

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall have everlasting life.

John 3:16

The last 6 words of the second sentence are what get me. *‘And that is what we are!’* Ever wonder what you are? Who you are? Why you are the way you are? Verses like this remind us that there’s always an answer in scripture. This is hope soaked in confidence, brimming with love: We are his children! He loves us! He wants good for us! He’s on our side!

Verse 3 is a plea for purity. Christ’s blood and sacrifice makes us clean and pure at salvation but there is a life of purity that comes along with God’s standard for righteousness. Believers don’t live in habitual sin. It’s not about being perfect- John makes that super clear -but it is about not living in the pattern of sin day in and day out. In the Disciples Study Bible, the writers put it this way: That Jesus came from heaven to earth to destroy what Satan had accomplished and to atone (pay the debt) for our sins. We don’t usually think about satan having accomplished things because that’s not the prettiest picture.

How does that make you feel? Do you agree?

1 John 3:5-6 words this concept pretty plainly. *‘He (Jesus) appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.’* Only a Savior without sin can take it away from us. Otherwise it’s the pot calling the kettle black, right?

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. (v.7)

It’s safe to assume that if scripture is warning us to not be lead astray then that’s probably because people are going to try to lead us astray! We’ve got to wise up and pay attention. John’s warnings are simple. Believers should love one another. If they don’t, then something is wrong. Believers should do what is right even when no one is watching. If they don’t, then something is wrong. Believers should not be in a habit of sin. If they are, then something is wrong.

Do any other verses or phrases within verses 7-10 stand out to you?

If you had one take away from today’s passage, what would it be?

Whatever satan had accomplished on this earth, Christ came to make another way. Although we still fight against the forces of this world, we have hope in a savior named Jesus Christ. To close out our time together today, take one more look at the verse you wrote just above. Pray and ask the Lord to help you understand it better, to bring it to fulfillment in your life, and to help you teach it to someone close to you. The Lord honors our requests when brought to him with an honest heart. See you tomorrow, sister!

Love One Another

DEAR CHILDREN, LET US NOT LOVE WITH
WORDS OR TONGUE BUT WITH
ACTIONS AND IN TRUTH.
- 1 JOHN 3:18

TODAY'S READING -1 John 3:11-24

I'm sort of running out of creative ways to greet you at the beginning of each lesson, so forgive me. But I really just want to come up, squeeze your neck and, as we look at one another we both nod and say simultaneously, *'Let's do this.'* Is that too much to ask?

Take a minute to read our passage for today at least twice. Underlining and taking notes as you go.

Our day today starts out with a throwback story about Cain. If you'll remember with me, Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's sons. Two very different kids, apparently. Isn't it crazy how you can have the same parents yet siblings turn out very different? Well, suffice it to say that Cain and Abel took 'different' to the extreme. One had a heart for God and obeyed and the other, well, didn't.

Take a minute to brush up on the story in Genesis 4:1-16

So Cain kills Abel. Cain was mad (and hurt) because God approved of Abel's sacrifice of meat and not his vegetable offering. See, this is why meat is good for you! Kidding. Just a little carnivore joke for you. In our passage from John, starting in 1 John 3:11, John is all about loving one another. The following is his monologue on why it's better for other people, but also for ourselves, to love one another.

*So don't be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.
And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil
and his brother's were righteous. (v. 12)*

Without being dramatic, there's a really short line for a parallel about how we tend to kill relationships, or even the hope of a relationship/friendship, when we hold our head a little too high. We dislike when someone seems 'better' than us. It's not fun to look at another person and feel like they've got their life together and we don't. (I'm mainly thinking female relationships right now but it could cross genders.) Bearing in mind that our 'opponent' might be the kindest most humble person, yet we hinder any glimmer of a friendship because of how it makes us feel. We 'murder' the friendship simply because we don't like the feelings that surface when we are around that person. Feelings of inferiority or feeling that maybe we could do a better job at some things. Shame does that. It isolates and steals before we realize it and builds a wall between us and friendships that just might be good for us.

It's easy for us to become cynical and cryptic by rationalizing that this person is probably fake, 'because no one is really that sweet all the time' or 'I can't have a friend like that because I need someone real'. All the while, we don't even have eyes to look beyond our own insecurities to see that this person could be such a dear friend to us. We murder the relationship based on our own insecurities. Sometimes, even before we get to know them well. Perhaps it's a familial relationship with our siblings or parents that we slay simply because we don't like that they know the 'true us'. Or, perhaps they don't...so the issue is the same, just flipped.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Romans 12:9

The end of verse 14: *'Anyone who does not love remains in death'.*

This is the saddest part of all. When we don't love others, it's really us that suffers. We lose out on really deep friendships simply because we can't get over ourselves. We can't push past differences to see companionship and God's love displayed through people all around us. We are truly the ones that miss out.

Can you think of a time when this has happened to you? Were you ever able to push past the differences to become friends?

What was the outcome?

What advice would you give to someone in a similar situation?

Verse 16 is a memorizer. *'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.'*

Today, this could be a great sentence to memorize. I would quote it like this to myself: 'This is how I know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for me!' And I would repeat it to myself all day. Repetition with an earnest heart breeds understanding. And understanding brings about compassion. Compassion can be an unstoppable force in our interactions with others, but also for ourselves.

With that thought in mind, read and write 1 John 3:19-20 below:

Action and truth- this is how we first know that we belong to the truth (the action of Christ on the cross and the truth of his spirit given freely). But also- this is how we set our hearts at rest in his presence when they condemn us.

Our hearts will condemn us. I know that's not fluffy and fun to think about, but it's almost weirdly comforting to me. You? I know, through scripture, that my thoughts are sometimes not right. And just because I want something, doesn't mean it's what I need. I don't have to feel condemned for every crazy thought I've ever had, and trust me, I've had a lot. However, I do have to bring those thoughts to the Lord. I must test them against scripture. Trusting our own will and our desire's every whit-and-whim can be like trying to read a map in the dark. Your eyes do adjust after awhile but it's never as clear as it should be. Scripture is the literal and figurative light illuminating the map to show us where to go next.

Do you know why we set our hearts at rest in his presence? *For God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything* (v. 20)

How does that make you feel? Does it bristle your skin to think that he knows all the desires of your heart or does it comfort you? How does your answer shed light on current circumstances in your life?

Let's finish today off strong.

Please reread verses 21-24.

John is calling us friends again, which I so dearly love! In verse 21, John is reiterating that when our hearts condemn us- shame, fear, disbelief- that we usually don't go to God with those worries. Yet, if we can push back against what we 'want' to do and take those worries directly to God, we can have confidence before God. In life situations where we feel and think things that we know are not right, we should immediately go to the Lord in prayer. Don't give into the desire to hide from him in those times. That's what Adam and Eve did (Genesis 3:8). Seek God that you might find yourself in Him and, as verse 22 says, we will receive anything we ask because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

And if that weren't clear enough, God's command is to (1) believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and (2) to love one another. And this is how we know he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (3:23-24)

I don't know about you, but I really appreciate when things are clearly spelled out for me. The end of Chapter 3 seems to lay out in a succinct format the beauty of a relationship with the Lord. We can come to him with our wayward hearts. There is freedom in his presence. Loving everyone is ingrained into Christianity- no room for hate here. Believe in his son Jesus. We know he loves us because he gave us his Holy Spirit. May we not allow shame to murder our relationships with people here on earth or with our heavenly father.

I pray you are blessed and encouraged today. **Remember: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.**

Test the Spirits

YOU, DEAR CHILDREN, ARE FROM GOD
AND HAVE OVERCOME THEM BECAUSE
OF THE ONE WHO IS IN YOU IS GREATER
THAN THE ONE WHO IS IN THE WORLD.
- 1 JOHN 4:4

TODAY'S READING - 1 John 4:1-6

Remember our talk yesterday? We are there again. Come on in and give me some love. Let's group hug and then set our hearts on what the Lord has for us together today. We've only got 6 verses to walk through together today, so that is a manageable goal!

Go ahead and take a few minutes to read 1 John 4:1-6 and make some notes as you go along.

Our verses today talk about 'Testing the Spirits'. Lovely title, don't you think? We are back on the anti-christ subject again. Feel free to reference Day 6 if you need a quick refresher. My family and I live in an older part of town. And for some reason, our street is a magnet for visitors of other faiths to knock on our front door. Pair that with me being an introvert that is home a lot during the day and it makes for some funny scenes. You can usually find me running and hiding in the bathroom so they won't see me or just pretending that no one is home. For the record, I can rival James Bond on the floor roll/hide behind the doorway trick. One day they came while Brad was home, so we answered the door together. We had a long conversation with two nice gentlemen and we honestly agreed on so much. Heaven. God. Purpose in life. The importance of family. But then we got to Jesus. And while my suited visitors recognized Jesus, there was no acknowledgment of the cross or that he had even come to earth yet. Blank stares filled with stammering and adamant arguments for their side of the story. We politely said thank you and closed the door, but the interaction stuck with me.

1 John 4:1-3 is the same story. Lots of spirits. Lots of false prophets. Many people in our world wanting Jesus-ish lives. They want the benefits of Jesus without the acknowledgment of who God is. Helping and serving others. Kindness. Acceptance. Love. Service. These are all Biblical concepts and quite frankly, ones that believers should be the best at in the world, yet it can feel like the false spirits around us are doing it better than we can! That should scare you! It scares me!

What are your thoughts on this topic? Can you think of examples of worldly influences that mimic what Jesus offers us?

But here's the difference according to John: *This is how you can recognize the spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. That is the spirit of the anti-christ, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.* (v.2-3)

If there's no acknowledgement of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, it doesn't matter how much they talk about love, truth and freedom, it's not of God. Jesus is pivotal in the entire story of scripture; everything points to Jesus.

Now God has revealed these things to us by the spirit, since the spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

**1 Corinthians
2:10**

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them because of the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 1 John 4:4

Here's the thing about 'testing the spirits'. This isn't like testing the waters. This is about walking through life with eyes wide open to the spiritual realm around us. Please don't brush this off as hokey horoscope fodder. This is spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-12) and making sure that we are armored up (Ephesians 6:13-18) and ready for a fight (2 Timothy 4:2). Even if it's only Thursday.

Verse 5 makes me shudder. Write it below:

'...and the world listens to them.' The world listens to voices that go against Jesus. I've always heard non-believers having a tough time understanding the obedience and disciplines of our faith and that is what keeps them from trusting God. I think that is certainly part of it, but I also think that it's hard to comprehend a God that loves us. A God that cares for us so deeply that he would send his only son to die on a cross for our sins. **THAT** is harder to comprehend. Love. It's the love that's the linchpin. The disciplines are a part of every other religion, club or organization. But man, the love of a father, the sacrifice of a son, the incomprehensible forgiveness of sin? Those are things that are hard to grasp. Those are the things that keep us awake at night.

What are personal 'red flags' for you in your conversations with others?

How do you decipher if a 'feeling' about someone's intentions is from you or the Lord?

There's another story that comes to mind when I think about Jesus 'testing the spirits' and it's in a conversation Jesus has with Peter.

Read Matthew 16:21-28 and give a brief summary. How was Jesus testing the spirits?

During his time on earth, Jesus took sacrifice seriously. There was no question in his mind that he would have to suffer and that it would be death on a cross that would atone for the sins of the world. But, while Jesus was clear on the mission, his disciples weren't totally buying it. Peter, out of his love and protection for Christ, was quick to pull him aside and say that Jesus shouldn't have to die that way. That he didn't think the cross was the correct method, basically.

You'd think that Jesus would hug him and tell him that everything was going to be ok, and that it was so sweet how much Peter cared about him. They'd have a moment and then Jesus would kindly tell him that he had to go accomplish his Father's work.

But what does he do instead? *'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me: you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.'* Peter was the stumbling block! Peter, for crying out loud! He certainly had his moments but he was in the in-crowd and yet he had an anti-christ spirit. And Jesus called it out in 2 seconds flat and spoke against Satan!

Listen, sister, maintaining relationship and open communication with the Father keeps us focused and prevents this spirit of doubt from creeping in. We have to fight for authenticity in Jesus' name. He will freely give it!

Father, I pray for my friend reading this today. She's searching and asking and needing you. Please meet her! Comfort her! Bring her into yourself that she might know what love and peace with her spiritual Father is. You're so good to us. We honor you with our lives that we might be able to know what is of you and what's not, so that we can follow your voice. You lead and we will follow. Amen.

God's Love & Ours

THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE.
BUT PERFECT LOVE DRIVES OUT FEAR...
- 1 JOHN 4:18

TODAY'S READING - 1 John 4:7-21

Brad and I met when I was a junior at college in Birmingham, AL. He's a couple of years older than me so he was already working as a college pastor. Fun story- I joined him in ministry after we got married and we did college and high school ministry for awhile at a local church! Anyway, back to the story of when we met. Let's just say that it was not love at first sight. In fact, the first night we met he forgot my name 3 times! So funny to remember back on those details! Anyway, my point is this- he would tell you that he knew I was 'the one' within a few weeks. It took me a tiny bit longer. *grin* He told me that he loved me for the first time in my parent's garage, right before I was heading back to school. And do you know what I said? 'Thank you.'

Thank you!? I've been more expressive to the barista at Starbucks! Thank you!? Geez.

We obviously talked after that but it took me a few more weeks to be able to say it to him on my own. We can laugh about it now but it was so not funny then! Love is a simple concept with complicated application. This leads us to our reading for today. (See what I did there?)

Go ahead and read 1 John 4:7-21.

Let's not waste any time today.

Tell me, what is love to you?

Simple question, right? Well, maybe not. If you're like me, you start the peppering of questions about the type of love, does the other person love me back, and is there such a thing as true love, and so on and so on. The book of John is not a romantic comedy- far from it- but in his letters he does talk about love. A LOT. In 15 verses it's mentioned more than 20 times! I'm not the smartest person but I'm thinking maybe John feels like understanding love is important?

Let's start in verses 7 & 8. Read and write down anything that sticks out to you.

As mentioned above...this text is centered around love. God's love. In fact, this passage may be one of the most powerful portions of scripture concerning the love of God. The word for this type of love is agape, which means a self-giving love that seeks the best interest of its object and is not selfish or self-seeking.

Agape in its root-word means 'wide-open'. Meaning it's a type of love for everyone. A love for humanity, if you will. The other three types of love are: Storge is a familial love. Eros is a romantic type of love. Philia is the reciprocal quality of love you feel for a friend.

So this agape love that John writes about is the only type of love that doesn't have a directional quality to it. The other 3 types of love have a one-to-one quality; spouse, friend, parent, etc. Agape love is a love that comes from within the Holy Spirit inside of us and radiates outward in all directions.

Write verse 9 below:

This is how God loves the world. Not just a few people. Not only a certain type of people. All. Every. All-encompassing.

*And this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us
and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:10*

He loved first. No matter how long you've been walking with the Lord I pray those words wash over you afresh today. He loved you first. In all your sin. In all your propensity to sin. Even though you did this or that and thought about those things. He loved you first and sought you out with a purpose. Love was his purpose.

Verses 11 & 12 sum things up nicely, don't they?

Remember how we talked about 'joy made complete' on Day 1? Similar concept. We have a relationship with Jesus and feel his love and joy made complete in us first, and then we go out and share it! We learn first and then we teach. We find food first so that we can then help others eat. 1 John 4:13-14 continues and solidifies this position. In verse 14, he says, '*we have seen and testify...*'. We must see first and then we can testify!

Please write verse 17 below:

We can have confidence in the day of judgement because, in this world, we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. (vv.17-18)

Perfect love drives out fear. Our one and only version of perfect love is with God. Your spouse will fail you, your kids will fail you, and goodness knows, eventually we all will fail! Your circumstances will never make you complete. That job, no matter how good it is, will not fully satisfy in the long run. If you've ever felt like you're drowning in the day-to-day, then you know that your circumstances won't keep you afloat for very long. Yet, we keep grasping at these things as if they are life saving flotation devices, and all the while the shore is just up ahead. The shore of Christ is where we can take off pride, selfish desires and sin, so that in turn we experience peace, forgiveness and new life. Temporary relief in the ocean of life that's full of crashing waves will never work.

As we finish today, read our last 3 verses and tell me your thoughts:

Ask the Lord any questions you might have about the passage we read today. Our God is not afraid of questions...don't believe that for one minute. Questions engage our mind and our heart. For many of us it's how we learn what we are studying. I can promise you that God can handle any and all of your questions when asked with a humble heart. He's a safe place to land because he is love. And he won't say ridiculous things like 'thank you!' when you tell him that you love him.

Love you today, sister. Fight for the love of God to infiltrate every square inch of your life. You'll never be the same.

In him, and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Ephesians 3:12

Faith in the Son of God

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW THAT WE LOVE
THE CHILDREN OF GOD: BY LOVING GOD
AND CARRYING OUT HIS COMMANDS.
- 1 JOHN 5:2

TODAY'S READING - 1 John 5:1-12

Hello to you! I just finished working out and doing some stretches so I could be loosened up for today's lesson. Kidding. I just ate two Oreos. And let's be honest, I'm thinking about a third. The real question is whether I'll pour a glass of milk. But I digress.

Go ahead and read our passage for today.

Our scripture work for today can be categorized into two parts. We'll start with **Part 1: 1 John 5:1-5**. Our first few verses are solely focusing on the results of faith. Take a minute and jot a few results of faith down:

Our banner verse for today is simple, succinct and gut wrenching. Please write it below:

Just after John makes his point about the children of God carrying out his commands, he's quick to move into his next point which is to make sure the community of recipients of this letter know that God's commands are not burdensome. In fact, God's commands are what bring about victory in this world! If carrying out his commands feels overwhelming to you, be encouraged by these words from William Barclay's Daily Bible Study, "God does not give us his commandments and then go away and leave us to ourselves. He is there by our side to enable us to carry out what he has commanded. What is impossible for us becomes possible with God." It's always comforting to be reminded we're not in it alone!

This concept might bring to mind another passage - **Matthew 11:28-30**

Anyone who is weary and burdened. (Isn't that everyone?) You give those people rest? (Where's the sign up sheet exactly? Asking for a friend.)

It's easy for us to get on board with a love language like the one written about in the Matthew passage, as well as in today's scripture in chapter 5. Who wouldn't want to 'overcome the world?' I don't know about you but I'd settle for overcoming my emotions on some days, but the world sounds good, too.

The three main concepts for part 1 are this: *Obedience, faith and love.*

Write those three words below. I want you to see them in your own handwriting.

We give evidence to our belief that Jesus is God's promised Messiah by obeying God's commands. Such obedience is what helps us to overcome the thousands of temptations the world offers us every single day. When we have genuine faith in God, we fully trust in his direction and who he is. Our motivation for obedience is our love for God. What other proof of our love for him is there, other than obedience? That love then extends to all other children of God.

Obedience. Faith. Love.

Those three concepts lead us to **Part 2. - 1 John 5:6-12 -**

We have three more words for Part 2. *Water. Spirit. Blood.*

Write those below so that you can also see them in your own handwriting.

In verse 6, John writes about how Jesus didn't just come by water but by water and blood. Here, he is referring to Jesus' baptism, as well as his crucifixion. And the Spirit is what testifies because the spirit is truth.

There are 3 'witnesses' to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah- the Son of God.

Here's the breakdown of the witnesses:

Water - The water at Jesus' Baptism was a key part of that ritual. It spoke to God being the living water as well as God's words to Jesus at the time of the baptism. Read those here: Matthew 3:13-17

Spirit - The spirit is what came upon Jesus during his baptism. This side of the cross, we receive all of God and the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation but in Jesus' time, it wasn't so. During baptism, Jesus received the Holy Spirit that stayed with him for the next 3 years of ministry.

Blood - The blood is represented by the cross and Jesus' resurrection. Colossians tells us that Jesus Christ made peace through the blood.

**And I will ask
the Father, and
he will give you
another coun-
selor to be with
you Forever- the
spirit of truth.**

John 14:16

Out of context, this can all sound, well, weird. I get it. It's a big concept but I think the most important part to remember is that we have 3 main witnesses that speak of the personhood and glory of Jesus and we have 3 main results of faith above.

<i>Obedience</i>	→	<i>Water</i>
<i>Faith</i>	→	<i>Spirit</i>
<i>Love</i>	→	<i>Blood</i>

Can you see the correlations? Out of Obedience, Jesus was baptized. Seemed futile since he was God's son. But it was an act of Obedience so that out of Faith, the Spirit could come and rest on him for his 3 years of ministry. And it was only out of his Love for God and for us that he went on to shed his Blood on the cross and to rise again three days later that he might be seated with God in heaven.

*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life,
and in this life is his Son.' 1 John 5:11*

The witnesses above bear testimony that God has given us eternal life, and in this life is his Son. As you go about your day today, I pray you'll keep those 6 words in the forefront of your thoughts. Maybe even write them on an index card or something?

Obedience, Love, Faith, Water, Spirit and Blood.

Father, sometimes scripture can be hard to understand. Please give us your heart and wisdom on your word. You know it best and our hearts are hungry for you. You were so gracious to us to send your Son to accomplish your commands here on earth. May we be as obedient, faithful and loving as he was. We love you, Amen.

A Confident Conclusion

HIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WE HAVE IN
APPROACHING GOD: THAT IF WE
ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS
WILL, HE HEARS US.
- 1 JOHN 5:14

TODAY'S READING - 1 John 5:13-21

Hi friend. Proud of you for hanging in for the final days of our study. Our time is never wasted in scripture. Some days we have huge breakthroughs and others we simply till the soil so that we might plant the seeds and keep them healthy and safe. I pray you've experienced both types of days in this journey through the Epistles of John. Today is our last day in 1 John and the last two days will be the subsequent books in The Trio. Let's finish strong and power through John's concluding remarks:

As always, be sure you've read through the passage a couple of times. Take a minute to ask the Lord to open your mind and heart to his word.

As John brings this first letter to a close, remember that our text is just that- a letter to a community of friends to stay strong and firm in the Lord. A diatribe against false teachers who seek out weak members of the church, a plea to remember the truth that Jesus left with them and a call to keep our gaze forward and upward on the finished work of Christ and on heaven to come! I couldn't encourage you with better words than verses 13-15, so I'll wait here while you digest those again.

Verse 14 is our banner verse for today, but it could be a banner verse for life. No matter what happens, no matter who schemes against us or who fails us.... we have a God that hears us! And not just barely hears us, as if he's only being polite, while never truly listening to us. We have confidence that he turns his attention to his children, cups our faces in his hands and LISTENS to us when we ask things in accordance to his will.

Don't move past this quickly or gloss over it because you're in a hurry. These verses are scriptures you commit to memory. Even if you don't need them today, you will need them at some point. That's the beauty of how memorization works- it's a packing away so that it's there when you need it. Foresight to know the future is unclear but rest assured, God is unchanging.

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

1 John 5:16-17

The scripture above has had theologians scratching their heads for centuries. I won't pretend to understand it, but the common and agreed upon meaning be-

hind ‘*sin that does not lead to death*’ is this. There are sins that threaten our spiritual lives and sins that threaten our physical lives. You could argue that there is much crossover in these two areas however, there are most certainly sins in my day to day life that don’t threaten to take my physical life. I’m guessing you’re the same way. At the end of the day, sin is a thief and a liar. It promises to give when really it takes. It seduces to give the illusion of power, popularity and knownness when really all it does is isolate and confiscate your voice.

Read and write any part of Romans 6:20-23 that stands out below:

1 John 5:18-20 bring things home for us. John is landing the plane on this lengthy letter to his church body. Remember when we talked about how John wasn’t afraid to say what he needed to say? Well, he’s back at it again.

Take a minute to write out a few statements that sum up what John ‘knows for sure’.

1 -

2 -

3 -

4 -

I’ve given you space for 4 theological declarations. I counted around 10, so feel free to go for those extra credit points! These declarations are the bow on top of the present that is 1 John. It’s his moment to hurry back and cover the concepts that he desperately wants to make sure that his people know before he places his quill in the ink for a rest. There’s a stark desperation to it that is surprisingly inspiring.

What would be your final declarations to the ones you love? List a few below:

A buzz word or phrase these days is to know ‘your truth’. Live your truth! Speak

your truth! Build your life around your truth! Hopefully, after nearly two weeks together, you know what I'm about to say. Sister, you are beautiful and you have a story. No doubt a blockbuster of a story. But the only truth we have to stand on is scripture and the truth that God loves us, sent his son to die for us and to be raised again three days later to transcend into heaven so that he might be seated at the right hand of the Father.

**Simply let your
'yes' be 'yes' and
your 'no' be 'no'.
*Matthew 5:37***

That's the truth.

Personal revelation is a good thing. It can be what steers us away from poor choices and helps us know our hearts better. However, don't buy into the world's version of self-trust. You can trust God, our Father. He leads, guides and protects us out of his love and deep affection for us.

The last verse of the book of 1 John is this: '*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*' (v. 21) This statement is the perfect summation to what we've been discussing. That there are declarations of our faith and yet, the world has us constantly bombarded with declarations of self-sufficiency. John ends with a plea to essentially, '*Be wary of any teachings that are opposed to these realities.*' He knew that the world, even centuries ago, would be vying for our affection. It's his last ditch effort to remind us to not bow to the idol of self.

Things to pray for today:

- **The ability to see the goodness of the Lord, not just rules to obey.**
- **A fresh desire to learn and study his word.**
- **A heart that trusts the truth of scripture.**
- **A renewed desire to remove the idol of self from your life.**
- **A quickening in your soul of the fact that God loves and desires a personal relationship with you.**

Commandment to Love

AND NOW, DEAR LADY, I AM NOT
WRITING YOU A NEW COMMAND, BUT
ONE WE HAVE HAD FROM THE BEGINNING.
I ASK THAT WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER.
- 2 JOHN 5

TODAY'S READING - 2 John

Today we are going to cover an entire book of the Bible! Don't be scared! It's gonna be great! Truth be told, it's only 13 verses, so it should be enlightening and not overwhelming.

Let's start by reading the entire book and taking notes.

First of all, let's talk through the details of this letter.

Author: *John* (He's the Elder) - This term may refer to his age or official position in the church. John was the last apostle to accompany Jesus on earth. As to his church position, he was most surely an overseer or bishop. Don't let the terms confuse you. Just know it's the same John we've been reading.

Recipient: *'The chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth.'* There are two main schools of thought on this mysterious 'chosen lady'. #1- The lady is the church, elsewhere referred to as the bride of Christ or even a particular local church. #2- Others think that the letter could be addressed to 'The elect Kyrria'. This name could be the Greek equivalent to the Arameic name of Martha and both mean 'lady'.

What do you think? Now that you've read the entire letter, what is your summation of who the 'chosen lady' is and why?

Verse 3 should be a familiar greeting for any of you Paul lovers. Except there's an added noun in there. Write the three words below.

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.

Romans 16:17

I think it's really interesting that John adds in 'mercy'. He's so fixated on the personhood of Christ that mercy is a standard concept for Christianity in his mind. There is grace and peace, but oh, there is the beauty of mercy, too!

In verse 4 we see John resume his customary cadence focusing on love and truth. He's so pleased that members of the church have remained in the truth. He reminds the chosen lady that he's not saying anything new, yet he's still preaching his banner theology. God is love and therefore we must love one another (v.5).

The next few verses reemphasize his message in 1 John. There's lots of crazy people in the world saying the name of God. Be sure that their theology is centered on Christ and not just a 'god' that they send prayers. The world's 3 main religions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity all use the term 'god' or God. But only Christianity reveres God in 3 persons. Jesus cannot be left out of the equation. Period. John is adamant about that!

Verse 10 could be off putting if we forget the background of our book. John warns this community against welcoming in people who do not agree with this view of Jesus Christ. He is essentially saying that if we entertain or show hospitality to these people then we are wicked also. But here's why I said to remember our background and a great example of why we cannot take scripture out of context.

John is speaking against these 'traveling missionaries'. They are random people and in ancient days there was no way to check their backgrounds or authenticity. These traveling teachers had likely left a Christian church and adopted some of the Gnostic beliefs along their travels. Think of it like a buffet of religion all mixed together. John's point was not to be unwelcoming to those who believe different than we do. Jesus was clear about his stance on that in these passages. Read and write a one sentence summary below:

Mark 2:1-12 -

Luke 5:27-32 -

Matthew 12:1-14 -

John's point was that when people worm their false teaching into our lives, we are susceptible to believing things we know are not true simply because we've gotten used to hearing it. It's similar to how your parents probably told you to be careful who your friends were in high school and college....we become who we hang around. That's John's position.

Lastly, we see our sweet and endearing author close with what is a timely message for our technology filled lives.

*I have so much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper
and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face,
so that our joy may be complete. 2 John 12*

There's a lot we can say over text, email and facebook. There's much to be written in books about the goodness of the Lord. But there is magic in the face to face. My dad calls it 'eyeball to eyeball'. Things change. Hard lines in the sand soften and become easily crossable. Walls of protection are lowered and vulnerability takes center stage when we take the time to meet with people face to face.

I am praying for you today, sister. That you would remember the command to love one another. This will most certainly come on a day when you want to do anything but love someone else! That's the irony of this life. But also that you'd be able to meet someone face to face today- even if it's the cashier at the grocery store. Make eye contact. Encourage. Reach across social boundaries that you might offer hope for today and a friendship that might just be the very thing that keeps that person going for one more day.

In the name of Jesus, may your joy be made complete in him and others today.

Faithfulness to the Gospel

I HAVE NO GREATER JOY THAN TO HEAR THAT
MY CHILDREN ARE WALKING IN THE TRUTH.
- 3 JOHN 4

TODAY'S READING - 3 John

This is our last day! You did it! I'm just beaming with joy over here! So proud of you! I pray that this discipline of committing to something and completing the task will spill over into other areas of your life!

3 John is the shortest book in the New Testament. Our 13 verses for today will echo much of 1 & 2 John however, where there was a firmness to 2 John, there is a beautiful tenderness to the message of 3 John. Sometimes we need it told to us straight and other times we need more of a gentle nudge toward the truth. All three of these books have the opportunity to meet you wherever you are in life. Isn't scripture just the most beautiful thing?

Our author is the same: still John, however our recipient has changed.

Recipient: *Gaius, whom I love in the truth.* - Gaius is mentioned in two other scriptures, and although we are not 100% sure if this is the same person, it's widely agreed upon that it is.

Write the two scriptures below.

Romans 16:23 -

Acts 20:4 -

We have three people that are discussed in this book.

Gaius: The hospitable and the spiritual.

Demetrius: The commendable.

Diotrephes: The self-seeking and unloving.

MacDonald tells us that Diotrephes may illustrate the strong, self-willed personality that can show up in any church structure. Yikes! I've known a person or two like that in my day, have you?

Let's take a minute to pray for that person. Whether they are in your past or present, the fact that they came to mind at the mention of a personality type

**They have told
the church about
your love...**
3 John 6

means that they are a part of your church story. Church resentment sadly is easily bred. Confessing and praying for others is a front line defense against a spirit of offense.

The primary goal of this epistle is that of hospitality. How we welcome people into our church bodies says so much about what we believe about Jesus. The beginning of the letter is John praising Gaius on his faithfulness and how his church community is continuing to walk in the truth. Our banner verse speaks to this concept. We can apply this a little more literally, if we so choose....as believers, isn't that what we desire for our own children as well? To walk in the truth? We must teach them well- and it's never too late to start!

Verses 5-8 continue with John's encouragement to Gaius. He apparently worked with others to be hospitable and received no help from anyone else. However we 'show hospitality so that we might work together for the truth'. Friendliness, warmth and affability goes a long way in winning people over. Believers are to be winsome and appealing to the world. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is through the simple act of being kind. No news there, but it's easily glossed over. Common kindness and respect is often what softens hearts.

Verse 9 is a gut check for me. Please write it below:

Diotrephes '*loves to be first*'. Whew. I don't know why that's so powerful to me. This has nothing to do with being treated fairly or being welcomed. It has to do with a church member who had to be first to share news or always be the one on the platform. Diotrephes was that kind of a leader in the church. Full of pride and ambition. Wanting to be the gatekeeper of the church and call all the shots.. But his pride would lead him to destruction. In other religions, there is a process by which one talks to God that involves a hierarchy in the church. One of the most beautiful things about Christianity is that we can go straight to God. And he hears us!

Apparently Diotrephes is on a rampage of malicious gossip and, if that weren't enough, he's asking people to leave the church. Don't miss the fact that the first description of this man 'was that he had to be first.' It then morphed into malicious gossip and finally culminated with throwing people out of church.

Moral of the Diotrephes story? It starts in our hearts. Evil breeds and multiplies in our hearts long before you can see it on the outside. It then pollinates and starts to come out of mouths with hushed whispers and gossip. Before we know it that pride has overtaken our bodies and leads to physical actions. All repercussions of pride and an inflated ego. Be wary of those who puff you up. John's not letting this happen on his watch. '*I will call attention to what he is doing...*' (v.10).

John. He's the real deal. He gives praise and encouragement where it's due and gives warning and calls out danger when it's lurking behind the veil of religion. We'd be wise to do the same.

'Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good.' (v.11). Sounds easy enough, right? Demetrius certainly has the hang of it. He's *'well-spoken of by everyone'* and also by John. There is a small but important lesson here. We cannot feed off 'haters'. Yes, there is resistance to truth. And while it can be a sign we are not on the right track, it can also be a sign that we could stand to soften our delivery a little bit. Notice I did not say to soften our message....but the delivery. Grace, mercy and peace. Remember those from yesterday? That's our delivery. Our message is God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever experienced this in a relationship? You might have been right but the way you said it wasn't appropriate? What did you learn from that experience?

John's last two thoughts are this: I can't wait to see you face to face- remember that from yesterday?

And then at the end, he sends peace to them and asks Gaius to *'greet the friends there by name.'* I feel like this is another one of those tiny lessons that could easily be overlooked.

The respect of remembering names is so valuable. I fail at this quite often but I want to get better at it. My opinion of someone soars when they simply remember my name. To me, it can feel like they remembered me and our time together wasn't wasted. Of course, everyone makes mistakes but man, it's a winsome thing to acknowledge and remember people by their names. Let's try together to value that action!

Last thing I want you to know....

Jesus loves you and knows you by name. He truly does. No matter what you're going through today, he's with you. Walk with him. Engage with him. Tell him how you feel. How you really feel. How happy you are or how lonely you feel. If John has taught us anything, it's that the life and crucifixion of Jesus really happened and that we, too, can have a relationship with a living and active God. That's a message that spans centuries and countless stories of God's grace.

Peace to you, friend. And also grace and mercy, as well.

