Q] How is that a moral, social, and doctrinal issue?
- [Q] What do you find most difficult about showing brotherly love to others?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We can consistently love others only through God's love.

How can we love unconditionally? Human love has its limits, and if we go beyond them, our love is over. It is exhausted. As human beings we can only take so many hurts before our resources are depleted. All of us, at one time or another, have dispensed hurt and anger when our love was exhausted. All of us have been hurt by someone who reacted out of need, insecurity, or pain. We will only be able to show love as we draw deeply from the one who is the source of love—God himself!

Read 1 John 4:7–12.

John tells us that love is the essence of who God is. The heart and pulse of the Christian gospel is rooted in the *agape* (love) of God.

- [Q] How has God shown his love toward us?
- [Q] What does John say is God's purpose for us in Christ (4:9)?

In 4:10, we find one of the important truths of the Christian faith. We are reminded of the fact that all of the initiative of love rests with God. He is the one who makes the first move. We did not move toward him. He has moved toward us. Read Romans 5:8.

- [Q] In 4:10, John talks about an atoning sacrifice. Other translations may use the word *propitiation*. What does this mean?



Leader's Note: You may find it helpful to use a Bible Dictionary (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bible/features/dictionaries.html>).

- [Q] What should be the logical consequence of God's love for us (v. 11)?
- [Q] How does loving others make his love complete in us (v. 12)?
- [Q] Read Colossians 3:6, John 3:17–18, and Acts 17:29–31. How are we to relate God's love to the other aspects of his character?

Teaching point two: Our love for others testifies to the truth of the gospel.

In his book *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness*, Jerry Cook writes:

One of the greatest services a church can offer to the community is to provide a place for people to be brought to wholeness—to be healed physically, spiritually and emotionally. A place where people are loved, accepted and forgiven. People are fragmented. They are torn. Life doesn't work for them because they are without Jesus. They don't need more programs and more activities. They simply need a place to be healed. The place does not have to be fancy. The physical environment need not be impressive. The people don't have to be super-spiritual. They simply need to be real, loving, accepting, forgiving.

Read 1 John 4:13–16.

- [Q] What assurance are we given in 4:13–14?
 - What gives us this sense of assurance?
- [Q] Why does John make such a strong point of verse 15?
 - If someone asked you what basic thing they had to believe in order to be a Christian, how would you answer them from what you have studied so far in this epistle?
- [Q] How does our love help others to be assured of the truth of the gospel?

Teaching point three: Knowing we have been forgiven and have acceptance with God gives us the impetus to freely love others.

Read 1 John 4:17–21.

Notice how verse 17 says that “we will have confidence on the day of judgment.” This truth of being able to stand before God with confidence (or boldness) is an important one in the Scriptures. Examine how it is expressed in the following passages: Hebrews 4:14–16; Hebrews 10:19–22; and Psalm 1:4–5.

- [Q] How does John relate our being able to stand before God with confidence to the fact and reality of his love for us? How are these two things connected?



- [Q] Verse 18 introduces the idea of fear into the letter. Do you fear punishment from God? Why or why not?
- [Q] John says that fear is driven out by love. What do you think he means by this? Why does love dispel fear?
- [Q] How are we to understand those verses that talk about “the fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 1:7)?
- [Q] How does the fact that we don’t have to fear punishment from God help us to love others?

In 1 John 4:19, we see one of the great principles of the Christian life: “We love because he first loved us.” Some of the older translations read, “We love Him, because He first loved us.” This conveys the meaning that we love God in response to his love for us. This of course is not wrong. However, if we read the New International Version quoted above, we see that it says “we love, because ...” In other words, we are called to attitudes and actions of love toward everyone, as a response to God’s love for us.

Verse 20 brings together the vertical relationship of loving God and the horizontal relationship of loving one another. We can’t have one without the other.

- [Q] Why do we sometimes find it easier to say that we love God, whom we have never seen, than to love those whom we see every day?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us face the fact that if we love God, we must love others.*

Activity: *In the midst of your desire to love and worship God, is there someone whom you have secretly hated? How can you give your hate up to the love of God? Take time now to quietly ponder this. If you would like prayer from the group, share this with them.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

If we truly understand the immensity of God’s love for us, our gratitude will be so great that we will want to extend that love to others.

Action Points:

- How can you grow in your personal realization that God loves you? How would this change your way of thinking and behaving toward other people?
- What prevents you from experiencing—and then expressing—the powerful healing force of God’s love?
- What would happen to our church if we began to practice what this week’s study is all about? What would it take for that to happen?

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 8

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

God's Love Overflows

We love through God's acceptance and love for us.

God is love. This is perhaps the most basic statement we can make about the nature of God. But love is not just warm sentiment. God's love demands a practical response from us.

Scripture:

1 John 4:7-21

Based on:

"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

For the third time, John returns to the theme of relational Christianity. We have seen that this epistle calls us to three tests: moral, social, and doctrinal. The way in which John advances these three tests does not move forward in a straight line. It is more like a winding staircase or a helix, always revolving around the same center, dealing with the same topic but moving a little higher each time. In 3:14–18 we were given the obligation of brotherly love. Now we are taken one rung higher on this winding staircase, and are told how to express this unique bond.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We can consistently love others only through God's love.

Teaching point two: Our love for others testifies to the truth of the gospel.

Teaching point three: Knowing we have been forgiven and have acceptance with God gives us the impetus to freely love others.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

If we truly understand the immensity of God's love for us, our gratitude will be so great that we will want to extend that love to others.

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 9

LEADER'S GUIDE

Victory in Jesus

We overcome with confidence through Jesus Christ.

We know the word Nike as a popular brand of sportswear and running shoes. But it's also a word straight from the New Testament, and especially from 1 John. *Nike* meant victory.

Scripture:
1 John 5:1-21

Based on:
"The Tests of Life," by Tom Cowan

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

We are now very familiar with the three different but complementary tests of our spiritual lives that John has woven together. They are:

- ❖ the doctrinal test—what we believe
- ❖ the social test—how we love
- ❖ the moral test—how we live

In the opening verses of chapter 5, we find all three tests brought together. Once again we see that the tests are to bring us to a sense of assurance in our spiritual lives. John wants us to know that we are God's children.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Why is it so important to know that we are God's children? What does this do for our daily lives?
- [Q] After all of these studies, how would you say the doctrinal, social, and moral tests work together to give us assurance that we are God's children?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God's commands are not a burden.

Read 1 John 5:1–5.

- [Q] How does 5:1 challenge the person who says that we can believe in any of the world's spiritual teachers, because they are all expressions of God for us?
- [Q] How does 5:3 define what it means to love God?
- [Q] Why do you think John adds that God's commandments are not a burden?
 - This, however, is often the attitude that people have. Why is this?
 - Do you feel they are a burden?
 - What light does verse 4 shed on how to avoid feeling God's commands are burdensome? Also read John 16:33.



Teaching point two: Eternal life is only in Christ.

Read 1 John 5:6–12.

In this study, we are faced with the difficulty of what verse 7 refers to. The problem lies in understanding verses 6–9, and especially John's reference to Jesus' coming by water and blood. John Stott includes a lengthy discussion of this phrase in his commentary on 1 John. He presents three major lines of interpretation:

1. Water and blood are a reference to the sacraments of communion.
2. Water and blood are a reference to the spear wound which Jesus suffered on the cross.
3. Water and blood are a reference to baptism and the death of Christ. This might be a challenge to a heresy called Cerinthianism which claimed that the real "Christ" left Jesus before he was crucified, and so he was crucified only as a human being. So Stott concludes that John is stressing "the unity of the earthly career of Christ."⁷

William Barclay, in his *Daily Bible Study Series on 1 John*, combines the ideas of Jesus' baptism and crucifixion with the meaning of baptism and communion in the church.

His summary paragraph concludes:

The Spirit and the water and the blood all combine to demonstrate the perfect Messiahship, the perfect Sonship, the perfect Saviourhood of this man Jesus in whom was God. The continued gift of the Spirit, the continued death and resurrection of baptism, the continued availability of the sacrifice of the Cross at the Lord's Table are still the witnesses to Jesus Christ.⁸

- [Q] How would you summarize verses 6–9?
- [Q] What do you think John means in verses 9 and 10, when he says that the witness of God is greater than the witness of men?
- [Q] Verse 11 states that God has given us the gift of eternal life. Read John 17:3. How does this verse define eternal life?
- [Q] The message of verse 12 is clear and uncompromising. Eternal life is to be found in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. What are the implications of this for the unbeliever? The believer?

John wrote his gospel primarily for unbelievers, to convince them of the reality of Jesus Christ. Read John 20:31.

- [Q] How does he explain the purpose of his gospel?

⁷ See pages 177–179

⁸ Barclay's *Daily Bible Study on 1 John*, page 110.



Teaching point three: God wants us to live with full assurance of eternal life.

On the other hand, this letter or epistle is written primarily for believers. Read 1 John 5:13.

His readers were being seduced by a rising tide of uncertainty about the Christian faith. He has given the criteria (moral, social, theological) so that they might test themselves and establish a ground of assurance in their lives. He wants them to know and so live with spiritual confidence.

The Greek has two different words for *knowing*:

1. The word *ginosko* (from *gnosis*, meaning knowledge) has the sense of coming to know something through a process of learning and study.
2. The word *oida*, which comes from the verb meaning “to see,” has the sense of fullness of knowledge. It does not mean that we gradually come to an understanding about something. Rather it is the sense that we can possess a full assurance about the life we have in Christ. We use the word in the same sense when we say “I see!” We are saying that now we know what something means. This is the word that John uses throughout his letter in these verses, as he speaks of our assurance in Christ. Look up 3:2; 3:5; 3:14; 5:15; and 5:19–20.

In this final section, we will see that John presents 5 aspects of the fruit of assurance for us. Think about them as 5 pieces of solid rock in the middle of quicksand. Here is where we can place our feet on firm ground.

In 5:13, he says that we can have a supernatural orientation to life. Some people think that eternal life will begin when they die. John says that we already have it. Read this verse as well as 1 John 3:14.

[Q] What difference does this make to the way we live each day?

Next, we have the confidence of answered prayer. Read verses 14–17.

[Q] John has confidence about answered prayer. What gives him this confidence?

[Q] How does the phrase “according to his will” govern our prayers?

[Q] How might we learn to develop more confidence in prayer?

[Q] Verse 16 presents us with something of a puzzle. John talks about “a sin that does not lead to death,” and then goes on to say that “there is a sin that leads to death.” What do you think these might refer to? What is the difference between one kind of sin and the other?

[Q] What steps should we take to assist Christians whom we see heading into sin?

The third point of assurance is the witness of moral strength (v. 18). Note how 5:18 repeats the truth of 3:9.

[Q] How are we kept from harm, as John affirms?

[Q] How does this relate to the prayer of Jesus for his disciples in John 17:15?



Read verse 19 concerning the radical nature of commitment. We need to know who we are.

- [Q] How seriously do you think about the state of the world that John says is “under the control of the evil one”? Explain.
- How does Ephesians 2:1–3 expand on this statement?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Finally, we are assured by a growing understanding of the truth (v. 20). We are fond of saying that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. What we also need to remember is that the purpose of that first step is the journey of a thousand miles. Our spiritual assurance does not come from standing still, but rather from moving ahead with Christ. This is illustrated as we read verse 20, noting the two different words for “know” which are outlined above. He writes:

We know (*oida*, meaning for a fact) also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding (that is the ability to think through life) so that we may come to know (*ginosko*, meaning to come to know) him who is true.

Christians will lack the solid ground of assurance when they do not know why they believe what they believe, and also when the muscles of faith do not grow in understanding.

John has told us that we have the victory! The victory of God in our lives and the task of overcoming the world will be accomplished on a day-to-day basis in the small issues of life: temptations to be resisted, struggles to be faced, opportunities to take. Day by day we have to overcome, and as we do, the angels in heaven cheer us on with a shout of victory.

Action Points:

- [Q] In John 16:33, Jesus says that we will know stress and struggle in our lives. Where do you feel this in your life? What kinds of situations bring on stress?
- How does 1 John 5 help you cope with that stress?
- [Q] Do you know that you have the gift and the assurance of eternal life? How do you know this?
- How can this change the way you live each day?
- [Q] What would help you to increase your ability to pray with confidence?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To take inventory of what you need to apply from 1 John.

Activity: As you reflect on the weeks you have spent in personal study and also in your group discussion of this powerful letter, what is the one thing that stands out to you?

What is the most important lesson that 1 John has for you?



Where do you need to grow in your understanding of Jesus Christ?

How will you go about doing that?

Are you an authentic Christian?

How do you know that?

—Study by Dr. Tom Cowan



Study Through the Bible

1 John: Test of Faith - Study 9

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Victory in Jesus

We overcome with confidence through Jesus Christ.

We know the word Nike as a popular brand of sportswear and running shoes. But it's also a word straight from the New Testament, and especially from 1 John. *Nike* was the Greek shout of victory. {??}

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1 John 5:1-21

Based on:

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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God's commands are not a burden.

Teaching point two: Eternal life is only in Christ.

Teaching point three: God wants us to live with full assurance of eternal life.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

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