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# 1, 2 & 3 JOHN

*With conviction, confidence, and clarity,  
John presents a compelling picture of Jesus—  
so we see clearly who God is and what love is.*

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*1, 2 & 3 John*

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ISBN 978-0-89109-114-1

Printed in the United States of America

24 23 22 21 20 19 18  
34 33 32 31 30 29 28

# CONTENTS

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How to Use This Study	5
Introduction	9
Map of the Roman Empire	9
Timeline of John's Ministry	10
One—Overview of 1 John	15
Outline of 1 John	24
Two—The Word of Life (1 John 1:1-4)	27
Three—The Light (1 John 1:5–2:2)	37
Four—Ethical Tests (1 John 2:3-11)	49
Five—Two Digressions (1 John 2:12-17)	59
Six—The Test of Truth (1 John 2:18-28; 4:1-6)	69
Seven—Children of God (1 John 2:29–3:10)	79
Eight—Love in Action (1 John 3:11-24)	87
Nine—God Is Love (1 John 4:7–5:1)	95
Ten—Testimony (1 John 5:1-12)	103
Eleven—Assurance (1 John 5:13-21)	111
Twelve—Review of 1 John	119
Thirteen—Love and Truth (2 John 1-13)	123
Fourteen—Love and Rebellion (3 John 1-14)	135
Study Aids	143

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The LIFECHANGE series has been produced through the coordinated efforts of a team of Navigator Bible study developers and NavPress editorial staff, along with a nationwide network of field-testers.

*SERIES EDITOR: KAREN LEE-THORP*

# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

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## Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

## Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

*Optional Application.* Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

*For Thought and Discussion.* Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

*For Further Study.* These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

## Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of 1 John. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson 1 you will lay the foundation for your study of 1 John by asking yourself, “Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?”

In lessons 2 through 11, you will analyze successive passages of 1 John in detail. Thinking about how a paragraph fits into the overall goal of the book will help you to see its purpose. Its purpose will help you see its meaning. Frequently reviewing a chart or outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.

In lesson 12, you will review 1 John, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Lessons 13 and 14 each cover one of John’s shorter letters. Because of their brevity, they do not require separate overviews and reviews. They elaborate on certain themes raised in 1 John.

## Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, "Lord, what do You want me to see here?" "Father, why is this true?" "Lord, how does this apply to my life?"

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

## Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 143. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

## Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

## Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

## For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and

businessmen's studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 146–147 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

# INTRODUCTION

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## Map of the Roman Empire



The other apostles were dead, but John remained—the last living intimate friend of Jesus. The aged apostle was living in Ephesus, a port city Paul first evangelized four decades earlier. John regarded the Christians in every town within a hundred miles as his personal responsibility, and now a clique of pseudo-Christian teachers was wreaking confusion in John's flock. His response was a letter sent to each church in the province of Asia, the letter we call 1 John.

## Timeline of John's Ministry

(All dates are approximate)

Jesus' public ministry	AD 28–30
John an apostle in Jerusalem	30–70
Jewish rebellion	66–70
Romans destroy Jerusalem, Christians flee	70
John in Ephesus	70–95
Domitian is Emperor of Rome	81–96
Gospel of John written	85–90
Epistles of John written	90–94
Domitian persecutes Christians; John is exiled to the island of Patmos and writes Revelation	95–96
John in Ephesus until his death	96–100

## John

On page 9 is a likely reconstruction of what prompted the writing of 1 John.<sup>1</sup> John probably wrote this epistle around AD 90, sixty years after Jesus' crucifixion and perhaps twenty-five after Paul's and Peter's deaths.

During Jesus' lifetime, John was one of the three disciples closest to Him (see Luke 8:51; 9:28). When Jesus died, He entrusted His mother to John's care (see John 19:26-27). In his gospel, John called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23).

Popular mythology has sometimes painted John as a kindly old saint, like Santa Claus. Kind he may have been to his flock, but he had another face. Mark tells us that John and his brother James were known as the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). They once offered to call down fire from heaven upon some Samaritans who snubbed Jesus (see Luke 9:51-56). Jesus rebuked this zeal, but we can sense a sanctified son of thunder behind many passages of 1 John (see 1:6; 2:4,22; 3:9,18; 4:5-6,20; 5:10).

When Paul visited Jerusalem around AD 50, John was still living there (see Galatians 2:9). But in AD 70 the Roman armies demolished Jerusalem after crushing a Jewish revolt. The Christians fled. John went to Ephesus, where he became the thriving church's most venerable elder. By the time he wrote the fourth gospel and his epistles, John was renowned throughout Asia, for he apparently traveled and preached frequently.<sup>2</sup>

In the AD 70s and 80s, persecution of Christians was a small-scale affair—a brawl here, a little job discrimination there, and malicious gossip nearly everywhere. But about AD 95, Emperor Domitian took a dislike to Christianity, which many Romans considered a pernicious superstition. As one of its founders, John was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he beheld the visions recorded in the book of Revelation. When Domitian died in AD 96, John returned to Ephesus and apparently died peacefully around AD 100. He probably wrote his gospel and epistles five or ten years before his Patmos sojourn.<sup>3</sup>

## Syncretism

If persecution was only a minor irritant for the churches of Asia in AD 90, heresy was a major threat. The Roman province of Asia, part of what is now called Asia Minor or Turkey (see the map on page 9), was a cultural melting pot. Greek conquerors had brought their language, philosophy, art, and religion from the west, while immigrants from Egypt, Persia, and Syria were carrying their customs from the east and mixing them with whatever ancient ways still lingered in Asia. Few people judged it necessary to hold one school of thought rigorously. There were many roads to truth, and a man took what he liked from each—a pinch of Plato, a dash of Persian dualism, and one's ancestral cult for tradition's sake. Modern scholars call this mixing of Greek and Oriental culture *syncretism*; it was pluralism taken to extremes.

In this environment, Jews and Christians were considered narrow-minded and impious for paying homage to just one God. Most people acknowledged hundreds and favored several deities. Some hedged their bets by joining one or more “mystery” cults—groups with secret rites of initiation that promised encounters with the divine and bliss in the afterlife. There were sects that mixed Judaism with Plato or astrology or secret revelation. Thus, it was inevitable that someone would try to add Christianity to a Greek-Persian-occult casserole and challenge the apostles' gospel.

Fifty years after John's death these semi-Christian hybrids were as common and various as roses, but the seeds were planted in John's lifetime. Many of the full-blown systems of the second century AD are grouped under the label *Gnosticism* (from the Greek *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge”) because they all offered some secret knowledge by which a person could be saved. This knowledge was not available through study, but only through “revelation from a higher plane.”<sup>4</sup> Gnosticism “is a religion of saving knowledge, and the knowledge is essentially self-knowledge, recognition of the divine element which constitutes the true self.”<sup>5</sup>

Gnostics believe that matter is evil and spirit is good. Therefore, the world and the human body are also evil. They were created not by the Absolute (who is perfect), but by a lesser, malevolent spirit. We humans were all originally sublime spirit beings, but through no fault of our own we became imprisoned in physical bodies in this material world, ignorant of our lost bliss. Our only hope is for someone to redeem us by bringing that forgotten knowledge of our true natures. When a person learns what he

was, what he is, and what he can be, “that knowledge in itself becomes his redemption.”<sup>6</sup>

Many variations on this theme were promoted in the second century AD. Some Gnostics identified the redeemer with Jesus. Others did not. Those that did talk of “Christ” were not thinking of the Jewish Messiah (*Christ* and *Messiah* both mean “Anointed One”—a Jewish king). They thought the Christ was an *aeon* (a sort of spirit) who had “emanated” from “the divine Absolute.” Also, they differed over the relation between the Christ and Jesus. One group, called *Docetists* (from the Greek *dokein* “to seem”), believed that Jesus was the Christ but only seemed to have a flesh-and-blood body. He was really a pure spirit being appearing visibly, as the angel of the Lord did in the Old Testament. To the Docetists, it was unthinkable for the divine Christ to be defiled by a material body.

We know of one teacher with Gnostic-like views who was busy in Ephesus while John lived there. He was Cerinthus, an Egyptian Jew. One of John’s disciples told the story that

John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within!”<sup>7</sup>

Why did the apostle so abhor Cerinthus? Because, wrote Irenaeus of Lyons (around AD 185), Cerinthus

represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ, descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible [not liable to pain or injury] inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Cerinthus said Jesus was a man, but the Christ was never incarnate—He only briefly occupied Jesus’ body. This is just the kind of teaching John wrote his first epistle to deny (see 2:22; 4:2-3).

The letter suggests that some men with views like Cerinthus’ joined the churches of Asia for a time and provoked strife with their unorthodox views. They eventually withdrew in anger when they failed to persuade the majority (see 2:19; 3:12-15), but the believers were upset. John probably wrote his letter to circulate among the troubled churches and calm the members.

1. Many scholars doubt the apostle wrote the letter. These include C. H. Dodd, Rudolf Bultmann, C. K. Barrett, and Raymond Brown, among many others. See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982). Others offer strong cases that he did write it. For specifics, see J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 13–41; Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 215–292; Leon Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel*

of *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 8–30; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 254–311; Donald Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 7–37.

2. Our information about John's life comes mainly from the second-century bishop Irenaeus of Lyons and from the fourth-century church historian Eusebius of Caesarea. Their sources were oral traditions passed down from bishop to bishop.
3. Burdick, 38–44.
4. Burdick, 55.
5. Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 10. Technically, "Gnostic" applies to the full-blown systems that grew up after John's death. For simplicity, we will call John's opponents "Gnostics" rather than using the awkward term "proto-Gnostic."
6. Burdick, 55.
7. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), book 3, chapter 3, section 4. Irenaeus got the story from his mentor Polycarp, who was a disciple of John.
8. Irenaeus, book 1, chapter 26, section 1.



# OVERVIEW OF 1 JOHN

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When you receive a letter from someone, how do you begin examining it? If you are like most people, you probably start by reading the whole letter through to get a general idea of what the writer has to say. You pay attention to the main ideas and feelings the sender is communicating, and you are alert for sections that you want to look at more closely later.

This is just the way to begin studying a biblical letter. First John is God's Word, but He chose to give us this information through a letter from an ordinary man to an ordinary group of Christians. Later you will want to think about what God is saying to you through this letter, but for now, imagine that you are one of John's original readers receiving this letter from a respected friend. Take about fifteen to thirty minutes to read through 1 John, not stopping to ponder phrases but scanning for the total message. If possible, read it twice in different translations. Read at least part of the letter aloud so that you can hear as well as see it. You can jot notes for questions 1 through 3 as you read or afterward.

1. What attitudes and feelings toward his readers does John show? (Also, how does he show his feelings?)

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**For Thought and Discussion:** Is John writing to Christians or non-Christians? How can you tell?

**For Thought and Discussion:**

a. How would you describe John's *style* of writing? (Does he reason logically from point to point? Is there an obvious way to outline his letter?)

b. How is John's style like and unlike Paul's way of writing letters?

c. From the way he writes, what do you think John is like?

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2. Repetition is a clue to the ideas a writer wants to emphasize, and John makes especially strong use of this technique. List as many as possible of the key words, phrases, and ideas he repeats.

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**Study Skill—Broad Outline**

To trace the train of thought in a biblical book, it is often helpful to sketch a general outline of it during your overview. On your first reading, notice where the writer's thought shifts, and mark the major sections of the book. Then, go back and give each section a title that expresses what it is about (see question 3). Key phrases in the section may give you clues to good titles.

3. You might find it difficult to decide for certain where John changes topics in his letter. He often seems to flow imperceptibly from one idea to the next. So, to help you make a broad outline of 1 John, we've chosen some rather arbitrary places to break the letter into sections. Make up a title or short summary for each passage. (You can change the divisions if you like.)

1:1-4 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1:5-2:11 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2:12-14 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2:15-17 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2:18-27 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2:28-3:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3:11-24 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4:1-6 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4:7-5:5 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5:6-12 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5:13-21 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What does John say about certain other people (not his readers)? Who are they, how does he feel about them, and why? (See, for instance, 2:1-26.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**For Thought and Discussion:**

a. In what ways does John sound like a “son of thunder” (see Mark 3:17) in his letter?

b. What other aspects of his character balance this one?

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5. Two of the ideas John repeats are what we may have *confidence* about and what we *know* for certain. In what may we have confidence (see 3:21; 4:17; 5:14)?

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6. Over and over, John emphasizes *what* we know and *how* we can be certain that we know it. From the following verses, write down what we know and what tests assure us.

what we know	how we can be certain that we know this
2:3	
3:10	
3:14	

what we know	how we can be certain that we know this
3:24; 4:13	
5:1,11-13	

**For Thought and Discussion:** John is especially fond of contrasts. One example is light versus darkness. What other contrasts do you observe in his letter?

**Study Skill—Themes and Purposes**  
 People normally write letters in response to some situation in their own or their readers’ lives. They usually have reasons for choosing the topics they cover in their letters. Although it is often not possible to reconstruct the precise reasons that prompted a letter, any insight in this area will help us understand a writer’s message.  
 Our own purpose for studying a letter will often be different from its original purpose, but how we understand and apply a writer’s words should be influenced by how he and the Holy Spirit meant them to be understood and applied in the first century. A clear idea of what we think John’s letter is about, even if we have to modify it later, is a better foundation than a vague one.

7. What four purposes does John state in the following verses?

1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2:1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**For Thought and Discussion:**

a. Gnostics believe that we are saved by knowing the truth about the world and ourselves. How is Christianity different?

b. Do you know of any modern groups with views like the Gnostics? What do they believe about Christ? About spirit and matter? About the origin of evil? About whether humans are divine? About how to “become who you are”?

c. Do you know any people who want to mix Christianity with other philosophies and religions?

2:26 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5:13 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. From your first reading of John’s letter, how would you summarize its main themes or purposes?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. If you have not already done so, read the Introduction on pages 9–13. If you feel you would like more background about 1 John, you might write your questions here. Some of your questions may be answered later in this study; the Study Aid sources on pages 143–147 may answer others.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Your overview of 1 John may have suggested questions about particular passages that you would like to pursue as you go deeper into the book. If so, jot them down now while your thoughts are still fresh. Your questions can serve as personal objectives for your further investigation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Study Skill—Application**

James 1:22 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 remind us of the primary reason we study God’s Word—to let it affect our lives so that we will fully become the people God desires. Therefore, the last step of Bible study should always be to ask yourself, “What is God saying to me? What difference should this passage make to my life? How should it make me want to think or act?” Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person.

At times you may find it most productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer. At other times you may want to list many implications a passage of Scripture has for your life, meditating on them all for several days before you choose one for concentrated prayer and action. Use whatever method helps you to take to heart and act on what the passage says.

**Optional**

**Application:** Take five or ten minutes to think and pray about 5:13. What difference would deep, confident knowledge of eternal life make to the way you deal with your circumstances? What difference would it make to the way you feel about yourself, God, and other people? Thank God for the opportunity to develop confidence about this, and ask Him to implant this confidence in you as you study John’s letter.

11. Think about the purposes you wrote in questions 7 and 8. How are any of them relevant or important to your life?

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12. Is there some part of John’s letter that you would like to think and pray about this week, or something you want to act on? If so, describe your plans.

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### For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select and adapt what suits your group. The main goals are to get to know 1 John as a whole and the people with whom you are going to study it.

**Worship.** Most groups like to begin with some kind of worship—a few minutes of prayer and/or a couple of songs. Worship helps people lay aside the business of the day and focus on God. It relaxes, renews, and opens you to listen to the Lord and each other. If you don’t already have worship built into your meetings in some way, discuss how you might do so.

**Warm-up.** The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your group—out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. Why do you want to study 1 John? What do you hope to give as well as receive? If you have someone write down each member’s hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met.

**How to use this study.** If the group has never used a LIFECHANGE study guide before, you might take a whole meeting to discuss your goals for the group and go over the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5–8. Then you can take a second meeting to talk about the background on pages 9–13 and the overview questions. This will give you more time to read 1 John and prepare lesson 1 for discussion.

**Reading.** It is often helpful to refresh everyone’s memory by reading aloud the passage you are going to study. You probably won’t want to read all of 1 John, but consider having someone read, for instance, 1:1-4, another read 1:5–2:2, and another 4:7-21. These selections will remind the group of John’s themes, his style, and his personality.

**First impressions.** Ask the group to share first impressions of John’s letter—its style, mood, content, or whatever strikes you. For instance, how is 1 John like and unlike letters group members write or receive, or like and unlike a sermon, a graduation speech, or advice from a father? What is John like as a person? How does he feel about his readers and about certain other people? What are his main topics? Help the group see 1 John as a real letter from a person to real people for some specific purposes.

The background should help you understand the setting of 1 John. Ask the group to describe the connections among *syncretism*, early *Gnosticism*, and what John has to say.

When you apply John’s words, you’ll have to transfer them from that first-century setting to your own. What signs of syncretism (mixing of religions and value systems) and Gnostic-like ideas do you observe in your day? What are some general ways in which John’s words are relevant today? In what specific ways might you take to heart something he says? Encourage the group to pray about how the epistle applies to each of you personally. If some members are not used to purposefully applying a passage to themselves, take time at this or your next meeting to make up a sample application of some part of 1 John. The Study Skill on page 32 gives one example.

When you cover question 3, remind everyone that there is no one right way to title a passage. Compare and discuss the merits of different titles.

**Questions.** Give everyone a chance to share questions about the letter or the study guide. It is good to clear up confusion as early as possible. You may want to leave some questions about the book until later in your study; they may answer themselves if you are looking for answers. Point out the list of references on pages 143–147, and encourage members to bring questions to their pastors or other Christians they respect.

**Outline.** First John is not an easy book to outline, for John weaves topics together and flows from idea to idea. Therefore, many different outlines have been made. You may want to find several to compare from study Bibles, commentaries, and Bible handbooks. Here is one example:<sup>1</sup>

- I. Introduction: The Reality of the Incarnation (1:1-4)
- II. The Christian Life as Fellowship with the Father and the Son (1:5–2:28)
  - A. Ethical Tests of Fellowship (1:5–2:11)
  - B. Two Digressions (2:12-17)
  - C. Christological Test of Fellowship (2:18-28)
- III. The Christian Life as Divine Sonship (2:29–4:6)
  - A. Ethical Tests of Sonship (2:29–3:24)
  - B. Christological Test of Sonship (4:1-6)
- IV. The Christian Life as an Integration of the Ethical and the Christological (4:7–5:12)
  - A. The Ethical Test: Love (4:7–5:5)
  - B. The Christological Test (5:6-12)
- V. Conclusion: Great Christian Certainties (5:13-21)

**Wrap-up.** The group leader should have read lesson 2 and its “For the group” section. At this point, he or she can give a short summary of what members can expect in that lesson and the coming meeting. This is a chance to whet everyone’s appetite, assign any optional questions, omit or clarify any numbered questions, or forewarn members of any possible difficulties.

You might also encourage anyone who found the overview especially hard. Some people are better at seeing the big picture or the whole of a book than others. Some are best at analyzing a particular verse or paragraph, while others are strongest

at seeing how a passage applies to our lives. Urge members to give thanks for their own and others' strengths, and to give and request help when needed. The group is a place to learn from each other. Later lessons will draw on the gifts of close analyzers as well as overviewers and appliers, practical as well as theoretical thinkers.

**Worship.** Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs and prayers that respond to what you've learned from 1 John, or prayers for specific needs of group members. Many people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer, and a short closing prayer by the leader, might be an appropriate end. You could share requests and pray in pairs instead.

1. Adapted from Donald Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 88–90. Burdick thinks the letter covers the tests of real Christianity in three ever-deepening cycles.