

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

# JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

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## THE MORE YOU KNOW

### *1 JOHN*

There is an old saying from a children's cartoon many years ago— "Knowledge is power." Do you remember something like that? The idea behind that statement is that a person who possesses the right knowledge for a given situation also has the power to make some positive changes in their life.

The apostle John would agree with that statement. He believed that possessing the right knowledge was the key to living a Christian life that is full to the brim with spiritual success, and spiritual confidence. There was no doubt in his mind that if you had the right knowledge, you could really experience a difference and not just talk about wanting to experience a difference in your life.

We mentioned in John's Gospel a few facts about the life of this apostle; how that Jesus may have called him to preach as early as his teenage years, and that the Holy Spirit used this man to write five of the twenty-six books in the New Testament.

Think for a moment about all of the history that passed through John's life. This man John knew the sound of the Savior's voice. This man John knew what it was to leave a life behind for the cause of Christ. This man John was there standing before the cross of Christ. This man John saw the resurrected Christ. This man John became a pastor at the Church at Ephesus and continued to preach Christ.

Throughout this life, after he heard those words from Christ that every believer knows so well— "Follow me," John's life had been consumed with the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, he's writing as an old man. All of that history of being saturated with his relationship with the Savior we love so well is now using all of his knowledge, moved on by the Holy Spirit so that you would know what he knows about how to follow Christ.

If you ever get the chance to study this book in detail, you'll notice here, like the book of James, that John is very bold in the way he writes. There is no grey area when John is giving his instruction— it is either black, or it is white; it is either right, or it is wrong.

You'll also notice right away in your reading of this little book that he doesn't like you to guess about why he is writing, so he just takes his pen and tells you about it. In fact, he does this in all of his writings. If you remember, near the end of John's

gospel, he places the key at the back door of the book. **John 20:31**, “But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

John does this in the book of the Revelation as well; except it is Christ Himself who tells John to do it. **Revelation 1:1-2**, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.”

This is John putting the keys near the front door.

Then, when you come to the letters, John just scatters the keys all over the house. Over and over again John will tell you why he is writing and what you need to learn. And speaking of what we need to learn, let's open up this book a little bit and see what we find.

### *How to Think About 1 John*

This book, like the book of Proverbs, does not cooperate with someone trying to break up the content— it's notoriously hard to outline. It is as if John wanted you to just sit down and consume this letter all at one time, taking it in altogether. However, so we can see the subjects a little better, we're going to impose an outline and talk about everything John wants us to know.

**Understanding Our Fellowship (1:1-2:29)**— To understand our fellowship with God John gives us a few tests to grade ourselves a little bit. That's what tests are for. When your teacher used to give you a test in school, they did so to test your level of understanding. Here, John is doing the same thing.

**The Obedience Test (1:1- 2:6):** John lays out for us what it means to have fellowship with God by way of our obedience. John says there are ways you can tell about your salvation by the way that you respond to God's truth. For instance, John will say things like, “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness...” or, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light...” or, “If we say we have no sin...” All along the way, John is giving us a way to test our obedience to God.

**The Love Test (2:7- 17):** Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you comfortable around the members of your church? How do you feel when you're asked to do something at your church? If you saw someone hurting in your church, is your immediate need to do something about it because you love them so much? These are just generic questions, but this is what John says, “He that loveth brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” (1 John 2:10) And we know that Christian love has action tied to it. That's why John gives you a little test to see if you understand fellowship or not. If you do, it will show up in the way we love each other.

**The Truth Test (2:18- 2:29):** This is another important test to see if you understand fellowship. If you know how to settle into God's truth, then that's where you'll stay. If you can't do that; if you can be persuaded to water down what the Bible says about who Jesus is, then you fail the truth test, and you're not in fellowship with God. As I said, John is very black-and-white.

**Understanding Our Relationship (3:1- 5:21)**— Once again, John wants to give you a few tests in this area as well. We not only need to understand our fellowship with one another. We need to understand why that relationship exists in the first place, and also understand if we have this relationship. It's also important to note that John follows the same pattern here when talking about our relationship with God, as he did in talking about our fellowship with God's people.

**The Obedience Test (3:1-24):** You'll notice right away in reading chapter 3 that John mentions our sonship with God. In John 3:1, John tells us that by God's love, we are God's sons (and daughters). In John 3:9, John

speaks about us being “born of God.” This is important when it comes to understanding obedience, because if God saved you and placed you in His family, wouldn’t you want to look like your heavenly Father? If there is constant rebellion in a person’s life, there are one of three things happening: 1) They simply are operating out of ignorance and need to be corrected. 2) They are in complete rebellion against what they know to be true (Like Lot, Abraham’s nephew). 3) And here is what is most likely the case... they are not really in God’s family.

**The Love Test (4:1-21):** Take a look at this verse, 1 John 4:8, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” John is giving you another little test here; you better pay attention. You can tell when you are operating out of love, can’t you? Do you have a love for God’s people? Do you have a love for God Himself? All you need to do is look at your actions, at your bank account, at your church attendance. There are a few ways your love will most definitely show up if it’s there.

**The Truth Test (5:1-21):** What is it exactly that you are looking to have assurance for salvation. John gives us a truth test to help us out. 1 John 5:11, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” God’s Word is your warrant to show that you have eternal life and a real relationship with Him. If you claim God’s record, you pass the truth test.

### *What to Look for in 1 John*

#### **Key Words—**

**Knowledge:** You’ll find this word scattered all over this book almost forty times in your reading. John doesn’t want to you be in the dark about your faith; he wants you to know it. So he writes things like, “These things I have written unto you that ye may know...” He writes, “If ye know...” “And ye know...” All over the place, this book is filled with the knowledge we should have.

**Fellowship:** Just in the first chapter alone, you’ll read the word fellowship four different times. It has to do with “sharing all things in common together.” That’s what identifies us as God’s people— we share things in common... together. Meals, truth, love, worship, life, struggles, sorrow, joys, laughter. No matter the background; no matter the situation, God’s true people are in fellowship with one another.

#### **Key Doctrine—**

**God’s Love:** 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:” This is one of the great verses in the Bible. Not even John, who had seen and learned from Christ Himself, knew how to describe God’s love to the people who would read this book; but he did want you to just look and stare at it.

**God’s Deliverance:** Particularly in this case, God’s deliverance from false teachers and satanic forces. In chapter 2 you can read about John’s warning of “many antichrists” that come to corrupt people in the church and John says that for some, it actually worked! That had to be incredibly discouraging. But John says the reason these people went out of the church, is because they were never saved in first place. Also, by the time you get to chapter 5, John consumes us with the knowledge that we can have assurance that God will deliver us from our troubles. 1 John 5:18, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”

### ***What to Gain from 1 John***

Once again, John is a book with some Christian tests inside. And these tests are important because they point us to the reality of eternity. Living a life of faith can sometimes be difficult because we want so badly to only trust with what we can see with our eyes, and touch with our hands. It feels safer to have something tangible to hold on to. If someone asks where you live you can point to your house. If someone asks where you work, you might be able to point to an organization. But if someone asks to see your eternal security, there is no plaque on your wall; there is no special card that you carry. But faith is not without its evidences, and that's the purpose of these tests.

**You Should Have the Right Response to Sin**— Does sin own you? Is there a sin that you just can't conquer, and you wouldn't want to even if you could? A true child of God has a right response to sin. They may fail God, but they hate that they do.

**You Should Have the Right Response to Salvation**— What happens in your heart when you think about how God saved you? Do you long for heaven? Is the fact that God loved you to send His Son to die for you, and is preparing you a home in heaven where you'll be with Him forever the best thought you can think of? For the child of God, the word salvation means everything!

**You Should Have the Right Response to Sanctification**— We've touched on this, but being a child of God means that you should want to look like your heavenly Father. When you speak, your truest desire is to speak how God speaks. When you love, you can't think of anything better than learning how to love like God loves. There may still be a long way for you to go, but you should want to cut out all of the things in your life that don't look like your heavenly Father.



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