
The book of
FIRST JOHN

Week of Monday, September 21, 2025

1 John 1:1-4

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

Back in February, Christina and I were blessed to go to Israel, and I was overwhelmed. At first, it was simply because of the new surroundings. There were new sights, sounds, and smells. And because I love the Bible and history, being able to see these places was amazing.

But about halfway through the trip, something happened that affected me in a different way. We were standing at Caesarea Philippi, the place where Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." I had read those words countless times. I knew they were true. But standing there, looking at the same landscape Jesus and His disciples would have seen, I was overwhelmed by a truth that I had always believed but that suddenly felt much more tangible.

The words of Scripture reveal to us real events that happened in real places involving real people. Sometimes we read those words on the page and know they are true, but they can still feel somewhat abstract. But seeing the places where these events took place brought them a little closer to home for me. These weren't simply stories I had read. These things actually happened.

As John opens this first letter, he is testifying that he was even closer to the events he writes about. He tells us that what he is proclaiming is what he heard with his own ears, saw with his own eyes, and even touched with his own hands. John was there. He didn't experience Jesus from a distance. He encountered Him up close. And therefore, John isn't presenting Christianity as an abstract philosophy or a collection of good ideas. He's saying, in effect, We encountered Jesus.

The truth about Jesus that we find in Scripture is real. Our faith is built on something that actually happened. Jesus Christ came into the world. He was heard, seen, and touched. John and the other apostles weren't passing along a theory; they were proclaiming what they had personally witnessed.

Now, we haven't seen Jesus in the same way John did, but our faith rests on the testimony of those who did. And throughout 1 John, John is going to keep bringing us back to the reality of Jesus and what it means to know Him. In fact, near the end of the letter, he tells us why he wrote: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

So our goal of this series isn't simply that we know more about the book of 1 John. John wants us to know God more deeply, walk more closely with Him, and experience the fellowship we have with His people because we belong to Him. And that gives us something to think about as we begin. If Jesus is truly who John says He is, what difference should that reality make in my life? It is possible to believe that Jesus really lived, really died, and really rose again and yet live as though those truths are distant from our everyday lives. John doesn't give us room to do that. The Jesus he proclaims is not merely someone to believe facts about; He is someone to know and follow with our lives.

Over the coming weeks, John will call us to walk in the light, confess our sin, obey Christ, love one another, remain in the truth, resist the world, and have confidence that we belong to God. These aren't disconnected commands. They are what life begins to look like when the reality of Jesus moves from something we believe in our minds to someone we know and follow with our lives.

My prayer as we begin this series is that we won't simply come to know 1 John better. I pray that through the truth John proclaims, we will know Jesus better.

-Devotional written by Jason McDonald

Read Also:
1 John 1
John 1:1–18 — John identifies Jesus as the eternal Word who became flesh and lived among us.
Luke 1:1–4 — Luke explains why he carefully recorded Jesus' story.
John 20:24–31 — John explains that his Gospel was written so we might believe and have life in Jesus.
Acts 4:1–22 — Peter and John testify boldly about what they have seen and heard concerning Jesus.
2 Peter 1:16–21 — Peter emphasizes that the apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty.
John 15:9–17 — Jesus describes a relationship with Him as abiding in Him with fullness of joy.
1 John 5:9–13 — John explains that his purpose is for believers to know they have eternal life.

Group Discussion Questions

What stands out to you about the way John describes Jesus in 1 John 1:1–4? What do we learn from his repeated references to hearing, seeing, observing, and touching? Why do you think John places such emphasis on the fact that he and the other apostles personally encountered Jesus?

John says that he is proclaiming what he has seen and heard "so that you may also have fellowship with us." What does Christian fellowship mean, and how is our fellowship with one another connected to our fellowship with God?

Verse 4 says that John is writing so that his readers' joy may be complete. What connection do you see between knowing Jesus and experiencing genuine joy?

It is possible to believe that Jesus is real and still live as though He is distant from our everyday lives. What are some ways we can unintentionally do this?

As we begin this study, what do you most want God to teach you or change in you through 1 John?

John's stated purpose at the end of the letter is that believers may "know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Why do you think assurance is important to the Christian life, and what would it look like for you to live with greater confidence in what Christ has done for you?

Week of Monday, September 28, 2025

1 John 1:5–2:2

1 John 1
5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. **6** If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. **7** If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 2
1 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one. **2** He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

This weekend at our men's retreat, we talked about putting Christ above everything else. It's a truth we gladly affirm when we're sitting with other men, singing, opening our Bibles, and having honest conversations. But we also need to live it out when we go home. What happens when I'm tired, impatient, or interrupted? Do my words and choices show that I value Jesus most?

I don't have to look very far into my own life to see how much I still need God's grace.

John begins this passage by saying, "God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him." That means there is nothing about our lives we can keep hidden from him. He sees the things other people notice, and he sees what is going on in our hearts.

We can respond by making excuses. We can tell ourselves we were just tired, that it wasn't a big deal, or that we'll do better next time. But John says that if we claim we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves. Making excuses may help us feel better for a moment, but it keeps us from dealing honestly with God.

Here is the encouragement: walking in the light doesn't mean pretending we have it all together. It means coming to God honestly. John says that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. We can admit what is wrong because Jesus has already done what is needed to make us clean.

That is what confession is. We stop explaining away our sin and tell God the truth about it. And we can trust his promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

John doesn't want us to become comfortable with sin. He writes, "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin." But he also knows we will still fail. So he adds, "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one."

That is such good news. When I sin, my hope is not that I can come up with a good enough explanation or make up for it by having a better day tomorrow. My hope is Jesus. He knows the truth about my sin, and he has given himself for it. He is my advocate with the Father.

Whatever this past week has looked like for you, this passage gives us a way forward. When God shows us something that needs to change, we don't have to hide it or defend it. We can bring it into the light, confess it, and take the next step of obedience, trusting that Jesus will meet us with the forgiveness he has promised.

-Devotional written by Eric Foster

Read Also:
1 John 1
John 3:19–21 - Coming into the light
Psalm 32:1–5 - The relief of confession
Psalm 51:1–12 - Asking God for a clean heart
Proverbs 28:13 - Confessing instead of hiding
Hebrews 4:14–16 - Approaching God for mercy
Romans 8:31–34 - Christ interceding for us

Group Discussion Questions

John says that "God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him." What does this tell us about God's character, and why does it matter for how we approach him?

In verses 6, 8, and 10, John describes three things we might *say* about ourselves. What do these claims have in common, and what truth is John urging us to face?

How can John call believers to walk in the light while also saying that we still need to confess sin? What does walking in the light actually mean?

John calls Jesus both our advocate and the atoning sacrifice for our sins. What does each description tell us about what Jesus has done for us?

What are some ordinary ways we minimize or hide sin, even from ourselves?

What makes confession difficult for you? How does knowing that Jesus is your advocate change the way you come to God?

Week of Monday, October 5, 2025

1 John 2:3-17

3 This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. **4** The one who says, “I have come to know him,” and yet doesn’t keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. **5** But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: **6** The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the word you have heard. **8** Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. **9** The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. **10** The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. **11** But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn’t know where he’s going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children,
since your sins have been forgiven
on account of his name.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you have come to know
the one who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young men,
because you have conquered the evil one.

14 I have written to you, children,
because you have come to know the Father.
I have written to you, fathers,
because you have come to know
the one who is from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men,
because you are strong,
God’s word remains in you,
and you have conquered the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. **17** And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

HOPE Journaling
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Weekly Devotional

When I look at our congregation gathered for worship on a Sunday morning, I am thankful to see the wide range of ages that make up Living Hope Church. I am thankful to see gray hair, I am thankful to see babies, I am thankful to see toddlers and teenagers. In short, I am thankful that our church isn't made up of people in the same stage of life as me. There are many younger and many older—both in terms of age and in terms of how long they have been walking with the Lord.

John's church had a similar wide range in ages and in maturity levels in the faith. In 1 John 2:12-14 he gives us a highly poetic section of Scripture that encourages three age groups: little children, fathers, and young men—with most commentators stating that "fathers" refers to mature believers and "young men" referring to younger believers, regardless of gender.

John addresses each group twice with some slight differences in the wording, but the poetic nature of this passage was supposed to stick in the minds of his readers. For John, it is imperative for his readers to know who they are in Christ and what he has done for them through his death on the cross and that is why he is writing this letter to them.

"(Little) children" refers to all believers, it is how John typically addresses the whole church (as in 2:1, 2:18. 2:28, etc.), and he reminds us all that "[our] sins have been forgiven on account of [Jesus's] name" and that "[we] have come to know the Father." In short, he reminds us of the truth of the Gospel—that because Jesus died for our sins we have been reconciled to God in such a way that we now know him as our Father. That is why we are called *children* in the first place, because we are *his* children—born of God (John 1:12) and given the Spirit of Adoption that calls out "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15).

"Fathers" refers to mature men and women in the church, who have been walking with the Lord for a long time and can testify to his faithfulness throughout their lifetime. John reminds them twice that "[they] have come to know the one who is from the beginning." John wants them to know that his pastoral instructions to them are anchored in the same Jesus that John (and perhaps they themselves!) knew, heard, saw, and touched (compare with 1:1). As those with more experience living life in a fallen world and with more experience knowing Christ, he reminds them that what they have in Christ is eternal life in him.

"Young men" includes both men and women who are growing and maturing in their faith, and John tells them that "[they] are strong, God's Word remains in [them], and [they] have conquered the evil one." John is reminding them and encouraging them in their zeal for Christ, and that though they may not be as seasoned as the older people in the congregation, they are strong in the Lord and have conquered the Devil in him and through him.

Regardless of what demographic we may fall in, the fact of the matter remains that the entirety of John's letter—and all the encouragement and instruction that he gives—is based on the fact that we have been given eternal life in Christ, who is our Advocate before the Father and the atoning sacrifice that covers our sin and reconciles us to God (2:1-2)

-Devotional written by Rick Leeman

Read Also:
1 John 2
John 1:10-14
John 15:1-8
Romans 8:12-17
Ephesians 6:10-18
1 Timothy 4:12-16
Titus 2:1-8
1 Peter 5:1-9

Group Discussion Questions

How does 2:12-14 relate to the rest of the passage (2:3-11) and to what John has written so far in his letter?

What are your initial thoughts reading the statements of 2:3-11? Why is it important that vv. 12-14 follow?

Why does John refer to us as "children"? What does this imply about us and our relationship to God?

Do you think that you fit in the "fathers"/mature category or the "young men"/maturing category? Why?

What is the "old command" that John is writing to them? But why does he say that it is "new" "because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining"? (2:8).

What recurring theme's from the John's Gospel show up in this passage? (Hint: read John 1 and John 15)

Week of Monday, October 12, 2025

1 John 2:18-27

18 Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. **19** They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. **21** I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. **22** Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.

24 What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. **25** And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life.

26 I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. **27** As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him.

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

There have been people in my life whose promises I knew I could trust. If they told me they would do something, I believed them. I knew their character, and I knew they would follow through, as far as it was within their control.

But that last part matters. Even the most dependable person has limits. Someone can sincerely intend to keep a commitment, only to have illness, an unexpected circumstance, or something beyond their control make it impossible. Their willingness hasn't changed, but their ability has.

With God, we never need to make that distinction. He is both faithful to His word and able to fulfill it. Nothing catches Him by surprise, and nothing can prevent Him from accomplishing what He has promised.

That gives particular weight to John's words in verse 25: "And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life."

John gives this assurance in the middle of a warning. People had left the fellowship and were trying to lead others away from the truth about Jesus. They denied that Jesus is the Christ, and John makes clear that we cannot reject the Son and still have the Father. What we believe about Jesus matters because eternal life is found in Him.

Imagine how unsettling this must have been for those believers. People they had known and worshiped alongside were now rejecting the message they once professed. Perhaps some were wondering, "Have we believed the right thing? Can we still be sure?"

John directs them back to what they had heard from the beginning. They didn't need a different message or a new version of Jesus. They needed to remain in the truth of the gospel they had received. The Holy Spirit, whom John describes as their anointing, would help them recognize the truth and resist the lies.

And right in the middle of those instructions comes this promise: eternal life.

Our confidence rests on the God who made that promise. He has given us life through His Son, who died for our sins and rose again. Eternal life is more than an endless existence someday. It is life in fellowship with the Father and the Son, life that begins now and continues beyond death.

That doesn't mean God has promised an easy life. We can still experience disappointment, uncertainty, sickness, and loss. But none of those things can overturn His promise. Even death cannot prevent Him from giving His people the life He has promised in Christ.

John's response to that assurance is simple: remain in Him. Keep trusting the Jesus you have heard proclaimed in the gospel. When another voice offers something more appealing, return to His Word. When doubts arise, bring them to Him. When life becomes difficult, remember that your circumstances have not weakened His ability to keep His promise.

The people we trust most can only promise what they hope they will be able to do. God promises what He will certainly accomplish.

Whatever we face today, those who belong to Christ have a future secured by His faithfulness: He has promised us eternal life, and He will keep His word.

-Devotional written by Eric Foster

Read Also:
1 John 2
1 John 5:1–13 — Eternal life is found in God's Son.
John 10:22–30 — Jesus promises eternal life and lasting security.
John 15:1–11 — Remaining in Christ and His Word.
John 14:15–27 — The Holy Spirit teaches believers the truth.
2 John 1:7–11 — Rejecting deception and remaining in Christ's teaching.
Hebrews 6:13–20 — God's unchangeable promise gives us firm hope.

Group Discussion Questions

In verses 18–23, what distinguishes the truth about Jesus from the lies being taught? Why does denying the Son also mean rejecting the Father?

Why does John urge believers to hold on to what they "heard from the beginning" (v. 24)? How does that help us evaluate teaching today?

What does the promise of eternal life in verse 25 tell us about God? How does knowing who made the promise strengthen our confidence in it?

How does the Holy Spirit help believers recognize and remain in the truth (vv. 20, 27)? How does this fit with John writing to teach them?

What voices or influences can draw us away from the truth about Jesus? Why might we be tempted to listen to them?

What does remaining in Christ look like in our everyday lives? What helps you keep His Word close?

Where do you need the assurance of God's promise right now? How might the certainty of eternal life change the way you face that situation?

Week of Monday, October 19, 2025

1 John 2:28-3:10

1 John 2
28 So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming. **29** If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

1 John 3
3 See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children—and we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know him. **2** Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. **3** And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.

4 Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. **5** You know that he was revealed so that he might take away sins, and there is no sin in him. **6** Everyone who remains in him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen him or known him.

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. **8** The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works. **9** Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. **10** This is how God's children and the devil's children become obvious. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister.

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

Eschatology. That word can make one feel a number of different things. One may not know what the word means (it is the Christian doctrine of the "last things," like Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, etc.). One may think that it is a controversial subject that people are often overzealous about (which is pretty accurate). Or one may think that it is a complicated subject with a complicated timeline of cataclysmic events described in Revelation, one of the most complicated books in the Bible to understand (also, pretty accurate).

Be that as it may, when the Bible speaks of the last things, it does so to instill hope, faithfulness, and perseverance in the people of God. Why? Because we need to know that the Christian life is not simply slogging through each day until we get to heaven, but there is a glorious light at the end of the tunnel when Christ brings redemption, history is brought to a close and eternal life with him begins. This passage in 1 John adds to this.

First, we have confidence in Christ's second coming, rather than shame and fear (2:28). Because we "remain" (or "abide") in Christ, there is no reason to fear standing before him when he "appears" "at his coming"—when he raises all humanity from the dead and some will go to the resurrection of life and some will go to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). Because his blood has atoned for our sin, because we are righteous by faith, we have nothing to fear when we stand before him on Judgment Day.

Second, we will become like Christ when he returns. "Dear friends, we are God's children now," John says, which is astonishing enough! But he continues, "and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is" (3:2)—resurrected, glorified, and completely freed from sin!

And third, we know that the devil will be destroyed. "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works." Jesus called the devil a "murderer from the beginning [and] the father of lies" (John 8:44). He is "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" (Rev. 12:10). So no wonder Jesus comes to give us life, truth, and righteousness. And on the same Day that we have confidence in, and the same Day that we will see him as he is and will become like him, we will see the devil finally destroyed in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10).

But what does this all mean for us right here and right now? With the rest of the New Testament writers, John says that Christ's impending return ought to motivate us to persevere in faithfulness and obedience. John says that "Everyone who has this hope in him [that is, Christ's return] purifies himself just as he is pure" (3:3). When we look towards Christ's return and become fully and perfectly like him, it encourages us to pursue Christlikeness in the here and now. It makes us hate sin and devil-likeness, because children of God who have been born of God resemble him rather than that ancient serpent (3:9-10).

This week, remember that as you go through your daily grind, as you feel the stress and anxiety that this broken world brings, as you feel your flesh, the world, and the devil trying to deceive you into sinning against your Lord and Savior, remember that Jesus "having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28)

-Devotional written by Rick Leeman

Read Also:
1 John 3
1 Corinthians 15: 50-58
Titus 3:1-8
Luke 12:35-48
2 Peter 3:1-13
1 Thessalonians 5:2-11
Revelation 22:6-15

Group Discussion Questions

What do you think of when you hear the biblical terms "eschatology," "second coming," "final judgment," etc.? What about these topics is challenging? Why should we study and discuss them regardless of how challenging and controversial they are?

What does John mean when he says "we will be like him because we will see him as he is"? What will we become? What will Jesus be like?

How does 1 John 2:28-3:10 compare with the "Read also" texts. How are they similar?

John is very black-and-white in this 3:4-10: You either practice righteousness or practice sin and lawlessness. You are either a child of God or a child of the devil. Why do you think he chose to write this way?

What does 3:4-10 say about sin? Knowing that John does not contradict himself or other biblical writers, what is he referring to? (Note: compare the CSB translation with the ESV)

We often read 3:4-10 as an admonishment not to sin, and rightly so. But how is it also an encouragement to us as God's children?

Week of Monday, November 2, 2025

1 John 3:11-24

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, **12** unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

13 Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. **14** We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. **15** Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. **16** This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. **17** If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.

19 This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and will reassure our hearts before him **20** whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things.

21 Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God **22** and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. **23** Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. **24** The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

Cain is one of the most infamous men in the Bible. Adam and Eve thought that their firstborn son would be the one who would crush the head of the serpent as the Lord promised (Gen. 3:15). Eve said "I have *had [*also could be translated as *gotten* or *acquired*] a male child with the LORD's help" (Gen. 4:1)—with the name *Cain* being derived from the Hebrew word for "had" or "acquired." But instead of crushing the head of the serpent, he "was of the evil one and murdered his brother [Abel]" (1 John 3:12a).

But how did this all start? Cain gave an offering of produce that the Lord did not regard, while his brother offered the firstborn of his flock which the Lord did regard. Therefore, "Cain was furious, and he looked despondent" (Gen. 4:4-5). But the Lord, in his mercy, spoke to Cain: "Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:6). But he did not rule over his sin. Sin ruled over him and he murdered Abel, "because his deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous" (1 John 3:12b).

If we are honest with ourselves, we are often in Cain's frame of heart. He was filled with self-pity and wounded pride because his offering was denied. He was filled with jealousy and envy because his brother was accepted. And he was filled with anger and rage because he thought God was to blame. Do we not sulk when we don't get our way? Do we not mutter jealous words under our breath when someone gets what we want? Do we not shake our fist at God when we think that he is being withholding? And, to this, God says the same to us: "If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it"—words that seem to resonate with John's tone and instructions in this letter.

But, more often than we would like to admit, sin seems to get the best of us. We may not commit cold-blooded, premeditated murder like Cain (Gen. 4:8), but our anger is tantamount to murder (Matt. 5:21-22). We may not have an adulterous affair, but indulging our lust is the same thing (Matt. 5:27-28). We cannot do the good we want to do, yet so easily and naturally do the very things we hate (Rom. 7:15). And how many of us feel confident that we would pass the litmus test of brotherly compassion that John gives in 1 John 3:17? When we take an honest inventory of ourselves, we will find that we are devoid of the goodness God requires of us and full of the sin that he condemns. In and of ourselves, we are as guilty before him as Cain was when God confronted him and said, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!" (Gen. 4:10).

But Jesus's blood "says better things than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24). Abel's blood said that Cain was condemned, but Jesus's blood says that there is no condemnation for us! "This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things" (1 John 3:19-20). God sees our sinfulness and guilt more clearly than we do. He knows all things; nothing is hidden from his sight. Yet that guilt and sin has been laid on Christ, so that when he looks at us, he sees Christ's righteousness. Even when our very own hearts condemn us, *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. Even when we are guilty of sin and feel the weight of our guilt, our hearts do not give the final judgment. The One who is greater than our hearts renders that judgment, and he declares, "Not guilty!"

-Devotional written by Rick Leeman

Read Also:
1 John 3
Genesis 4:1-24
Romans 8:31-39
Matthew 5:21-30
Isaiah 1:2-20
James 4:1-12
Hebrews 10:19-25

Group Discussion Questions

Read Genesis 4:1-24. Why do you think Cain's offering was not regarded by God? Why does John say that his deeds were evil and Abel's righteous? How does this play into the world hating Christians (1 Jn. 3:13)?

What does it mean for Christians to lay down their lives for each other? How does it reflect Christ's love for us?

How can we as a church ensure that we heed John's instructions in vv. 17-18?

Why do our hearts condemn us? What should we do if our hearts condemn us for something we did that is truly sinful?

Verse 20 speaks of God's omniscience, "knowing all things," specifically about your heart. Discuss how this can bring both comfort and discomfort to our hearts?

How does John link our freedom from self-condemnation to prayer?