

Volume 4

Scripture Readings & Devotions

BE
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Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

Over the first three years of these studies, we have taken a sweeping overview of the entire Bible with studies on the four Gospels (“Be with Jesus”), the rest of the New Testament (“Be on Mission”), the Old Testament (“Be God’s Light”). In 2025 we followed that overview by exploring New Testament books written for Jews who saw Jesus as the Messiah (“Be God’s Family”).

Our study in 2026 will be on the New Testament books that focus on books related to the Apostle John. We begin with the Gospel of John and end with the Epistles of John. In between we will explore John’s adopted home of Ephesus by looking at some sections of Acts, the book of Ephesians, and 1 & 2 Timothy which were letters written by Paul to the pastor of the Ephesian Church. As the Gospel was expanding, it was important for John, Paul, Timothy and others to remain connected to the Lord and each other. So, this year’s study is called, “Be Connected.”

Think about it. This theme of “Be Connected” is timeless. Modern believers need to know how to be connected to our God, our church community, our families, our neighborhoods, and our world. Particularly in this technological age, we are longing for deeper real-life connections.

Again this year several people from our church are joining me in writing the devotionals for this study. They will bring fresh insights and perspectives to our devotion time. Each of them is engaged in training by me, a small cohort with one another, and personal prayer as they produce what you will read and reflect on. Make sure to thank them throughout the year as you are impacted by their words.

There are several components to this year-long exploration:

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by others and me, and correlate with the daily Scripture to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
4. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, visit fishersumc.org/beconnected for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
5. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week’s readings, catch these at fishersumc.org/beconnected, in the church app, or access on your favorite podcast platform.

The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to embrace the fact that you are a child of God, called by Him to “Be Connected” with Him and others.

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor

Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

BE CONNECTED

10/12/2026 - WEEK 37 DAY 1

Jesus is the Word of Life: 1 John 1:1-4

Devotional By: Dave Rizk

While driving with my son Joshua, now a high school sophomore, he told me about the friends he's made through online gaming. I'm glad he connects with others, but I have also begun to worry not only about his safety but also about his spiritual growth. It struck me how quickly the word "fellowship" can become just another word for hanging out instead of something deeper and more meaningful. That moment made me ask myself what real Christian fellowship should look like: Who is forming our hearts? What truths guide our conversations? Are our relationships bringing us closer to Jesus, or quietly leading us away?

John begins his letter by reminding us that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of life, came into the world as a human so we could be saved from sin and brought back into fellowship with God. When John says "we," he speaks as someone who actually walked and talked with Jesus, sharing what he saw and heard himself. This is important because real Christian fellowship is not based on feelings or convenience, but on the solid truth of God's Word.

From this truth, unity is essential. A divided group cannot work well, so we need to protect and value our unity. The Holy Spirit helps us stay close to Christ every day. Even though we have not seen or touched Jesus like John did, we are not missing out. We have the reliable testimony of those who did, written in Scripture and made alive by the Spirit. Because of this, we are invited into the same real and living fellowship with Christ and with each other.

Call to Action: Try to bring the Lord into your assemblies and your fellowship. You can start by saying grace before a meal or taking a moment to pray before a tough conversation. Let His presence guide every action.

Notes

10/13/2026 - WEEK 37 DAY 2

Walking in the Light: 1 John 1:5-10

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

Without light, all life on earth would perish. Our sun stimulates so many processes that all life is dependent on it. Without light, photosynthesis would cease and kill most plant life. Evaporation would diminish, and the water cycle would be greatly interrupted. Without healthy plants, animal survival would quickly become imperiled.

Just as the sun sustains the physical world, God is the light of the universe. Without Him, life is not possible. He sent His son to help insure our eternal life. Light plays such a pivotal role that it, after the heavens and the earth, was the first thing that God created. Genesis 1:3-4 says, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

Today's verses remind us that God and His Son, Jesus, are the lights of the world. With them, everything is exposed and made well. Without them, darkness reigns, and all are lost. God will once again separate light from darkness, with the light being those who have chosen to follow Christ.

However, today's Scripture also offers a stern admonishment for those following false doctrine. Verse 6 reminds us that claiming fellowship with Him cannot be followed by walking in darkness. Walking in darkness means our fellowship with Him is a lie. Verse 8 tells us that denying we have sinned causes deception and keeps us from living in the light. Finally, verse 10 warns us that saying we have not sinned makes God into a liar and turns light into darkness.

Whenever I hear about Jesus being the light of the world, I am immediately drawn to our singing of "Silent Night" as a congregation on Christmas Eve. As we sing the song, we hold an unlit candle. A neighbor with an illuminated candle lights ours, and we in turn, light the candle for the person standing on our other side. Verses 3 and 4 of the song in *The United Methodist Hymnal* specifically make reference to the light:

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light;
radiant beams from thy holy face with the dawn of
redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Silent night, holy night, wondrous star, lend thy light!
with the angels let us sing, Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!

Are you living in the light? What can you do to step out of the darkness?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/14/2026 - WEEK 37 DAY 3

Jesus, the Atoning Sacrifice for Sins: 1 John 2:1-2

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

This verse starts off strong - "I write this to you so that you will not sin." Great suggestion. I'll stop sinning!

Oh if only it was that easy.

I'm going to stop sinning.

Thank goodness the passage does not end there. Thank goodness the story does not end there.

John continues: "If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father." That verse could be rewritten not with "if" but with "when". We **will** sin. We **do** sin.

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." We can, and we must atone for our sins. But we will fall short, and we will sin again. Thank God we have Jesus to atone for our sins.

We have seen in many other passages ways that people tried to atone for sins; animal sacrifices, good deeds, and some even tried to pay their way in. But Jesus is the only way.

When I was a child, I didn't understand what Jesus dying for our sins meant. I remember one day in 8th grade confirmation it clicked, and I got it. Some days as an adult, I still don't understand. The only analogy that I can remember is a legal one: when we break the law, we must pay the price. With the law, we pay a fine, we go to jail. Similarly when we sin (break God's law), we must pay the price. But we cannot pay the price as our sin is too great. However, Jesus will "pay the price" for us and atone for our sins.

I like the idea and suggestion to "stop sinning". If only it were that easy. Since I know I cannot, I am thankful to God that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

I pray a prayer of thanksgiving that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the whole world sins.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/15/2026 - WEEK 37 DAY 4

Living as Jesus Did: 1 John 2:3-6

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In His Great Commission, Jesus told us to go and make disciples. My working definition of a disciple is someone who knows, loves and obeys Jesus Christ. All three of these verbs show up in today's passage.

Whenever I get pushback on my definition it is on the word obey. Almost everybody agrees that we are called to know Jesus in a personal way. And virtually 100% say that Christ desires for us to love the Lord and love people. But people sometimes hesitate at the word obey. I guess it sounds too legalistic.

Jesus Himself said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (John 14:23-24).

In the aforementioned Great Commission, Jesus said that part of making disciples is "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus even said, "You are my friends if you do what I command" (John 15:14).

Our benchmark for obedience is Christlikeness. Living as Jesus did isn't automatic. If it were, Jesus and John and others wouldn't have had to remind us to do so. Perhaps my working definition can shed some light.

To know involves the mind. We get to know someone by spending time with them, asking questions, listening, learning about them, and eventually knowing how they think.

To love involves the heart. We love by being vulnerable, passionately caring, feeling what the other feels, having compassion, rejoicing and crying along with them.

To obey involves the will. In a hierarchical sense it is about doing what they command. In a relational sense it is about honoring what they desire.

As a disciple of Jesus, what is the growing edge of your discipleship journey with Him?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/16/2026 - WEEK 37 DAY 5

Walking Away from the Darkness: 1 John 2:7-11

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Last year Lisa and I applied for and received a five-day pastoral retreat in the Missouri Ozarks. A young couple, Tim and Lyndsey, treated us like royalty in a small home used for short-term guests. They and their two daughters visited from time to time offering encouragement and fun. Most of the time, Lisa and I just had time together with no obligations, a rarity for couples in ministry.

During one of our times with Tim and Lyndsey, they took us up the mountain to enjoy a picnic lunch and panoramic views. What a blessing! After we packed up, they took us on a hike. We ended up at the mouth of a cave and they led the way in. It was moist and cool, with a low ceiling. The farther back we got, the more we needed the lights on our phones. When we got all the way back, we turned off the lights. You know what we saw? Nothing.

That's how darkness is. It illuminates nothing. It hides the hard walls and dangerous footfalls. Pretending the darkness is not there would mean certain concussion on the many low hanging protrusions. As John wrote, darkness can blind us.

I suppose if we had stayed there long enough our eyes would have adjusted somewhat. If we had stayed there several days eating our leftover picnic food, our eyes would have been so acclimated to darkness that the light of day would have been blinding if we had managed to crawl out of the cave. Initially darkness was the enemy. In time, light would have been our foe.

What are the spiritual implications of light and darkness for your own journey with Jesus?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/19/2026 - WEEK 38 DAY 1

Talk for All Generations: 1 John 2:12-14

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

Talk for All Generations

Topical TED TALKS have blossomed over the last 40 years. GOD TALK began at creation. In today's scripture, JOHN TALKS through encouragement and warning against sin. Today's devotional is LISA TALK for all generations.

Talk For Littlest

Try memorizing scripture. Dance and sing Christian Scripture songs. Now is the age to grow.

Avoid fits of biting, kicking, tantrums and running away!

Learn to eat a plate of many colors such as blackberries, purple beets, oranges, greens, red grapes and brown rice. Don't only eat yellow foods! Your body is God's Temple.

Keep practicing praying aloud. Jesus knows you and you know Jesus.

Talk For Elementary Age

Try listening to Focus on the Family's "Adventures in Odyssey". Each of the 947 episodes contain Christian truths, humor and struggles kids face. They teach forgiveness too.

Avoid movies, gaming and books that make heroes of the occult (witchcraft, casting spells, ghosts, magic, killings and idolizing pretend).

Think on what is true, pure, lovely and worthy of God's praise. Phil. 4:8 Learn daily Bible reading and scripture memory. Read aloud with family. Time in God's Word is a treasure you give yourself and others.

Keep praying for friends, family and your future spouse. God knows the future.

Talk For Teens

Think of others first. What encouragement do they need?

Avoid solitary room behavior and needy traps such as fake social media. Instead, actively invest in God and others. You are strong. Do your part at home. Ask God to provide community with Christian friends.

Learn to exercise your Spiritual mind. Be active in daily Scripture journaling. Listen during the sermon and take notes. God speaks as you spend energy growing your mind towards Him.

Keep an eye out for those in need. Put on God's glasses of compassion.

Talk For Young Adults

Today and tomorrow are both important to your church, family, career, and friends. Be aware of your actions and words throughout the day.

Avoid habits of overconsuming, over gaming, overcontrolling, overthinking, overcommitting, overspending and overpowering. Instead... overcome the evil one.

Love the Lord above the world. Ask God to bless your every action. Lead. Know the anointing of the Holy Spirit by seeking to discern the difference between truth and lies.

Talk For Adults

Take time to enjoy every moment the Lord has appointed you to minister on earth by focusing on others. People, both older and younger, need help in coming to know Jesus. Now is the time.

Avoid grumbling and hoarding time and money. Get up, turn off the TV, share Jesus and be keenly aware of your life timeline.

Lead in forgiveness and repair relationships. Be a disciple and seek to be discipled. God speaks to your heart and mind as you mentor others and grow in His love.

Keep the Lord's anointing that remains in you. Worship, pray and read Scripture.

Notes

10/20/2026 - WEEK 38 DAY 2

Do Not Love the World: 1 John 2:15-17

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The Bible often draws a sharp contrast between loving God and loving the world. They are mutually exclusive options. While we are called to love the world with Godly compassion, we are warned about loving it with worldly desire. John offers three ways to think about this worldliness.

The lust of the flesh, or satisfying every physical desire, is one such tripwire. I grew up in the 60s and 70s, the ultimate “if it feels good, do it” age. But that mentality didn’t die when the calendar flipped to a new decade or even a new millennium.

The lust of the eyes seems to be about caving to the cravings of greed, covetousness, and well... lust. Some would say, “We only see what we want to see.” Ultimately, we have no control over much of what passes in front of our eyes. But we do have a choice about whether to turn the glimpse into a gaze. Car companies are masters of ads that tell us how we will look when we drive what they are selling.

The pride of life is the third warning put forth by the Apostle John. He never imagined we would live in a world where we measure ourselves by how many likes, hearts, friends, and followers we accumulate. A CBS News poll found that 86% of young Americans are willing to try to become an influencer on social media platforms.

The good news is that Jesus understands. He was tempted in every way, just like we are. In fact, 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

Notes

10/21/2026 - WEEK 38 DAY 3

Warning Against Antichrists: 1 John 2:18-23

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Who is the antichrist? There are scores of sermons, books and movies about this topic. Nearly all of them point to the end times when Christ comes back.

But this passage is talking about something different. John is describing the difference between being pro-Christ and anti-Christ. Indeed, he says the antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the anointed Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Apparently, these false teachers had once been part of the church. They were welcomed, invited to the table, encouraged to grow in their faith and knowledge. But something got the best of them. Gullibility? Boredom? Arrogance? Power? We don't know. But their teaching opposed the straightforward truths about the identity and work of Jesus.

John doesn't seem to be pointing to an apocalyptic figure at the end of the age. Rather he is pointing out many antichrists who were leading people astray. These insiders are often more dangerous than outsiders. Here are a few things we can do to filter what is true from what is false.

Does this line up with Scripture? It's always good to see what the rest of the Bible says about a particular teaching or idea.

Does this line up with other truths of the faith? We should measure a teaching with what the Church has believed for the past two thousand years.

Does this person's life line up with Godly teachers? If the person teaching something strange is living a questionable lifestyle, beware!

Does this make sense to me as I ask God? Spend time praying that the Lord would reveal truth to you through His Holy Spirit.

Paul warned Timothy, "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Notes

10/22/2026 - WEEK 38 DAY 4

Remaining in the Son: 1 John 2:24-27

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In these verses, John continues to poke holes in the teaching of the false prophets who were leading some of the believers astray. But they should not be dismayed, for they have an anointing. A few verses earlier he said, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth” (1 John 2:20). Then in verse 27 he wrote, “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.” Read this paragraph again, emphasizing the word anointing.

Our anointing is our salvation in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. First, our best defense against false teachings is a good offense by staying steadfast. Jesus Himself said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Faithfulness is never measured by how you start a relationship; rather it is measured by how you remain in that relationship.

Another means of resisting false teachings is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Just after Jesus told His followers to remain in Him, He promised, “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me” (John 15:26). Jesus followed that by saying, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13).

John was writing this letter fifty years or so after Jesus’ resurrection. Already people were deceiving believers with false doctrines. Nothing has changed now that we are two thousand years after Christ. The call to remain in Jesus is still the word we need to hear.

How is the Lord challenging you to remain in Him?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/23/2026 - WEEK 38 DAY 5

Continuing in Christ: 1 John 2:28-29

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The New International Version translates verse 28 with the challenge to “continue” in Christ. This word is the exact same Greek word translated as “remain” in the previous few verses (see yesterday’s devotion). Another way to translate this Greek word is with the English word “abide.”

Continue. Remain. Abide. I like this good way for us to think about our relationship with Jesus. It’s not like the Hokey Pokey, where we put our right foot in only take it back out. A relationship with Christ is more like being adopted into a family. There’s no such thing as a healthy hit and miss, now and then family relationship.

That’s why this same Greek word is sometimes translated “dwell.” Being part of God’s household means we move into God’s house. We are called His children. God is our Father. Jesus is our Brother. We dwell with the family of God.

This Greek verb is also sometimes translated “endure.” Everybody who has ever been married, been in a family, or had lifelong friends knows there are times you simply have to endure. Things aren’t perfect in relationships. Same with life.

Continue.
Remain.
Abide.
Dwell.
Endure.

Which English translation speaks to you when you consider your relationship with Christ?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/26/2026 - WEEK 39 DAY 1

How Great the Father's Love: 1 John 3:1-3

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

Every May 2nd I add another year to my Christian walk of faith. As I age, in my walk, I understand that I will never quit growing in Christ. There is no time, in our Christian walk, that we “know it all.” When we consider our Father’s great love for us, we know that His love is so vast, we will NEVER comprehend it all in this earthly life.

One of the reasons I love the pastors’ weekly devotions, podcasts, and Scripture readings, is that I am not skilled enough, in my life, to guide myself through daily Scripture studies. We are blessed, at Fishers United Methodist Church, to have both strong pastoral leadership, as well as strong lay ministry volunteers.

In volunteering to contribute a few daily devotionals, I’ve been blessed to hear volunteer devotionals from other members of Fishers UMC, as well as devotionals from pastors.

I challenge every one of you to grow in your faith walk as God guides you. The power of God’s blessings is enormous. It is impossible to outgrow God’s blessings and God’s Word. We were talking, in our Sunday small group (Sunday School) that God’s Living Word is amazing. We can study Scripture and possibly put notes in our Bible. We may come back to that same Scripture next year, or some other time, and be given a completely different lesson. The beautiful advantage of the Living Word is the Bible reaches us where we are, not where we were.

It was amazing to hear so many people, in our Sunday small group, share how the Scriptures have been alive in our hearing of the Word of God.

If you haven’t found any small study groups to belong to, I suggest you open your eyes, ears, and heart to find a place God will challenge you and help you grow in your faith walk.

Our prayer: Dear Father, thank you for providing us with your living Word. We ask, Lord God, that you can direct and guide us to the opportunity that you have for us. Help us that we may grow in our understanding of your living Word. Bless us with your discernment in your wisdom and that we can grow in your love and reflect your great love. Amen.

Notes

10/27/2026 - WEEK 39 DAY 2

The Devil's Work Destroyed: 1 John 3:4-10

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

This passage says that Jesus came to destroy the devil's work. What is the devil's work? The Bible gives us some insight. Take a look at what Jesus came to destroy, thanking Him as you read each verse.

"The devil...was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14)

"The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing" (2 Thess. 2:9-10)

"The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (Rev. 12:9).

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:11).

"Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

"Since the children have flesh and blood, (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/28/2026 - WEEK 39 DAY 3

Love One Another: 1 John 3:11-15

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

There's a famous Peanuts cartoon that begins with a conversation between Lucy and her little brother, Linus. Linus wants to be a doctor. But Lucy scoffs at him and says, *"You, a doctor? Ha! That's a big laugh! You could never be a doctor! You know why? Because you don't love mankind, that's why!"* As Lucy is riding away, Linus shouts back, *"I love mankind.....it's people I can't stand!"* I will admit, the older I get, the more I identify with Linus' comments. It's easy to say I love everyone. But the individual people? Maybe not so much. I love mankind but there are people in this world that I sometimes find difficult to love.

But Jesus commands us to love. Full stop. Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was. His response? ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.....And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Matthew 22:37, 39) The two most important commandments for us as followers of Christ are to love. And Jesus doesn't say love those who are easy to love. We are to love ALL, no matter what.

John takes this point and increases the stakes. Not only are we to love, but hate is not to have any part in our lives. In fact, John says if we hate another person, we are, in fact, a murderer, just as Cain murdered his brother Abel because of the evil in his heart. I'm reminded of another Scripture that sounds very similar.

"You have heard that it was said.....'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment." (Matthew 5:21-22)

Christians are called to a higher standard. We are not to murder, but we are also not to hate or hold anger toward another. God calls us to examine the attitudes of our hearts, not just be concerned with our actions. Are there even times when we struggle to love other Christians? Yes - and that's the challenge. We are called to love ALL. Even those whom we don't really like very much.

"I love mankind.....it's people I can't stand!" God doesn't call us to show love to "mankind" and then fail to show love to "people". It's our relationship and love for people that is the heart of the gospel. My prayer for myself, and for you as well, is that we find ways to love everyone. EVERYONE! Even those we may not like. In God's eyes, they are all children of God and deserving of our love.

Notes

10/29/2026 - WEEK 39 DAY 4

Jesus Laid Down His Life: 1 John 3:16-18

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." This is reminiscent of one penned by Paul in Romans 5:6-8.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The heart of both passages is that love is what motivated Jesus to give His life for us. John suggests that same kind of love should motivate us to love those around us with our possessions, actions and truth.

I am married to someone who loves others like this. Over the four decades plus of marriage and ministry together, I have witnessed Lisa pouring out her time, energy, and money into the lives of those in need. Once when I came home from work, she had already invited a stranger passing through town to come live with us until he sorted things out. We gave him the basement of our parsonage, while I slept with one eye open upstairs where my wife and four daughters were tucked away. I couldn't figure out if I was proud of Lisa or upset with her.

That's how Christ-like love is. It disrupts our daily lives where most of our thoughts, words and actions are centered around our own agenda. Godly love is not a slogan or a platitude or a well-meaning Christian concept. It costs something. It risks something. Just ask Jesus.

The brother of Jesus put it like this in James 2:14-17.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Notes

BE CONNECTED

10/30/2026 - WEEK 39 DAY 5

Believing in and Obeying Jesus: 1 John 3:19-24

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Spend a few minutes with somebody and you will know what they think about the weather.

Spend ten minutes with that same person and you will know what they think about the world.

Spend an hour with them and you will know what they think about most.

Our worldview is revealed by our lifestyle. Our worries are betrayed by our words. Our passions are exposed by our proclamations.

I have led several disciple-making groups called Followers Made. One of the things I love about it is the way we are challenged to interact with Scripture. When reading a passage of the Bible, we are to respond with both an "I Believe" and an "I Will" statement.

The "I Believe" statement engages the mind. It forces me to consider what that section of Scripture says about God or about people or about myself. An honest "I Believe" declaration speaks to my worldview. How do I see the person and work of Jesus? How does that truth impact the world and me?

The "I Will" statement challenges the will. It prompts me to decide what I am going to do about what I have read. It's one thing to write, "I believe God calls Christians to love those around us." It's another thing altogether to write, "I will apologize to my coworker" or "I will take my contentious neighbor to lunch" or "I will only speak positively to my spouse this week."

John put these concepts together in a single verse when he wrote, "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."

What do you believe?

What will you do about it?

Notes

11/2/2026 - WEEK 40 DAY 1

Test the Spirits: 1 John 4:1-3

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

This is dedicated to my mother, Jane Friz, who passed on this date in 2009. She loved music, was a brilliant Christian woman and teacher of the Bible.

It's test time! The exam topic is "testing spirits." Let's assess our accumulated knowledge over the "semesters" of our lives. It's a difficult test, so let's pray for wisdom.

Prayer: *Holy Spirit*, today is going to be a *Glorious Day*! Pour your *Fullness* on us. *Come Holy Spirit*! Bestow insight and teach us which spirits come from God, the *Great I Am*, or from the antichrist. I am *Living for Jesus* and *I Speak the Name of Jesus* because *There is Power, Power Wonder Working Power*. We know when friends are empty in life, they become curious and gullible with evil because they look for something to fill their spiritual barrenness. *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus*, when we acknowledge *Your Name*. You *Break Every Chain* of despair, brokenness and addiction as demons try to imprison us. We must be aware and alert as we test the spirits of this world. Satan tries to worm his destructive ways into our families, social life, work environment and heart. But when I ask the *Spirit of the Living God* to *Pour Over Me*, I understand that *At the Name of Jesus*, discouraging restraints are loosened because demons can't stand to hear *Your Name*. The occult severely tries to hide and conceal *Your Great Name* through evil tactics such as fortune telling (predicting the future), witchcraft (powers from the unseen dark world), identity fraud (skewed attacks on self-worth) and storms of emptiness. We know Jesus spoke power over death, demons, and disease. Therefore, as Christians, we claim authority from God because there is *No Other Name* but the name of Jesus. When we believe and *Take the Name of Jesus* with us, we feel your *Sweet, Sweet Spirit* standing in victory. James 4:7 tells us the devil will flee from us as we submit to the Lord. Please clean our homes of ungodly literature, aggressive video games, magic, idols of false religions and demonic abuse. Anoint our doors with the oil of the Holy Spirit. Rid our lives of spiritual evils that dishonor You. *I Surrender All* and give You permission to come in *Fullness* and *Rest on Us*.

It's test time! Can we identify the difference between the Holy Spirit who boldly proclaims Jesus versus evil spirits that refuse to recognize Him as the Son of God? Trust the *King of Kings* and call on the name of Jesus when tempted. *All Hail the Power of Jesus Name*.

PS: Every phrase in italics is a song that helps you grow in discernment. Start with listening to the song, "I Speak Jesus" by Charity Gayle.

Notes

11/3/2026 - WEEK 40 DAY 2

The One Who is in You: 1 John 4:4-6

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The older I get the more I become like my father. When I glance in the mirror, I look like him. Lisa says my laugh sounds like him. I can only hope to love like him, for he was truly a man who poured out words and hugs and gifts of love. I guess you could say some of my father is in me.

Today's Scripture reminds us that our Heavenly Father is also in us. Galatians 4:6 says, "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." Several other passages tell us that the Spirit of God dwells in us. We are his temple.

When we live, laugh and love, we do so as an expression of what is within us. If God is taking up most of the space, He pours out. If things that are not God garner most of our being, worldliness leaks out. The Bible says how we speak and what we treasure reveal the condition of our heart.

Modern spiritual practices often encourage people to meditate by emptying themselves. But I would challenge these rituals based in eastern religions. Rather, I recommend filling ourselves with the Word of God and allowing the Spirit of God to occupy the crevices of our lives. The goal is not being empty, but being filled.

Then with confidence we can claim the truth of this verse that "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." A few verses later John writes, "everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). And Jesus Himself said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

There it is. The world will throw the kitchen sink at us. How do we overcome that? "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6).

What a blessing!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/4/2026 - WEEK 40 DAY 3

Love Comes from God: 1 John 4:7-12

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In this short paragraph, John used the word love thirteen times. But that's just a warmup. In his three epistles of 1, 2 and 3 John, he used the word over thirty times, and in the Gospel of John he employed the word love nearly forty times.

Most famously, John quoted Jesus saying, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Now he is telling us to love others the way God loves us. Wow. That's a tall order.

Somebody once asked Jesus what the two greatest commandments were. He boiled down the ten commandments and the six hundred thirteen laws of Moses into two simple directives: Love God and love others. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Paul gave a running definition of love. Use this as a stethoscope to examine the spiritual health of your heart.

Love is patient
Love is kind
Love does not envy
Love does not boast
Love is not proud
Love does not dishonor others
Love is not self-seeking
Love is not easily angered
Love keeps no record of wrongs
Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth
Love always protects
Love always trusts
Love always hopes
Love always perseveres
Love never fails

Notes

11/5/2026 - WEEK 40 DAY 4

The Savior of the World: 1 John 4:13-16

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Throughout this letter, John has been exploring the themes of God's love for the world and God's Spirit in us. Here he brings it together with the straightforward truth: "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."

Several years ago, I preached a sermon on this concept. I talked about our sin, and how it separates us from a holy and perfect God. I spoke about human efforts to bridge that gap always fall far short. I then shared how God sent His Son Jesus to be the one who saved us by His sacrifice on the cross. It was a good sermon. After the service, someone came up to me and told me it was a bad sermon. He flatly said, "I don't want anybody dying for me."

We live in a DIY culture. From an early age we are taught to do our best, achieve the highest, and pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Nobody ever said, "If you want something done right, rely on somebody else to do it."

Yet that is precisely what God is calling us to do. The sin gap is too vast to be traversed by human achievement. Saying that we are only a little bit sinful is like promising a bowl of pudding has only a bit of poison in it, or saying a skunk is only a little stinky, or claiming a mass murderer only killed a few people. The pudding can't cleanse itself, the skunk can't remove its own scent glands, and the killer can't bring victims back to life.

Neither can we eradicate our own sins. Like it or not, we are dependent on somebody else to do it for us. And that somebody is Jesus, who died on the cross, rose from the dead, and became the Savior of the world. His offer is on the table. Stop relying on yourself. Put your faith in the only Somebody who can do it for you. If you are willing to do so, pray this prayer:

Dear God, I believe that you created a perfect world. You created people in your own image. But they destroyed that image by sinning against you. So did I, and I admit that I am a sinner, eternally separated from you without Christ. I am truly sorry. I believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to become the Savior of the world. I want the salvation Jesus offers. Come into my life and save me. And come Holy Spirit. Fill me, sanctify me, and equip me to serve you and others in this world. I put my trust in you. Amen.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/6/2026 - WEEK 40 DAY 5

No Fear in Love: 1 John 4:17-21

Devotional By: Susan Pressler

There are hundreds of verses in the Bible about love. Why then did the Apostle John feel the need to write these verses about love in 1 John 4:17-21? What is unique and special about the verses? What can we learn from John's words?

One author noted that the book of 1 John is "modest in language yet deep in theology" (Sanchez, 2011). Another author noted that love was one of the most important things that John learned from his time with Jesus and that the "power of Jesus's love transformed John's life" (Swindoll, Insight for Living). Here are some main themes in each verse that may help in understanding them.

Verse 17 – On the day of judgment, we will understand completely what perfect love in God is. We really do not have any idea of how magnificent God is and how perfect His love is until that time. (Guzak, Enduring Word)

Verse 18 – On the day of judgment, God's perfect love will drive out any fear we have about His love. (Guzak, Enduring Word)

Verse 19 – God loved us even before He created the world or created mankind. God loved us so much that He gave His only Son to save us from our sins (John 3:16,17).

Verse 20 – If we love God, we must love our brothers and sisters, too. Love of our brothers and sisters is evidence of God's love (Swindoll, Insight for Living).

Verse 21 – This verse has the same theme as the great commandment verses in Matthew and John. In Matthew, Jesus said "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37,39). In John, Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34,35)

Reflection Question: What can I do today to reflect my love for God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit and my love for brothers and sisters?

Hymn: Because He Lives

"God sent his Son, they called him Jesus; he came to love, heal, and forgive; He lived and died to buy my pardon, an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives."

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fear is gone; Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives."

(Gloria and William J. Gaither, 1971)

Notes

11/9/2026 - WEEK 41 DAY 1

Jesus Christ, the Son of God: 1 John 5:1-5

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

Before I became a Christian, I remember posing questions about Jesus. Often, I would turn to secular answers to those questions, but all of them failed to convince me that Jesus was more than just a good man, prophet, or great teacher. But it was Mrs. LaChance, my Sunday school teacher, who shared a host of Scriptures, books, and sermons that declared Jesus is God.

In one of the sermons I read, Adrian Rogers, one of my favorite preachers, shared a story about preaching in Moscow to an audience of Russian Army soldiers and their wives. He said God had given him a once-in-a-lifetime privilege—to tell them why he believed Jesus is God. Knowing they had been taught from their youth there is no God, he prayed, “Lord, what would You have me to say?” The Holy Spirit answered, “Adrian, tell them about Jesus—why you believe in Jesus Christ.” He reflected, “That’s what I did.” And he used the Bible to share what God has declared about Jesus.

In today’s passage, John writes that “whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (v.1). There are numerous Scriptures which explicitly affirm that Jesus is God. The following are just a few that declare Jesus’ deity:

Thomas declared after seeing the risen Jesus, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28) Paul, once a persecutor of Christians, wrote that Jesus is “God over all, forever praised” (Romans 9:5).

Jesus asked Peter: “Who do you say I am?” and Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:15-16).

Jesus tells John, “I and my Father are One” (John 10:30).

John wrote, “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true by being in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

In chapter three of John we read: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

As believers in Christ, we have answered the question: “Who is Jesus?” But we need to share this answer with others in our families and communities who are searching for meaning in their lives and a Savior Who loves them.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we love you. Thank you for our salvation. Help us to share the Gospel with others that Jesus is God. Amen.

Notes

11/10/2026 - WEEK 41 DAY 2

The Testimony of God: 1 John 5:6-12

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In the Biblical world, two or three witnesses had to testify in agreement for something to be legally accepted as true. How do we know that Jesus is the Christ (God's anointed Messiah) and the Son of God? John points to three witnesses that testify.

The Spirit. Yes, the Holy Spirit proclaimed the identity of Jesus. Peter, who was present at the transfiguration of Jesus, wrote, "(Jesus) received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain" (2 Peter 1:17-18).

The second witness is water. This is a reference to the baptism of Jesus. Just as with the transfiguration on the mountain, when He came up from the baptismal waters in the river, Jesus "saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Mark 1:10-11).

Blood is the third witness mentioned by John. Here he is pointing to the crucifixion, where Jesus shed his blood for our sins. The event was so powerful that a pagan Roman centurion proclaimed, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).

For all of eternity in both directions Jesus is God. From the moment of his conception to His ascension Jesus became God in the flesh. Believing or not believing this is a matter of life and death. As John puts it, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

If you knew you would live forever, how would you live? This is not merely a parlor game question. If you have put your faith in Jesus, your eternal life begins now! So, let's rephrase it. Since you know you live forever, how will you live?

Notes

11/11/2026 - WEEK 41 DAY 3

Assurance of Eternal Life: 1 John 5:13-15

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

When I read the Scripture verse of the day, these words stand out: "...so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis mine).

Can we really *know* that we have eternal life? How can anyone be certain of their salvation? It feels almost presumptuous, especially in light of Matthew 7, where Jesus warns that many "varsity level" churchgoers are in for a shock on Judgment Day. Jesus says, "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:23). If those folks will be surprised, shouldn't we be a little less certain?

J.D. Greear, a pastor whose podcast I follow, argues the opposite. He admits to struggling so deeply with doubt that he prayed the sinner's prayer thousands of times and was baptized four. He eventually wrote a book with the provocative title, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*. While the title sounds all wrong at first, his premise is profound: once you surrender to Christ, you can rest in the gospel assurance that He has already received you.

Some wonder if God wants us to be uncertain—as if we are children who only behave because He is "making a list and checking it twice." If behavior modification were God's only goal, that kind of fear might work for a while. But eventually, we would wear ourselves out trying to earn His favor and grow to resent His rules.

God doesn't want your resentment; He wants your love. No good father wants his children to live in constant fear of his rejection, nor does he leave them wondering if he intends to return home after a trip. Your Heavenly Father is no different.

The entire book of 1 John, is written to assure believers that they have eternal life and today's verse is a summary at the conclusion of the book. I encourage you to re-read the first four chapters to know and rest in the assurance that God loves you and, in Him, you are secure.

Notes

11/12/2026 - WEEK 41 DAY 4

Praying for a Backsliding Brother: 1 John 5:16-17

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Throughout this epistle, John has been combating the infiltration of Gnosticism (silent “G”) in the Christian community. This heresy denied Jesus as being God in the flesh. Earlier in this letter John called these people antichrists. They had consciously chosen to reject Jesus as the Son of God. When John speaks of sin that leads to death for which even prayer can’t help, this is what he may have been referring to. If somebody chooses to abandon the way that leads to eternal life and embark on the path toward eternal death, only repentance will get them back on the right track.

But for other sins, which are common to all people, we should pray for those committing them. When people who are part of the church restart a life of wrongdoing, it is the responsibility of believers to pray for them. Some of my hardest conversations in my four decades of ministry have been with brothers or sisters in the faith who have backslidden. Even harder is when others have had those conversations with me.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlined steps to take when fellow Christians sin. It involves offering a loving confrontation. Ouch. And his brother James said this about praying for other believers: “If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:15-16).

Secrecy is the enemy of community. It’s counterproductive to keep our lives private while trying to be part of the family of God. And it’s unhealthy when we allow a brother or sister in that family to do whatever they want with their personal lives. True community means taking off the dirty shoes to reveal the smelly feet. And it means bending down to wash between the toes when a fellow believer has stunk it up.

How can you “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other?” Are you willing to risk the relationship in order for there to be restoration to the family of God?

Notes

11/13/2026 - WEEK 41 DAY 5

Freedom from Idolatry: 1 John 5:18-21

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

This epistle ends with a simple directive: keep yourselves from idols. This was easier said than done in John's world. He most likely wrote this letter from where he was living in Ephesus. As we have learned this year, Ephesus was a city filled with idolatry. They even had one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a temple to the multi-breasted goddess of fertility, Artemis. Beyond this, Ephesus housed scads of statues, temples and leaders that encouraged worship of gods, goddesses, and emperors.

Keeping ourselves from idols is easier said than done in our world as well. Whether it's money, success or fame (ever heard of American Idol?), it is all too easy to take our attention off God and give our affection to something or someone else. Earlier in this chapter John said, "All wrongdoing is sin" (v. 17). He followed that up in the next verse admonishing us to "not continue to sin." Then, and now, it's oh so tempting to take our eyes off God and give our hearts to not-God.

When Paul visited the city of Athens, the Bible says, "he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16). I wonder if the idolatry that freely swims in the sea of life all around us causes us great distress. Here's a thought. When confronted with an idol, you can embrace it, coexist with it, ignore it, abandon it, or destroy it.

Be really honest about the idolatry that permeates the atmosphere in your world. What is in the habits you practice, the words you proclaim, the music you enjoy, the shows you binge, the relationships you foster, the work you pursue and the posts you peruse? This is only for starters. Make your own mental list as it applies to you. Then with David of the Old Testament, offer this prayer to God from Psalm 139:23-24.

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Notes

11/16/2026 - WEEK 42 DAY 1

The Truth is with Us Forever: 2 John 1:1-2

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

John the Elder writes today's verses to some special people that he loves in the truth and includes all people who love the truth as he does. John connects us all by reminding us that the truth will be with us forever.

John writes a lot about truth. In John 14:16, Jesus identified himself as the way, the TRUTH and the life. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth (John 14:17). The Word is truth (John 17:17) and Jesus is the Word who became flesh (John 1:14). Jesus tells us in Matthew 28:20, NIV (his final promise and part of the great commission): "Surely I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."

Truth is a profound concept and it will always be with us forever because Jesus is the truth. He was with God in the beginning and through him all things were made. Moses gave us the law, but truth and grace came through Jesus (John 1:17).

Here are some important questions to ask ourselves: "What is truth?" —a question Pontius Pilate asked which Jesus didn't answer. Jesus was the answer. It was one of the most important questions ever asked! The MOST important question is one that Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20) If you love the truth as John does, that is the question you must answer with your life.

Do you catch yourself omitting truth, bending truth or simply ignoring it when it's more convenient to do so? We can't omit, bend or ignore Jesus. Sometimes our actions proclaim that we only LIKE the truth, but loving is obeying. When we love truth, we obey Jesus.

Lord, we pray today that we will commit to being truthful in all we do. Teach us to respect the truth, love the truth and obey the truth. We love you Jesus and are so thankful you will be with us always. Thank you for your grace and truth. It is in your precious name we pray. Amen.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/17/2026 - WEEK 42 DAY 2

The Grace, Mercy and Peace of God: 2 John 1:3

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. We cannot earn rewards from God for being or doing good. Rather, God chooses to bless us, forgive us, and redeem us completely out of His love for us. Grace is God's free gift. He gives us what we don't deserve.

Mercy is the flip side of the grace coin. If grace is God giving us what we don't deserve, mercy is God withholding what we do deserve - His wrath for our sinfulness. By His mercy, we do not receive punishment or judgment for our trespasses. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross, becoming our sin and giving us His righteousness.

Peace is the state of wholeness and harmony that exists between God and us because of God's grace and mercy. Because of Jesus we don't need to fear death or eternal judgment. He promised to leave His peace with us, and called us to be peacemakers.

"Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love."

Will you receive God's grace?

Will you receive God's mercy?

Will you receive God's peace?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/18/2026 - WEEK 42 DAY 3

The Command to Walk in Love: 2 John 1:4-6

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye asks his wife Golde, "Do you love me?" She responds: "Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow...." Finally, she answers his question, "Yes, I do." All of her actions demonstrate her love for him. Likewise, when we love our families, friends, and neighbors, we want to express our love, too. And how do we express our love? By showing patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—all the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

In today's passage, the Apostle reminds believers of the most important command from the Lord: "walk in love" (v. 5). When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest, He said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor. Jesus told His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). John also tells us, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

Later, Jesus defined love by saying, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). I believe there is a connection between our love for God and our obedience to His commandments. Jesus tells us, "This is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love" (v. 6). Jesus said if we truly love Him, we will obey His commandments. He also emphasized that true Christian love is inseparable from our obedience to His Word and is expressed by obeying His commands. Jesus taught that our love is not merely a "talk" but a "walk" (a life) in accordance with the Bible.

Just as Golde shared her love for Tevye by her actions of love, we, too, are commanded to love one another, and we can express this love by our obeying Jesus' commandment to love Him, obey His Word, and love others.

Personal reflection: How are you and I showing our love for Christ and our obedience to Him through our "walk of love" with our family, friends, and neighbors?

Notes

11/19/2026 - WEEK 42 DAY 4

God in the Flesh: 2 John 1:7-11

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

A couple of things seem counterintuitive to normal Christian teaching, when John commands, "do not take them into your house" and do not "welcome them." While commentators vary on how to understand these prohibitions, here is my take. In the first century world, both of these actions legitimized the recipient as someone the community should trust and embrace. This is the last thing John wanted the believers to do. Why?

We have already seen in 1 John that Gnosticism had taken root like an invasive weed in the garden of God's truth. Gnostics denied that Jesus was God in the flesh. They agreed that He was divine, bringing a special message that only they could receive. But they said He wasn't really human. They said He came to enlighten us to the divine that was already within us. Since Jesus wasn't really human, His death on the cross was not a sacrifice for our sin. If He wasn't physically human, He couldn't redeem physical humans.

You can see why John was so concerned about this heretical teaching. He had spent over three years with Jesus. He was present when Jesus was crucified. He ran with Peter to discover the empty tomb. He received the call to make disciples. He watched as Jesus ascended into Heaven. He worked side by side with Peter to launch Christianity in Jerusalem and throughout the world. It was now sixty years later, and he was watching deceivers infiltrate the family of God. That's why he warned, "Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for."

Gnosticism denied Christ's full humanity. Another heresy that developed in the following centuries, Arianism, denied Christ's co-eternal divinity. But orthodox Christianity declares Jesus to be the eternal God in the physical flesh. The Nicene Creed, developed in the fourth century, says it well:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, Begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/20/2026 - WEEK 42 DAY 5

Face-to-Face Discipleship: 2 John 1:12-13

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

For the past five years, our church has had an annual them with a focus on various aspects of Scripture. Over these years I have written upwards of a thousand devotions and done over two hundred podcasts. While I've thoroughly enjoyed this, they pale in comparison to being with you personally. There is nothing better than face-to-face discipleship.

I love preaching. When one of my daughters was in Junior High, she asked me, "Dad, I know that you preach. But what do you actually do to get ready to preach?" I told her about the research and study, the writing and eliminating, the preparation and the delivery of the sermon. She thought about it for a little while, then said, "So every week you do research, write a paper, and give a speech. Those are my three worst things. Your job is worse than being a plumber!" I don't know how much she knew about the plumbers union, but I was pretty sure she never wanted to be in the preachers union.

What she missed was the pure joy of seeing lives changed as the word of God is proclaimed. Discipleship happens as people come face-to-face not only with the preacher, but with Scripture and God Himself. The word "church" is the English translation of the Greek word "ecclesia" which means "assembly" or the "called out" community of God. When we gather in the same room, something more than information sharing takes place. Just like a Thanksgiving gathering is about much more than turkey, a worship gathering is about much more than knowledge.

I also love making disciples. I treasure meeting with people face-to-face individually and in small groups. Unlike preaching, this form of discipleship allows give-and-take, question-and-answer, listen-and-learn. Sometimes I'm meeting with people who are just exploring the faith. Other times they are seasoned Christians looking to be developed as servant leaders. Always it involves growth toward Christ-likeness.

Thank you for the opportunity to be your pastor. It is such a blessing!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/23/2026 - WEEK 43 DAY 1

Walking in the Truth: 3 John 1:1-4

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Forty years ago, in 1986, Lisa and I moved to North Judson, Indiana for our first church appointment. There was no youth group in the church of eighty people, so we started one. It grew to about twenty teens on Sunday nights. Two of those students were a young man named Steve and a young woman named Sheri.

As is true for all youth ministries, the goal is to get rid of your congregation! They graduate and move on. Steve went to Purdue. A little younger, Sheri went to the University of Indianapolis. After graduating, Steve went to seminary. I had the privilege of laying hands on him at his ordination. A few years later, Sheri went to a different seminary. Again, I had the honor of laying hands on her at her ordination. Today, Steve is serving as a pastor in Florida, and Sheri is serving as a pastor in Indiana. I understand John's words when he said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Closer to home, Lisa and I raised four beautiful daughters. They are now married to incredible men. We also had the privilege to raise our nephew from 7th to 12th grade. The greatest blessing is that all our family, from the youngest grandchild up, are faithfully involved in a church that is pursuing Jesus. Yes, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

On a personal note with you, Lisa and I are blessed to serve among you in ministry. We love it when you learn new truths, explore new ministries, develop new friendships, and meet new challenges for the kingdom of God. At the risk of sounding paternalistic, I'm proud of you. Indeed, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Christianity was never meant to be done alone. It is a team sport. It is a family thing. It is a community endeavor. Let's keep finding new ways to encourage one another to continue walking in the truth!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/24/2026 - WEEK 43 DAY 2

Hospitality to Gospel Workers: 3 John 1:5-8

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

Part of working together for the truth, as John writes, is to be faithful to each other. In the passage today, John is writing a personal letter to Gaius, his dear friend. He commends Gaius for being faithful in his treatment and hospitality to some brothers that are strangers to him.

According to the introduction to 3 John, during the first two centuries the gospel was taken from place to place by traveling evangelists and teachers. Believers provided food and hospitality to these missionaries by taking them into their homes and sending them on their way with provisions for their journey.

When my husband and I were missionaries in Denmark back in 1981-82, we were sent to schools in different areas to sing and share the gospel, and while we were there, people offered their homes to us. They loved sharing their culture and making us traditional Danish meals which were delicious. They loved serving the Lord through their hospitality to us and were very grateful that we were helping them bring the gospel to young students in their community. After a while, though, we got a little tired of the same pork roast with boiled potatoes and brown sauce! One lady, realizing that we were getting the same traditional meals everywhere, learned that Keith loved pizza, so she made special pizzas for him one night. But we had never had pizza with tomato/mackerel sauce before! (Danes eat a lot of pickled herring, raw herring and mackerel). Although the pizza was not anything like an American pizza, the small act of kindness was holy. Holy mackerel!

In our verses today, faithfulness is what John commends Gaius for. Faithfulness is caring for people — showing love and generosity, going out of your way to honor and serve someone who may even be a stranger to you. I don't know what Gaius prepared for them to eat, but I'm sure it was done in love as was the holy mackerel pizza. Here at Fishers UMC, I'm glad that we offer that kind of hospitality by hosting several Methodist seminarians from Africa by taking them into our homes while they study and learn here.

Our Danish friend was listening. She heard about the pizza. She went out of her way to do something special and filled with love. That is faithfulness. Jesus calls us to faithfulness, small ordinary acts of kindness that add up to a love so great that even one person's ordinary kindness (Gaius) gets recorded in the Holy Word of God!

What small act of holy kindness could you show someone today?

Notes

11/25/2026 - WEEK 43 DAY 3

The Danger of Worshiping Power: 3 John 1:9-10

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

There was a Christian leader who rose to power and led a small congregation. He began to *"love to be first"* and basked in his power. He began to reject Christian teachings he had learned from his mentors. He began to control his followers, directing their actions and spreading *"malicious nonsense"* about outside officials. He shunned outsiders and *"stopped those who wanted to"* welcome others.

Does this describe Diotrephes, who we encounter in our scripture for today? Yes, it does but it's also a description of another charismatic leader. Someone who began his ministry in Indiana. Someone who let his ego explode, leading to fatal consequences. That leader was Jim Jones. In these two short verses, we encounter a problem that invades the life of the church yet today - a leader who, while beginning with genuine faith, lets his/her power lead them down a dark path - not being led by Jesus. We've seen this played out in the media with disastrous consequences. It's a reminder that, even in the church, we experience the sin of pride and love of power.

Diotrephes loved to be first. He enjoyed his power and the influence he had leading his church. But this love of power led him to think more of himself than he should, and he began to reject the authority of the apostle, the elder, John. It produced a struggle for leadership. He spread gossip about John and the other missionaries which he thought would elevate him even higher. He used this perceived authority to run those out of the church who challenged him.

The temptation to let an egotistical thread invade your heart can begin with a small thought or feeling. And then it escalates quickly when you start to be recognized. And then people begin to follow your direction. And then no one questions what you're saying. And then you begin to belittle others to elevate yourself further. And then it becomes destructive as you move further away from the gospel message of Jesus - where your faith first began.

Are we in any way like Diotrephes? Are we craving attention that is leading us away from Christ? Or do we see it happening in our churches? Do we see leaders elevating themselves, promoting the exclusion of others or discouraging compassion for the oppressed, all to control their followers? We should ***"call attention to what (they are) doing."*** Those leaders need to be challenged or great harm could result. A leader in the church cannot be a dictator, telling their people what they must believe. A leader in the church should not seek to control, but to guide. People should be allowed to ask questions and seek God for themselves. We are not called to manipulate people, but to make disciples of all nations in the name of Jesus Christ.

Notes

11/26/2026 - WEEK 43 DAY 4

Imitating What is Good: 3 John 1:11-12

Devotional By: Dan Henke

John made an interesting choice of the word “imitate:” the original Greek word is μιμοῦ (mimou). The primary translation is “imitate.” However, a second translation is “follow.” The King James Version uses that meaning: “Beloved, follow not that which is evil....”

I am old enough to remember Beatles’ haircuts (but was too young to have one). When my oldest son was in fourth grade, he and several kids in his class were wearing their Brett Favre jerseys for the class photo. I have no idea why some high school kids wear Goth clothing other than “that’s what the cool kids wear.” Many people follow their favorite celebrity, sports star or public figure. Sometimes it is peer pressure, the desire to fit in.

The problem with following or imitating people is that you are taking the bad with the good. I have heard it said: “You should never meet your heroes.” The experience will usually be disappointing as the real-life version does not live up to the idealized version.

Following or imitation of others is an example of idol worship prohibited by the Second Commandment: “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them....” Exodus 20:4-5. Of all the 10 Commandments, the Second Commandment gets the most attention in the Bible. A search of the word “idols” yields 164 results, more than “adultery,” “murder,” and “covet” combined. But we still idolize celebrities. The television show “American Idol” has run for 21 seasons.

Our hero should be Jesus, and not only should we want to meet Him, but also some day we will. He is the one we should imitate and follow.

“And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.” Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT translation):

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and we should not be flattering evil. What are you imitating? Who are you following?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

11/27/2026 - WEEK 43 DAY 5

Connecting with God's People: 3 John 1:13-14

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

As a network engineer with over 35 years in the industry, I've spent my career in tech support. Yet, when my parents have a problem with their iPhones, they don't call the professional—they call my kids! It's a bit humbling, but they aren't wrong. My kids have lived their entire lives attached to these devices; they know every shortcut and "trick" in the book.

But there is a hidden cost to being this "connected." We see it in the rise of phubbing (phone snubbing)—the act of being physically present but mentally absent, choosing a screen over the person right in front of us. I've sat in job interviews where candidates struggled to even maintain eye contact!

I cannot help but think that the author, who calls himself "the Elder," but is likely to be the disciple John, finds himself in a first century version of the same frustration. He had things to say and keenly felt the limitation of just writing. He longs for a deeper, more personal connection.

We've all dreaded that long, complicated email that could have been resolved in a two-minute face-to-face chat. John knew that while letters were useful, they were limited. He didn't just want to transmit information; he wanted to share presence.

I think this verse shows the timeless importance of direct fellowship in an age where we can snub the congregation and just watch church in bed. The final verses of 3 John that are just outside of today's reading, offer blessings of peace and personal greetings that highlight the communal nature of the early church that remains the same in our church today.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for the technology that allows us to stay in touch. Give us the courage to step out from behind our devices and engage fully with the people You have placed in our lives. May we value "face-to-face" time as much as the Apostle John did, seeking to build Your Kingdom through real, tangible connections to others. Amen.

Notes



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