

Group Discussion Guide to help you better understand *First John*

IMPORTANT NOTE: This discussion guide is composed of questions. Some of these questions may seem difficult and may require further prayer and study and discussion, but these more difficult questions are ideal for generating discussion that help you more fully explore the implications of First John. For best results, group moderators should NEVER offer their opinions or indicate approval or disapproval of answers they agree or disagree with. Pray to ask the Holy Spirit to lead the discussion and trust in His leading. Often the best long-term results do not look best in the short-term—you should be desirous of the best long-term results. Additionally, the quality of the discussion will be helped by allowing long awkward pauses while people in the group are thinking about how to answer the questions being asked—so don't try to cut short those long awkward pauses. (Discussion for most of these questions should usually last ten minutes or more per question. Typically, each session should last about an hour.)

VERY IMPORTANT: Please pray at the beginning of each session asking for the Holy Spirit to lead your group in thinking His thoughts, and leading everyone in the group to speak with kindness and wisdom. The optimum group size is about 12 people, and this does work well either in person or via video conferencing (Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, Zoho, etc.).

ANOTHER IMPORTANT NOTE: Many of these questions refer directly to the wording of the translation of First John that has been produced by Great Commission Training Ministries and which can be downloaded from its Web site at:

<https://www.discipleshiptraining.org/firstjohn> . We recommend you use this translation at least as a cross reference in addition to any other popular translations you might also use.

Session 1: Read 1 John 1:1-2:2, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. 1 John 1:2 calls Jesus “this ETERNAL LIFE.” What are the implications for us of this fact that Jesus IS eternal life? (In what ways is this different from saying that Jesus has eternal life, or gives eternal life, or is the way to eternal life?) Also see vv. 2:11, 5:20, John 17:3, and Matt 7:22-23.
2. Why do you think is so important to John that we know that Jesus came in the flesh? (vv. 1:1-3, 4:4, 5:6-8, and 3:16) What do you think is the significance of the fact that He came in the flesh?

3. What does it mean to live in the truth of His light (vv. 1:6 & 1:7)? What are some examples of living in His light? (see vs. 2:10, 3:1-11, 3:14, etc.)
4. What does it mean to walk around participating in darkness (vs. 1:6)? According to First John, what are some specific examples of walking in darkness? (see vv. 2:9-11, 3:4-6, 3:12-15, 4:4-6, 4:16, 4:17)
5. Vv. 1:9, 2:1 and 2:2 (among others) talk about finding forgiveness in Jesus for not walking in the light. What is more important: walking in the things God approves of (righteous deeds), or having the blood of Christ cleanse us from God's disapproval when we don't walk consistently in righteous deeds?

Session 2: Read 1 John 2:1-12, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. In vv. 2:3-6 (and many other verses in First John), John says that we are to “**preserve and take seriously**” those things God has charged us with. This phrase is a translation of the Greek word “tereo” (pronounced “tay-reh-oh”) which also means “to watch over” or “to guard” or “to keep intact” or “to hold firmly.” What does it mean to “preserve and take seriously (tereo)” the things He has charged us with? Can you give several specific examples of what this “preserving and taking seriously” might look like in the daily life of a Christian?
2. From the context of First John, what do you think John means when He says in v. 2:6, “that person spends their life involved in the kinds of things Jesus would be involved in”? Some verses that might help answer this question are: v. 3:16-18. What are some other verses in First John that give us more on the kinds of things Jesus is involved in?
3. What are some examples of: “the revealed truth of God displayed in the life of Christ” (v. 2:8)?

4. What does John mean when he says in v. 2:8: “the darkness is in the process of passing away as the true light of God shines to dispel it”? Can you give some specific examples of how this happens?

5. In v. 2:9, and in several places in First John, he says we should not “hate” our Christian brother or sister. This word in the Greek is “miseo” (pronounced “miss-eh-oh”) means “to detest on a comparative basis” or “to love someone less than someone else” which is usually translated in the English as “hate.” In the context of First John it means that we should not love other Christians less than we love ourselves. So, given this meaning of the word translated here as “hate,” what does v. 2:9 mean? How would you live out this walking in the light? (See v. 2:10)

6. According to v. 2:11, what happens to a person who does not live out v. 2:10?

7. In v. 1:8 and 1:10, John tells us that we are not going to be able to always walk in the light, which implies that we will not always be self-sacrificing and devotedly caring for our Christian brothers and sisters. What does v. 12 give as the reason for why Jesus will ALWAYS forgive you for those times you do not walk in the light? (Note: based on the verses that precede this one, this promise is only for those who have trusted in Jesus. For example, see v. 2:1-2.)

Session 3: Read 1 John 2:12-29, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. Vv. 2:13-14 state that we have already overcome the evil one. How did we do that? When did that happen? How is that “overcoming” the evil one?

2. V. 2:15 says that we can either be devoted to this fallen world or to the Father, but not to both at any given time. What does it mean to be devoted to this fallen world? (hint: see v. 2:16)

3. What does v. 2:17 mean when it says, “This world is passing away along with its lusts”? What examples of this “passing away” do we see in the world today? What examples of this passing away do you see in your own life? (Be cautious about sharing specifics in this group setting.)

4. How many antichrists are there? Where do they come from? What is their main message? (see vv. 2:18-19)

5. Re-read vv. 2:22-25, and talk about how different your life might be if you prayed this before starting each new task in your day:
“Lord Jesus, I can do nothing apart from You and apart from Your will. Father, please have Your Holy Spirit direct my paths, my thinking, my words, and give me wisdom for this task, and give me favor in the eyes of those I work with and for so the Lord Jesus Christ will be exalted through me.”

In what ways might this prayer be an appropriate response to vv. 2:22-25?

6. What reason does John give for why he wrote this letter? (see v. 2:26)

7. According to v. 2:27, what does the Holy Spirit teach us? (In other words, does the “everything you need to know” refer to? What does the context tell us we need to know?)

8. Read v. 2:29. What does righteousness look like? How does one live in that righteousness? How does Romans 14:23 help us answer this question?

Session 4: Read 1 John 3:1-10, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. What is it that John wants us to see in v. 3:1? Is this a desirable gift? If so, why?

2. Read vv. 3:1-3 along with v. 3:16. What are the reasons given for why we should find it desirable to sacrifice ourselves for others?

3. According to v. 3:4, what is one reason Christians sometimes walk in darkness? What are some examples of what it looks like and feels like when we decide to face life challenges independent from God?

4. How does Genesis 3:1-7 help to shed light on 1 John 3:5-6?

5. In Genesis 3:1-7, Satan convinces Eve that it would be desirable if Eve were the one who got to decide what was good (fair) and what was not, and to primarily value the immediate physical benefits of a decision more than the long-term spiritual outcomes. How do vv. 3:1-10 describe and justify the alternative to Satan's proposition in Genesis 3:1-7?

6. In v. 3:7, John tells us that our righteousness (our approval in God's sight) is the same as the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Why does this logically make sense?

Session 5: Read 1 John 3:11-24, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. According to v. 3:11, what has God always been proclaiming by His word and His deeds?

2. According to vv. 3:12-15, what are some characteristics of those who choose not to follow God's example as described in v. 3:11?

3. Jesus has always been, before anything in heaven and earth were created (see Colossians 1:15-20). And by coming to us in a completely human fleshly physical body, how did He live out v. 3:11?

4. What is it that God testifies to that v. 3:20 is referring to? According to vv. 3:21 & 22, what is the intended result of God's testimony referred to in v. 3:20?

5. According to v. 3:23, what two things has God charged us with? How are we supposed to preserve, treasure, and do (carry out) those two charges? What does v. 3:24 imply about the answer to this question?

Session 6: Read 1 John 4:1-11, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. In vv. 4:2 & 3, God gives us a litmus test to be able to discern whether or not a new idea is from Him. What is that litmus test? How would we apply that litmus test to the following three "new" ideas and what conclusions should we reach?
New ideas:
 - i. The theory of evolution, proposed by Charles Darwin in 1859, along with its corollary that life on earth evolved over a period of billions of years;
 - ii. All religions are equally valid and all will lead you to God;
 - iii. You should find some equitable (fair) way to repay a person who gives you a gift.

2. In v. 4:6, John says that "everyone who is not from God does not accept what we have been saying." What is it that was being said by John that is not acceptable to those from this world?

3. According to v. 4:7, what is the common sense justification for why we should be self-sacrificing and devotedly caring for one another?

4. In v. 4:10, we are told that all this is not about how we love God. What does this verse say it **IS** about?
5. According to v. 4:11, what should be the result in our lives when we clearly see how God loves us? If this is not the result in your life, what would this verse suggest might be the solution to our problem?

Session 7: Read 1 John 4:11-21, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. Read v. 4:12. The Greek word used for God's love throughout this letter is the word "agape" (pronounced "ah-gah-pay"). Literally it means "to prefer (more than oneself)." More specifically, it means "to prefer the benefit of the other person more than one's own benefit, and will act to benefit the other person even at great expense to itself." In other places in this letter, the translators have translated this same word "agape" as "self-sacrificing and devotedly caring for" the other. Do you see that this is an accurate description of the kind of love God has for you, which He has amply demonstrated by the sacrifice of His own Son for you?
2. Why do you think it is so critical (see v. 4:16) that we understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? In other words, why must we understand that Jesus is the Son of God if we want God to dwell in us and us in Him? (Luke 11:11-13 has several valuable insights that will help you answer this question.)
3. Given Paul's commentary on the scope of this "agape" love God has for you (see Romans 8:32), why do you think God sometimes does NOT give us what we ask Him for?
4. Some Christians are constantly concerned that if they fail to do something right, then God will in some way punish them. V. 4:18 tells us that this is the wrong way to think. According to v. 4:18, what is the remedy for this mistaken perspective?

5. If you think you love God with the kind of love that he has for you, then according to v. 4:20, what else will be true in your life?

Session 8: Read 1 John 5:1-12, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. How do we know we are trusting in the fact that Jesus is the anointed One of God? (Please note, to trust in this fact is not the same as to just know it is true. After all, the demons know it is true, but that doesn't help them.)
2. How can you tell if you really have the kind of love God wants you to have for His children?
3. If you find yourself not really loving other Christians with the self-sacrificing love God has for you, according to v. 5:3, what is the solution to this problem?
4. V. 5:5 says, "the person who trusts their life to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God" is living in victory over what the world wants you to trust in. What does it mean to trust your life to fact that Jesus is the Son of God? What does the world want you to trust in?
5. What are your take-aways from vv. 5:6-8, and what is the significance to you personally of each of these take-aways?
6. According to vv. 5:9-12, your eternal life depends on whether or not you have the Son (also see Matthew 7:22-23). What verses in 1 John (this letter) tell you how you can get, and know you have the Son?

Session 9: Read 1 John 5:9-21, then in your group discussion, discuss the following questions:

1. In vv. 5:14 & 15, John assures us God will give us what we need when we ask. And then in v. 5:16, he gives us an example of the kind of need he is talking about. Is this an example of something that you personally need, or is this an example of a need that the corporate body of Christ needs to be healthy and whole?
2. Based on the previous question, what kinds of things is John encouraging us to ask God for when we pray? Is this in concert with the charge from God for us to be self-sacrificing and devotedly caring for our Christian brothers and sisters?
3. According to v. 5:18, what prevents Satan from getting a firm hold on a Christian who stumbles into darkness?
4. V. 5:21 is the last verse in First John. It can also be seen as the summary verse for the entire letter. How might someone make the case for this verse summarizing all of First John?
5. What are the things in this world that you seek hope from? (A good retirement plan? Science? Healthy lifestyles and practices? A lot of money in savings? Your reputation in the community? Your popularity? Your religious observances? The government safety nets? The church? Your career? Art? Music? Etc. – note none of these things are bad, unless you find your hope in them instead of in God.)

Session 10: Summary session.

Here is a list of some of the KEY INSIGHTS from First John. Which of these seem most relevant to you at this time in your life?

- 1) Jesus came in the flesh.
- 2) Jesus is himself eternal life.
- 3) God wants us to be filled up with the joy of knowing about the favor God has for us.
- 4) God wants us to have fellowship with each other and with Him.
- 5) God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
- 6) Fellowship comes from together continually exposing ourselves to the light of God and be cleansed from our failures by the blood of Jesus.
- 7) We must recognize and admit that we fail to live in His light and we must trust that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from these failures and removes their effect on our righteousness.
- 8) Jesus turns away the wrath of God from us.
- 9) Our assurance of salvation (the feeling that we are indeed saved) comes from when we preserve and take seriously God's charges to us, which are:
 - i. Sacrificially love and devotedly care for our Christian brothers and sisters. (If you refuse to do this, you will slip away into darkness.)
 - ii. Trust in Jesus to be your righteousness.
 - iii. Allow God's word (from the Scriptures) to dwell in us continually.
- 10) The merit of an idea/proposition is to be judged by discerning whether or not it supports the fact that Jesus came in the flesh. (vv. 4:1-3)
- 11) Trusting in Christ to be our righteousness for us is the essence of overcoming the evil one.

- 12) For the sake of Christ's reputation our failure to walk in the light has been forgiven.
- 13) As we mature in our faith, we grow in our experiential grasping of the implications of the fact that Jesus was from the beginning of all things in the position of preeminent authority.
- 14) Do not sacrifice yourself in devotion to this fallen world, nor to the things in this world (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life).
- 15) The spirit of the antichrist is not knowing that you can't have the Father without the Son, and that you can't have the Son without the Father.
- 16) Letting the words of God in the Scriptures (Bible) continually dwell in you results in you continually dwelling in the Son and in the Father.
- 17) To keep from being led astray, rely on the Holy Spirit guiding you as He tells you the truth (from the Bible).
- 18) If you know how living in the approval of God works [relying on the blood of Jesus to give you that approval], then you know that everyone who lives in this approval of God is a child of God.
- 19) God prefers your benefit over His own benefit, and He ensures you are blessed even at great expense to Himself.
- 20) God wants us to have this same self-sacrificing love for all His children that He has for us.
- 21) Walking in darkness is synonymous with trying to be good apart from Christ, which is also the message of the antichrist, and those who live this way are allied with the devil.
- 22) The people of the world will take delight in killing those who only want to walk in the light.
- 23) The testimony of God is the reality, not our feelings (if they differ from the testimony of God).
- 24) The Holy Spirit is the proof that God deeply dwells in us.

- 25) Ideas that support the fact that Jesus Christ came in the flesh are from God. Any idea that suggests or implies that Jesus did come in the flesh is from the antichrist.
- 26) Because of God's great love for us, He has sent His Son to be the savior of the world, so that whoever trusts in Him will have Him. And because they have Him they already have eternal life.
- 27) God is committed to bless us, even at great expense to Himself, because that's who God is.
- 28) Understanding and accepting that God really does prefer you over Himself is what brings you to trust in God, and this trust in God is what overcomes the worldly perspectives and worldly values by which this world tries to take hold of you.
- 29) These three bear witness of the reality of Christ: (1) the Holy Spirit, (2) all that happened at the water baptism of Christ, and (3) the actual shedding of Christ blood (and death) on the cross for your sins.
- 30) The Begotten One, who comes from God, protects those who are His so that when they stumble into darkness, the evil one is not allowed to get a firm hold on them.
- 31) The Son of God is present with us and has given us a right-thinking mind so that we can know Him who is the Truth.
- 32) We must guard ourselves from seeking hope from anything other than God.