

1 John: On the journey of faith with Jesus' best mate.

Introduction.

As a church we are going to kick off the year reading 1 John. I've chosen 1 John for a few reasons; it's short, concise and fits with God's call for us to be "mature". I am hoping it will help us grow in our biblical literacy and reading of the Bible personally. Consequently I have tried to "set out" this study in a way that will grow your ability to read God for yourself.

How to

chosen 1 John for us to biblical this study to read God"

read 1 John.

As we read a chapter each week as a church, you'll be encouraged to read that chapter and see what you get from it. Before you read each chapter sit down and read all five chapters. This will only take you 15-20 minutes. This will help you to gain the "big picture" and is a more realistic way to read a letter.

Try to find out the background (I'll do some of this for you). Who wrote it, when it was written and what were the issues the writer was addressing. You'll be able to discover some of these from the book itself (hence why it's good to read the whole thing first). Some of the other information can be found from study Bibles or from Bible web sites like "[blue letter bible](#)" or "[biblegateway](#)".

Once you know the background of John, from there we will have a set routine for each chapter that will be the same. This is to help you develop an approach to reading not only this book but any book of the Bible. Apart from the "background" each chapter will follow four steps.

Becoming a seasoned traveler in the journey of living an eternal life.

Background to 1 John.

The letter of 1 John was written by Jesus' best friend, the Apostle John¹. John "The beloved" disciple as he describes himself (John 20:2) had a relationship that was closer to Jesus than all the other disciples (John 13:23-24).

Of the 12 disciples John was the longest living of the 12. He had a big influence as a "living voice" on those who lead the church into the 2nd century, like the Bishop of Smyrna (Western Turkey) and Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis (Southern Turkey).

Why did John write this book?

As the church began to establish itself and what it believed, some sought to re-shape "Its doctrine" or core beliefs away from what was initially taught by the first generation disciples and church leaders.

Like today, the Roman world was awash with many philosophies and beliefs. The golden age of Greek Philosophy still had great sway, mystic religions and the emergence of Gnosticism (the belief that those with special knowledge would "escape" this corrupted world) all sought to influence the Gospel of Jesus. These influences were creeping into the church and John sought to warn Christians about those who were corrupting their faith.

In this setting John's "eyewitness" account was especially important. It was his first hand experiences of Christ that he draws on as he addresses those who were seeking to distort what the early church believed. Not only did this eyewitness give John credibility in what he was saying but it also did for those he influenced.

Bishop Papias said of John that what he got from books was not as important as what came from "A living and abiding voice."² John's "Voice" was to challenge those who sought to change the message about who Jesus is and the nature of his appearing as well as the message and what it meant to be a Christian. John recognized this as no "small thing" but an absolutely undermining not only of the Christian message but what he had actually experienced.

Application for us.

We live in a relative age where people interpret truth so that it "fits" what's right for them. There are many voices that are seeking to change the Gospel of Jesus, downgrade the importance of the Bible and tell us that we have "evolved" past the "Religion."

¹ Stott, John R.W., The letters of John (Inter varsity press; England, 1995) 27

² Bruce, F.F., The epistle of John (Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, 1992) 15

Our culture of “relative truth” (“That’s true for you but that isn’t my truth”) seeks to diminish the power of the gospel and force us to accept a Christianity that is subjective, “personal” and unaccountable. Faith becomes closed and personal and is tolerated as long as it’s never referred to in public.

This flies in the face of the orthodox Christian message that tells us that God is Eternal, the originator of all things and the foundation of all that’s true. This is the message that John wrote of, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).” For John his understanding came through seeing, hearing, touching and watching a flesh and blood Jesus that fulfilled all the promises of messiah. From this vantage point John presents a Christianity that he says is to affect everything we do and is anything but “Private.”

When we have so many people today undermining orthodox Christianity and introducing a new “humanistic” version that diminishes or denies a belief in the actual resurrected person of Jesus, 1 John is a good anchor point in checking not only what we believe about Jesus but how true we are living as his disciples.

The four steps for each chapter.

Step 1. The big idea; Knowing where a chapter fits is much easier when you know the big picture of that book or letter. For instance, the genre, writer and broad background of the book and what issues it was seeking to address gives you a context for understanding the particular chapter you are reading. Being aware of the background helps to insure that we don’t form conclusions that are out of context or out of step with the whole Bible message.

Step 2. Summary. You will summarize in a few words what a chapter is about. You’ll be able to do this simply from reading the chapter.

Step 3. Honing in. You’ll be able to have a look at what you believe was the central idea or ideas from that chapter (Sometimes these can flow over chapters, that’s why it’s good to recognize the “big idea” first).

Step 4. Up close and personal; You’ll have thought about what God could be saying to us as a group and to you personally, concluding by writing a prayer.

Illustration; Below is an example of going through these four steps from chapter 10 of the book of Hebrews.

Step 1. The big idea It’s a New Testament letter to a local church. We don’t know who wrote the book but it’s to Christians who knew a lot about the Old Testament. Some people have suggested it was to Jewish priests who had become Christians but because of persecution and thinking of going back.

Step 2. Summary The writer is trying to encourage people not to drift away from the message of Jesus even though they are facing persecution. It encourages them to see challenges as a chance to grow rather than being condemned by them, that the troubles they are experiencing show that they are part of God’s forever family. Perhaps some of them were thinking there persecution meant that they weren’t Christians.

Step 3. Honing in. The key verse for me was vs 35 “So do not lose the courage you had in the past, which has a great reward” It’s easy to lose perspective when things are difficult and forget the “end goal”.

Step 4. Up close and personal. Following Jesus is a constant thing for any Christian anywhere. If you take your foot off the pedal you won’t just stop but Hebrews suggests you will fall off the road and lose your salvation. For us as a church, we don’t face any “persecution” like the Hebrews did. I think the hardest thing we face is not giving in to the temptation to let apathy and affluence cause us to drift. For me Hebrews challenges me to see circumstances as a chance to mature and not think, “What’s wrong with me.”

Prayer. Dear Lord, thanks for the way you have constantly and sacrificially spoken to all people of your love for them. Father help me not to take this for granted. Father I want to thank you for my church. Help us not to give into the temptation of the West to allow good times and ease crowd you out. Thanks to for you discipline. I do want to see and respond to difficulties as an opportunity to know you better.

Bibliography.

- Bruce, F.F., The epistle of John (Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, 1992)
Stott, John R.W., The letters of John (Inter varsity press; England, 1995)
Marshall I Howard., The Epistle of John (Eerdmans; Michigan, 1982)

Background to John (sit and read it in one go).

Who wrote it?

Who was it written to?

When was it written?

What was John writing this letter for?

What are some of the repeated words, phrases etc

1 John 1. Checklist for mature “Light” faith.

Step 1 - The big idea

Step 2. Summary (what was the main verse in this chapter for you?)

Step 3. Honing in

Step 4. Up close and personal.

Your prayer.

1 John 2. Letting it “remain” in you.

Step 1. The big idea;

Step 2. Summary (what was the main verse in this chapter for you?)

Step 3. Honing in

Step 4. Up close and personal.

Your prayer.

1 John 3. This is how we know.

Step 1. The big idea

Step 2. Summary (what was the main verse in this chapter for you?)

Step 3. Honing in

Step 4. Up close and personal.

Your prayer.

1 John 4. How do we “live in love?”

Step 1. The big idea;

Step 2. Summary (what was the main verse in this chapter for you?)

Step 3. Honing in

Step 4. Up close and personal.

Your prayer.

1 John 5 Growing in confidence

Step 1. The big idea;

Step 2. Summary (what was the main verse in this chapter for you?)

Step 3. Honing in

Step 4. Up close and personal.

Your prayer.