

How Do I Know? – 1 John Message Series

Discussion Guide for Journey Groups - Christ Community Church



Introduction

First John is a power-packed letter written to new believers by the aging eye-witness Apostle John. History tells us he was associated with the Church at Ephesus during the time he wrote. All three of his short letters address core doctrines, firming-up faith that was under threat from false teachers. His ultimate aim? Producing confident, Christ-following believers who dare to love God and people in the context of a broken world.

The Adult Ministry Team has produced these materials as a companion to the *How Do I Know* message series beginning Sunday, September 6th. You'll find four sessions in this discussion guide. Each session also has a video teaching segment meant to be viewed at the beginning of the discussion. The link to the videos can be found on the Journey Group Leader Blog at:

<http://cccomaha.org/blogs/journeygroupleaders/2015/08/14/how-do-i-know-message-series-beginning-september-6th/>

The Journey Group discussions ideally fit together with the Sunday messages, but can be done independently. You'll notice lots of overlap between the messages and the Journey Group discussions. That's by design not only to help connect the Sunday morning experience with your Journey Group, but it also fits the style of John's letters. John frequently repeats himself, interweaving his themes throughout his writing. You'll also discover that the discussions skip around throughout the letter. Don't let that be a distraction. Listen for the themes and let them take you wherever they lead you!

Session 1: How do I know... how to live in a broken world? (1 John 2:12-17)

Session 2: How do I know... what real love is all about? (1 John 4:7-17)

Session 3: How do I know... the difference between true faith and false teaching? (1 John 2:18-28)

Session 4: How do I know... that my faith is the real thing? (1 John 4:21- 5:13)

Feel free to make paper copies of this guide for yourself or your group. Freely forward this PDF document to other participants. Pass along the video links a well. Our aim is to facilitate group life around scripture. Your feedback is welcome! If you have specific questions about the content or need help answering questions for your group, you are welcome to contact us. We'd love to hear from you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Perry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Tim Perry – Pastor of Spiritual Discovery

timp@cccomaha.org Office: 402.938.1505

Other contributors include Nancy Davies - Director of Ministries; Reid Brown - Adult Discipleship Pastor, and Lisa Ashton - Assistant Director of Adult Discipleship.

Session One: How do I know... how to live in a broken world?

Passage: I John 2:12-17 - Main Point: Because of who you are, you are equipped to say no to the ways of the world and yes to the Father.

Video Teaching: Tim gives a brief overview of the series including some helpful background information about the Apostle John and his readers. Tim also talks about a key theological concept that John develops in this passage.

Discussion Launch: Before a team heads into a big game or an army goes out for battle, the leader usually will give a pep talk or a pre-battle speech. Can you recall an example of one of these talks either from your own life or from a movie you have seen? What made it so inspiring? Or did it fall flat and why?

In this passage John reminds his listeners of several foundational truths as they face the temptations of the world and the age to come. Let's join the conversation and see how it encourages us today!

Read 1 John 2:12-17 (NIV)

¹² I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁴ I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."

- 1) What words or phrases do you see repeated throughout this passage?

- 2) What are the reasons John gives for writing the believers? Why are those truths important – what is at stake?

There are a few perspectives on what is meant by "little children, fathers, and young men" but the most important thing to remember is that John is writing to believers.

- 3) When heading into something intensely challenging, what difference does it make to be generously encouraged beforehand?

- 4) In the video, Tim mentioned four different meanings for the word “world”. *Kosmos* can mean i) adornment (cosmetic), ii) the entire created universe (cosmos), iii) the abode or order of mankind – the stage of human history, or iv) humanity itself – all people in the world. In this passage what “world” is John referring to? How would you describe our world today in the terms John is using?

- 5) What does it look like to love the world? What is it about loving the world that can be so attractive?

- 6) Is it possible to love the Father and still love the world? What is the end result of following the ways of world versus following the ways of the Father?

- 7) Circle back to truths John encouraged believers with in verses 12-14 (Question 2). How do reassurances like these help Christians face the temptations of the world? How do words like these help them love the Father more?

- 8) Think about your own life. What are the temptations or challenges you are currently facing in the world? How can these reminders from verses 12-14 give you the confidence you need to follow in the will of God?

Conclude: End your time with group prayer or have people pray in 2s or 3s. Do battle in prayer with specific struggles. Also thank God together for the wealth of encouraging truth this passage shows us about knowing the Father and choosing him over the world.

Session Two: How do I know... what real love is all about?

Passage: I John 4:7-21 - Main Point: The key to loving others is knowing and loving God. Since God initiates by loving us first, it's only natural that he expects us to love Him and others in return.

Video Teaching: The world has never known a time when the hunger for love didn't drive our passions and dreams. But at one point in time, God brought love to humanity like never before and entirely redefined the word. Our theological word study this week comes to us from the brilliant writer C. S. Lewis who shows us how Jesus transformed humanity's best ideas of love.

Discussion Launch: In the video, Tim defined love as "God's prime mandate for humanity." Love is his core expectation! In his immense authority over people, God actually commands us to love him! Before hearing that idea, what do you think most people would say God's core expectation is? Why?

Read 1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

"⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."

1. Reading a rich passage like this gives one the same feeling you get when a waiter at a fine restaurant brings out your meal. It smells fabulous! Looks incredible! It's larger (and probably more expensive) than you expected! What's your first impression of this passage as you read it just now? What hits you? Why?
2. In verses 7-8 John correlates knowing God and loving people. The word knowing in this context implies a close or intimate connection. How can being close to God or not being close to God affect how we love people?

3. Verses 10-11 set a pretty high standard for this word “love”. What standard of love do you see set by God? What ought to be our motivation to love?

4. Read verses 12-16. What is the reoccurring phrase in these verses? Why do you think John is making this such an important point (vs. 12)?

5. All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in this passage. What do you learn that is unique to each member of the Godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

6. Since love is made complete in us when we are like Jesus (vs. 17) then how does living in perfect love drive out fear? What kind of fear is this passage talking about?

7. John drives home his main point again in verses 19-21. If love is the core expectation that God has of humanity, then what is the primary indicator of a follower of Jesus?

8. How would you answer someone who says, “I do not agree with this passage. I do not need to love God to love people really well.” Or how would you answer someone who says, “I really love God but there are some people in my life I can’t stand...and I might even hate.”

Conclude: If loving people better flows out of knowing God and living in him, what can you do to connect with God this week? In your time with God, ask Him if there are any relationships in your life that need a touch of his grace. It is not about trying harder. Only the power of Jesus can help you “agape” the people around you. True love gives. We see that through God sending his Son and giving us his Spirit. If we draw on the saving work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit we will see the fruit of love in our lives. Wrap up your group time by praying in pairs. Share one specific way you’ll commit to loving others better.

Session Three: How do I know... the difference between true faith and false teaching?

Passage: 1 John 2:18-28 Main Point: The heart of false teaching is denying biblical truth about Jesus.

Video Teaching: “Relax. The antichrist is coming!” This session’s theological word study definitely becomes the elephant in the room when you read these verses. Tim talks about John’s use of the term *antichrist*, clearing up numerous misunderstandings Christians have picked up over the centuries.

Discussion Launch: “Whenever people are trying to avoid the plain truth about Jesus, they have to fabricate something false in its place.” It always leads to very unconventional “substitute beliefs” about Jesus. Tim mentioned that in John’s day false teachers found ways to deny the claim that Jesus was the Christ (denying the deity of Jesus), and to deny the teaching that Jesus came in the form of a flesh-and-blood human (denying the incarnation of Jesus). Does anyone in the group have a friend or know someone who follows a non-Christian religion or is a member of one of the sectarian groups Tim mentioned? What does that person say they believe about Jesus?

Read 1 John 2:8-28 (NIV)

“¹⁸ Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist-- denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he promised us-- eternal life. ²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.”

In the first two chapters of 1 John, the author speaks about the conflict between light and darkness (1:1-2:6) and love and hatred (2:7-17). The third conflict is between truth and false truth. The believer must walk in truth as well as in light and love. Before John points out the consequences of turning from the truth, he points to the seriousness of the matter using two terms: “the last hour” and “antichrist.”

The term “last hour” or “last time” reminds us that a new age has come to the world. Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is doing a “new thing” in this world. The world is preparing for the

“end” when Jesus will return and establish His kingdom. The “last hour” describes a *kind* of time, not a *duration* of time.

1. Why is it so important for us to understand these two special terms in this passage (antichrist and last hour)? Are the conditions today as urgent as in John’s day? Why or why not?
2. What does the believer have working to his advantage according to verse 20? What force is working against the truth?
3. When John wrote this letter, he may have been battling the influence of false teachers later known as the Gnostics. Paganism was also rampant in John’s day. Ephesus, John's home at this time was a thriving metropolis with a well-developed economy based on the seaport and the Temple of Artemis. The Temple, one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World, attracted worshippers from near and far. Ephesus was an environment thick with opposition to belief in Christ as the Son of God. What false beliefs today keep people from believing in Jesus as the Savior?
4. Those spreading false teaching left the fellowship of the believers. According to 1 John 1:1-4, what is fellowship based on? How is your group living out the fellowship that John describes?
5. John highlights the fellowship of believers as one mark of a Christian (v. 19). How does this impact your commitment to growing with other believers in community?

6. False teachers bring ideas that are close to the gospel but in reality are counterfeit. Similarly, Satan works to draw Christians away from belief in Christ by deceit and lies. Like weeds that resemble the plants they are choking out, it can be difficult to discern the difference between the two. According to John, how are we able to distinguish truth from false teaching?

7. Share a time when you recognized false teaching in someone that "looked" like a true believer. How did you know they were teaching or believing something false?

8. As believers, scripture tells us that we have received and been anointed by the Holy Spirit (2:20). The anointing of the Spirit "abides" in us to guide us in truth (John 14:26 & 1 John 5:6). Find all the references to "abiding" or "remaining" in this passage (see also 1 John 2:6, 10, 14, 17). How does the believer abide in the Spirit?

Conclude: It is impossible to live in fellowship with God if you are disobedient, hateful or untruthful. Consider taking some time with your journal this week asking yourself the question: Is there any sin in my life that is keeping me from living authentically? If so, what changes can I make to more fully follow Jesus in Spirit and in Truth?

Session Four: How do I know... that my faith is the real thing?

Passage: 1 John 4:21-5:13 Main Point: Knowing God shows itself in a life of love and assurance.

Video Teaching: The last chapter of First John is a fitting reprise to the whole letter. This video teaching focuses on the connection between believing and knowing. Do we know something is true simply because we sincerely believe it to be true? How we come to know something is true matters a whole lot when it comes time to act on our beliefs. This week's word study will shed light on our big question: How do I know?

Discussion Launch: We are introduced to chores early on in our lives and they never seem to go away. Generally, they are burdensome things we have to do because they need to be done. Some can be more unpleasant than others like having to *clean the toilet*; others are more physical like *shoveling the snow*. What chore do you have to do that is a real burden for you?

Cleaning The Toilet

Washing Dishes

Mowing The Lawn or Shoveling Snow

Taking out the trash

Doing the Laundry

Other?

Part One: How do I know that I love God?

Read 1 John 4:21-5:5 (NIV)

²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 1 John 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

- 1) Underline the word "love" every time it occurs in this passage. Loving Christian brothers and sisters is inseparable from loving God. Have you noticed in your own life a pattern of growth in loving other Christians since believing in Jesus? Share an example with the group.

- 2) Circle the word “believes” every time it occurs in this passage. Recall from the word study in the video that *Pisteuw*, is the result of being fully convinced of something. Jesus Christ the Son of God is the object of our belief. Looking at vv 1-4 list everything you see that is an outcome of belief in Jesus (example: being born again and loved by God, v. 1).

- 3) Obedience to God’s commands is a repeated theme in these verses. How does a motive of love for God prevent obedience from becoming a burdensome chore?

- 4) Fellow Christians can test the quality of our love like no other challenge. Why is that? Is there someone in your life who feels “burdensome” for you to love? What is God teaching you through that relationship?

Part Two: How do I know that I have salvation?

Read 1 John 5: 6-13 (NIV)

“⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood-- Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹ We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

- 5) Underline the word “testimony” every time it appears in this passage. God’s testimony is that eternal life is from Him through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. How has assurance of eternal life affected you when facing doubts about your faith?

- 6) How is a believer’s life affected by worrying about whether or not they are truly born again in Christ?

- 7) Do you agree or disagree with this statement, “Knowing that I have eternal life gives me the freedom to do whatever I please.” Why or why not?

- 8) How does being sure of eternal life affect the way I live my day to day life? What is one evidence of assurance would you like to see displayed in your life?

Conclude: People seldom forget a loved one’s parting words. Sometimes the last thing said in a long conversation sticks the longest in our memory. The following two verses at the end of chapter 5 are an excellent summary of John’s entire letter – worth committing to memory! Have someone in the group read them out loud. As a group, worship the Lord together for a few minutes, thanking him for sending Jesus so we can know the Father through him.

I John 5:19-20 (NIV)

“¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. ²⁰ 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.”