



A STUDY ON 1 JOHN

*I
am
Loved*

WALKING IN THE FULLNESS
OF GOD'S LOVE



WENDY BLIGHT

❖ Endorsement ❖

I love how Wendy helps us dig into Scripture so we can truly and personally grasp the deep love God has for us. This is an amazingly solid study that will get you excited to study the Bible and breathe fresh life into your heart.

—**Lysa TerKeurst**, *New York Times* bestselling author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

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WENDY BLIGHT



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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❖ *Dedication* ❖

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK to Bobbie Wolgemuth, my dear friend and spiritual mom, who has now passed through the heavens to be with the One she adored. Bobbie lived loved and modeled in the most excellent way how to make expressions of that love the pattern of her life. We were beneficiaries of that love. She poured godly wisdom, countless prayers, and God's living and active Word into my mama's heart in ways that transformed my heart, my marriage, and my home. Bobbie's love has left a legacy that has had, and will continue to have, ripple effects on women, families, and generations to come.

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THE MORE I WRITE, the more I appreciate the friends and family God has placed around me on this amazing journey called life.

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WEEK
ONE

WALK IN THE LIGHT



PRAYER: *Oh God, I'm excited for a new journey through Your Word. Open my eyes to see, my ears to hear, and my heart to understand eternal mysteries that only You can reveal on this exciting adventure through the book of Your "beloved," John. Carve out time for me each day to spend with You. Give me the discipline to do my work, the perseverance to continue when I want to give up, and the mind to practically apply all that I learn. Reveal marvelous new truths and promises from Your Word. Draw me close. Speak into my life and transform my heart and mind in fresh new ways. I ask all this in Jesus's name, Amen.*

DAY ONE



Meet John

MEMORY VERSE: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

*D*o you remember the first time your parents left you alone? I do. I don't have many vivid childhood memories, but this night I remember. Our neighbors had invited my parents to a dinner party. They gave me fair warning and encouraged me to "be a big girl" and stay home by myself. The very thought terrified me. I wanted to jump up and down, stomp my feet and scream, "No!" But I didn't.

The dreaded night finally arrived. Orange and purple hues adorned the sky as the sun began to slip behind the horizon. Heart pounding, I watched my parents walk out the door, down the sidewalk, and into the fading light.

This won't be so bad.

I shut and locked the door. I was alone. All alone.

My stomach twisted and turned as darkness consumed the sky. I remembered my Dad's last words, delivered through kind eyes, "Don't forget. We're just a phone call away."



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But I wouldn't call. I couldn't call. I needed to do this.

In the quietness, I walked over to the television and turned it on. Yes, in those days you had to actually walk over to the television to turn it on! I'm giving away my age here. I then hopped onto the couch, grabbed a pillow, and curled up with my favorite blanket. My selection for the night, *The Carol Burnett Show*. What better way to take my mind off my fears?

But my stomach continued to churn.

Familiar furniture, plants, and bushes took on strange shapes and sizes. I imagined bad guys lurking inside and out. Crouching . . . watching . . . waiting for me to go to bed.

Why did they have to leave me tonight? I'm not old enough. I don't want to be alone.

Bedtime arrived and that meant walking through the scary shadows.

Why didn't I close the blinds? Why didn't I turn those lights on before it got dark?

Tears spilled down my cheeks. *I hate this.* Clutching my blanket, I tiptoed through the dining room. *If I could just reach the light switch.* It seemed miles away. *What if someone's watching?* Again, I envisioned the scary man waiting . . . watching me outside the window.

The imagined terrified me.

I wanted my parents.

Finally, I reached the light switch, flipped it up, and light flooded every dark space. Everything looked familiar again. I felt safe.

The real replaced my imagined. The imagined fears that held the little girl in my story captive dissipated the moment light flooded the room.

It's a simple fact, my friend. Light dispels darkness. With light, there are no more illusions . . . no more imagined fears. Light brings clarity, safety, and security.

My little-girl fears perfectly illustrate a scriptural nugget tucked in the first chapter of John's letter.

But, before going any further, let's get to know the author of 1 John, the man with whom we will become intimately acquainted over the next

five weeks. His name is John. He often called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23).

We first meet John in Matthew 4:21. Not long after Jesus called His first two disciples, Peter and Andrew, He encountered two brothers named James and John (also called the sons of Zebedee). Like Peter and Andrew, they were fishermen. Simple, hardworking men going about their business. Jesus called them by name while they were with their father getting ready to cast out their nets for the day. Upon hearing Jesus’s call, they did not ask questions or give excuses. Scripture says, “[I]mmediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:22).

Wow! Immediate obedience. Wish I could say I always react that way when Jesus calls out to me. All too often, I don’t.

James and John left family and all that was familiar to follow this man they barely knew. For the next three years, John and eleven other disciples walked alongside Jesus, watching Him turn water into wine, heal the sick, feed thousands with nothing but a few loaves and fish, and—most amazingly—bring the dead back to life.



Read and record what the following passages reveal about John.

♥ Luke 9:51–56

♥ Mark 9:33–37

♥ Matthew 20:20–28 (What do these verses communicate about John’s relationship with his mother?)





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♥ What was Jesus's response to her request?

I can so relate to John because I am quick to take offense. Quick to lose my temper. What about you? And don't we all at one time or another long to hold that place of honor in someone's heart or at their table?

Those were John's younger days. An amazing transformation occurred between the time Jesus found him fishing and the time he wrote this letter. In 1 John, we see a different man. A gentler man. A kinder man. A man motivated by deep love for God and for God's people.

John matured over the years as he walked alongside Jesus, observed His ways, experienced His love, listened to His teachings, and obeyed the call to full-time ministry.

My favorite image of John comes near the end of Jesus's life as He gathered His disciples around a table to share a message and meal. Scripture describes John as leaning into Jesus (John 13:23–25), resting his head upon Jesus's chest, so near he could sense the rhythm of our Lord's heartbeat. John loved Jesus with all his heart and knew Jesus loved him just the same.

In that moment, John had no idea it would be his last meal with Jesus. No idea he would witness his beloved teacher's arrest, unjust trials, beatings, and crucifixion. No idea he would look upon his teacher's beaten and bloody body, hanging limp and lifeless from a criminal's cross.

But, the tide turned three days later. John walked into an empty tomb to discover Jesus had defeated death and risen from the grave (John 20:1–10)! And a few weeks after that beautiful resurrection moment, John's last glimpse of Jesus would be his beloved Savior, arms lifted toward the heavens, toes dangling from beneath his white robe, speaking words of blessing over His friends, ascending into the clouds (Luke 24:50).

“Then [Jesus] leads them out to Bethany. He lifts His hands and blesses them, and at that moment, with His hands raised in blessing, He leaves them and is carried up into heaven. They worship Him, then they return to Jerusalem, **filled with intense joy**, and they return again and again to the temple to celebrate God” (Luke 24:50–53 The Voice, emphasis added).

Don’t miss Luke’s words. John and the disciples returned to Jerusalem “filled with intense joy.” I believe it’s this unspeakable joy that fueled John’s ministry for the remainder of his days. Despite decades of persecution and struggle, hard work and loneliness, John persevered. His love for Jesus and for the call God placed on his life never waned. His heart never wavered.

Over time, John’s hair grayed. His skin bore the deep creases of his decades of serving and suffering for the One who had called him by name. John spent years recording the rich and treasured memories tucked deep in his heart and mind. Church tradition holds that he authored the gospel of John, the three epistles of John, and Revelation.¹

As we begin our journey with John, we sense his deep and abiding joy in his opening words in 1 John chapter one.



DAY TWO



Message from John's Heart to Ours

MEMORY VERSE: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

*J*ohn opened his letter with these enduring words:
“We want to tell you about the One who was from the beginning. We have seen Him with our own eyes, heard Him with our own ears, and touched Him with our own hands. This One is *the manifestation of the life-giving Voice*, and He showed us **real life**, *eternal life*. We have seen it *all, and we can't keep what we witnessed quiet*—we have to share it with you. *We are inviting you to experience* eternal life through the One who was with the Father and came down to us” (1 John 1:1–2 The Voice, emphasis added).

John's words lay the foundation for faith in Jesus. A faith based on reality. A faith grounded in fact. Because he was an eyewitness to every word he wrote, his teaching is trustworthy. His experience real.



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He courageously traveled, preached, and penned every word of his experiences to ensure Jesus's followers could know the same Jesus he knew. And so that you and I could know and believe in that same Jesus.

As you read his words, can't you sense his passion? The pleading in his voice? *Believe our words because we have seen Him. Touched Him. Heard Him. We walked with Him!* This One we followed, he says, spoke the voice of God.

Jesus gave John life. Real life. Everlasting life. Jesus loved John and the disciples in ways they had never experienced before. He performed miraculous wonders they had never seen before. He prophesied events that came to pass.

Digging Deeper

Read 1 John 1.

Understanding John's audience and the culture in which they lived is essential to understanding his letter. John wrote to the children of God . . . those who believed in Jesus.

Specifically, John wrote to embolden a declining church, a church he knew was compromising its beliefs. He didn't direct his letter to a specific church. Rather, he addressed it to all believers, using inclusive words like "my little children" and my "beloved."

He wrote with intentionality to expose the spreading virus of Gnosticism and the false teachers promoting it. What is Gnosticism? We'll dissect it more later. For our purposes now, it was a prominent movement counter to the Christian church, led by counterfeit Christians (false teachers) who had infiltrated the church.



In this day and age, how do we recognize a counterfeit Christian?

I first heard the term "counterfeit Christian" at a church in my hometown of Charlotte. The pastor centered his entire sermon on people who

look like Christians, talk like Christians, but in the end, do not bear the marks of authenticity that belong to genuine believers in Jesus.

To bring it to a level to which we can easily relate, let's compare a counterfeit Christian with a counterfeit bill. Let's say you and I stop by our favorite pizza place for lunch. You treat and pay with a fifty-dollar bill. Amidst the change, you receive a twenty-dollar bill. It looks good to you. It looks good to me. And because you are a kind and generous mom, you give that twenty to your sixteen-year-old-daughter who just got her license. She uses it to buy gas and an Icee for herself and her friend. You *and* your daughter are such generous people! At the end of the day, the gas station manager takes that twenty-dollar bill, along with the rest of her cash from the till, to the bank and deposits it. At that point, one with greater knowledge about money than you, your daughter, and the gas station manager, rejects the bill.

You all used the twenty-dollar bill, and it remained in circulation until someone with specific knowledge identified it and exposed it for what it really was.

That's the way it is with counterfeit Christians. They show up in church on Sunday and play the part. To blend in, they speak the right words. They do the good deeds. But upon close examination, their hearts and lives don't line up with the truth of God's Word. Counterfeit teachers manipulate God's truth by leaving out the hard stuff of faith. They want more followers, so they don't want to exclude. And, because they want more power and control, they twist God's Word to fit their personal agenda.

Scripture is clear on the topic of counterfeit Christians. Matthew 7:21–23 says:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many





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miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

The frightening part about the counterfeit teachers in the early church—the Gnostics—was that they spoke of God, light, truth, and salvation but from their own philosophical and mystical interpretation. Their words sounded familiar. Sounded legitimate. But, when examined closely, the Gnostics approached these topics in radically different ways than Jesus. They twisted them for their own gain. They misled God’s sheep.

For example, they advocated that Jesus never came in the flesh, that He was not human. They claimed that earthly matter is inherently bad and only the spirit is good. Because of that, anything done in the body, even the most horrific sin, had no meaning because real life existed only in the spirit. They also claimed that God is remote and distant from His creation, that He is pure and holy and cannot have anything to do with sinful and vile humanity.

John wrote his letter, in part, to expose and eradicate this heretical teaching.



Think of examples of counterfeit Christians today. Who are they and how do you recognize that they are counterfeit?



How do counterfeit Christians hurt the Christian church today?

In addition to issuing a warning about the Gnostics, John wrote this letter to invite the church into more intimate fellowship with one another and with God the Father and His Son. John knew the more closely knit their community, the less likely they would fall victim to the Gnostics’ lies and deception. The more familiar they were with the truths of Scripture,

the stronger their ability to stand against the false teachings and combat the doubts that accompany them.

Do you find this true for yourself? The more connected you are in church and Bible study, the more you can stand against the sway of the culture.



Give an example of when being in fellowship with believers has kept you from falling away from your faith.



Read 1 John 1:4 and 3 John 1:4. List another reason John wrote his letter.

Joy marked John's ministry.

He deeply loved God and God's people. Shepherding and teaching brought him great joy. This joy fed his soul. John longed for everyone to know the joy, love, and fellowship that comes when believers come alongside each other in faith.

How does this carry over into our lives?

One of the distinguishing marks of an authentic believer is that she enjoys sharing the treasures she has received from knowing and loving God. She wants everyone she loves to experience the riches she has found





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in having a deep and abiding relationship with Jesus and with other believers. It makes her joy complete!



How are you sharing the riches of Christ with those around you?



Choose one person to encourage this week. Note his or her response to your encouragement, how it made you feel, and how God used it in your life and/or theirs.

DAY THREE



Living in the Light

MEMORY VERSE: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

*T*he false teachers and teachings infiltrating the early church disturbed John greatly. So much so, that he addressed them in this letter one by one. He began with a big one. The Gnostics' teaching that those with unrepentant sin can still have intimate fellowship with God.

To answer this lie, John defined what it looks like to have fellowship with God, using not his own words but the words of Jesus.

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:5–7).



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What do you think it means when John says, “God is light”?

Jesus called Himself “the light” (John 8:12).

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”



Who is Jesus, and what does He promise if we walk with Him?

John often referred to Jesus as light. We find some of his most powerful references in the opening message of his gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

“There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world”
(John 1:1–9).

“There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man” (John 1:9 NASB).



Read John 1:1–9 quoted above. How many times do you find the word *light* in this passage?



What does John teach about the “light”?

Digging Deeper

It seems simple, right? If God is light, and we walk in the light, we will have fellowship with Him. So, all we need to do is walk in the light.

But walking in the light isn’t easy. *Light* and *darkness* as used by John are not literal terms but moral terms. They speak of two contrasting natures: the nature of God and the nature of man. God is moral perfection—pure and holy. Man is moral imperfection—impure and sinful.

Let’s step outside our lesson for a moment and go back to the beginning of Genesis to gain insight into sin. The moment Eve took and ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, sin corrupted humanity from that day forward, for every generation of people (Genesis 3). Paul explained the effect of that corruption in Romans 6:23: “[T]he wages of sin is death.”

The Bible is clear: without Jesus, all people are steeped in sin and destined for death.

John 3:19 illustrates this same concept using light and darkness: “Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” Light represents righteousness and goodness. Darkness represents evil and sin. We love darkness because of our imperfect sin nature. God abhors darkness because of His perfect sinless nature.





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Friend, we must understand this truth before we can take one more step on our journey with John. By our very nature, we cannot stand in the presence of a holy God. We cannot on our own be in relationship with Him.

But God never abandons His children. Because of God's great love for us, He made a way to bring sinful man back into relationship with Him. A way in which we could once again stand before our Holy God.

It's the way of the blood-stained cross. This cruel Roman tool created for torture and death, in Jesus, defeats death and displays the fullness of God's love. Jesus, who lived the perfect, sinless life, died the death we deserve. A beautiful exchange. His perfect life for our imperfect life. His righteousness for our unrighteousness.

Jesus's single, grace-filled act restores our fellowship with God.

Now let's step back into our lesson. I walked us through the salvation message for foundational purposes, but John was not addressing salvation here. Remember, John wrote this letter to the church—to the "saved ones"—Christians who had already said yes to a relationship with Jesus. He was not concerned with their salvation. He was concerned with their daily walk.

Some in the church were choosing to walk in disobedience to God. In so doing, they chose to walk outside the fellowship they had gained at the cross. They were avoiding the light and immersing themselves deeper and deeper into sin and darkness.

I get it. I'm guilty of this. When I think certain thoughts, or behave in a certain way, hearing a sermon or reading my Bible can make me squirm. Why? Because light exposes darkness. The light of God's Word exposes my bad behavior. It shines a light on something I desperately try to hide.

A conversation with one of my Bible study girls brings this truth alive. For the last twelve years, I have taught Bible study here in Charlotte. One year, I invited a woman to join us. She seemed so eager. She showed up each week. But she never did her homework. I mean never. Everyone skips a week now and again for one reason or another, but she skipped

consistently. I confess, it really upset me. As the teacher, I had spent hours researching, writing, and praying over the study and the questions. I believe with all my heart that life transformation flows from the time we invest *in* the Word, *not* from the teacher's lectures or commentary. It's sitting and soaking in our Bibles, allowing God to work in our hearts in and through the reading and the homework.

A few weeks into Bible study, I pulled this woman aside. I tenderly asked her why she didn't do her homework. She confessed that the few times she had opened her Bible in the past, it made her feel bad about herself. It made her see things about herself that she didn't like and didn't want to address or talk about.

That was not the answer I expected! Our conversation gave me a new perspective on our Bible study girls, especially the new ones. What this woman didn't know is that what she felt was conviction. Conviction from God's Holy Spirit. It was healthy and good. It was God's Hebrews 4:12 living and active Word coming alive in her heart, moving and penetrating it.

Oh, it's hard to come face-to-face with our sin. With our poor choices. With the ugliness that lurks in the deepest, darkest crevices of our hearts. But we must!



Are you turning from the light? Are there parts of you that still walk around in darkness? If yes, acknowledge and confess them.

Living in the light requires that our hearts, our actions, our words, our thoughts, our values, and even our schedules align with God's heart and His character, *not* with our sinful nature and fallen character.

Oh, how I fail at living in light . . . often. In fact, it happened smack in the middle of writing this study. Of course!

While writing this study, my husband and I traveled to New York City. The second day found us stranded in a downpour near Central Park,





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blocks and blocks from our hotel. With everyone trying to escape the deluge, cabs were scarce. We ran into the closest store to wait it out. But the rain continued. We decided to go for it, running in and out of stores, jumping over and around puddles. Soaked from head to toe, my patience wore thin. My husband and I exchanged words. You see, I suggested heading back as the first dark clouds rolled in. My husband disagreed and talked me into sticking it out. So, the “I told you so” attitude hijacked my heart. My words grew harsher, as did his. And then I stepped over the line. You may know that line. I spewed out words I knew cut to the core. Part of me wanted to take them back. To grab his hand, look in his eyes, and tell him how sorry I was. But the other side of me—the dark side—reasoned how valid they were in response to his words. Guess which side won out?

You guessed it!

We walked into our hotel room and sat in deafening silence. For hours, no words passed between us.

As I sat staring out the window, my eyes wandered to the bedside table. The light from the lamp illuminated my Bible. The words I had been studying on light and darkness flooded my mind. Sorrow engulfed my heart. I walked over to my husband, touched his shoulder, peeked my head around his, looked in his eyes, and asked for forgiveness. I thought it would be hard, but it wasn't. The illumination of God's Word penetrated my heart and melted it, literally melted it. My heart ached that my careless words had hurt my husband so deeply.

And although it took a few hours for my husband to fully surrender his hurt, he did. We enjoyed the rest of our time, experiencing the exciting sights and sounds of New York City, sans any more rain . . . or darkness!

We all sin. Every day. Many times a day.

Does that mean this whole light-and-dark thing creates a forever barrier with God? Can we ever have true fellowship? Can we ever stand in the presence of God fully comfortable, fully welcome?

Yes! Absolutely, yes! We can be comfortable in the presence of a holy God. John reminded us of this in verse 7 when he said the blood of Jesus

purifies us from all unrighteousness. You see, God doesn't require sinlessness . . . in fact, that's impossible. Only Jesus is sinless.

God doesn't require perfection. Only Jesus is perfect. God simply asks for repentance. When we repent of our sins, He forgives us fully and completely.

I love The Voice translation of John's words: "walk *step by step* in the light." Friend, it's a daily walk. But we don't walk alone. We walk with a loving, forgiving Father who empowers us through His Holy Spirit. He invites us to walk in the light. Of course, at times we may take a wrong step away from the light toward darkness. This misstep, if unacknowledged, will interrupt our fellowship with God. But the good news is, we need only turn our hearts back toward our heavenly Father and ask forgiveness. He waits with open arms!

And what about when we do mess up and mess up big?

All sin is equal. All sin has consequences. But the consequences are not equal.

Walking in the light continues as we agree with God about our sin. It's our refusal to agree with God about our sin that interrupts our fellowship with Him.

Let's examine the inner workings of sin for a minute.

Thoughts

Sin begins in our thoughts. Our thoughts lead us down the path of disobedience.

The first step to walking in the light is learning to interrupt our sinful thoughts *before* they lead us to action. It's taking action that truly interrupts our fellowship with God.

Walking in the light, daily sojourning with God, sensitizes our hearts to His Word and the leadings of His Holy Spirit. When we allow His Spirit to have His way in us, His Spirit convicts us of the tempting thoughts, the angry thoughts, the unforgiving thoughts and reminds us that they are





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unacceptable for one created in the image of God. As long as we respond to that conviction with obedience, fellowship remains.



What are some ways that you can ensure you walk step by step in the light?

If you find yourself in a place like I was in my hotel room that day, with your heart cracked in two . . . split down the middle . . . half in the dark, half in the light . . . be honest with God and with yourself. I'll let you in on a secret. God already knows your thoughts!



Read Psalm 139:1–6. What does this passage teach about the knowledge of God?

When we sense that conviction in our hearts, it's our loving Father intervening in our mess to draw us back to perfect fellowship with Him.

And don't miss two truths key to this teaching.

The Holy Spirit convicts. Conviction is good. It comes from the Father's heart of love. He is good. He is safe. He is trustworthy.

Satan condemns. He is not good. He is not safe. He is a liar and the father of lies. In him, there is no truth at all.

My friend, God never condemns. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Thoughts Lead to Action

The Holy Spirit knows our thoughts. He knows our sinful thoughts will lead to sinful actions. His conviction interrupts those unholy thoughts and draws us back through His amazing grace. Agreeing with God about our sinful thoughts brings them into the light. It allows God to work in

our hearts and minds to not only correct us but also train us to think, speak, and act in new ways. If we don't take immediate action to walk back into the light, we leave the door wide open for the enemy to take full control of the reins of our heart and lead us deeper into darkness and further into sin.

So, in that moment where we sense God's conviction, rather than allow pride to hold us hostage in the darkness, let's confess and agree with God about our sin and allow Him to move us into the light of His love and grace.

I've written a prayer we can pray the next time we find ourselves in this dilemma. I wish I had this prayer that day in New York City. My story would have read much differently. Make this prayer your own.

Thank You, Jesus, for speaking into my life right now. It's hard to hear Your convicting words. I'm still angry about what brought me here. But I confess I've allowed that anger and pride to hold me hostage. I agree with You in this moment that You are right and I am wrong. I no longer want these thoughts to fill my mind and these words to spew from my lips. Forgive me, Father. Renew my thoughts. Fill my heart and mind with thoughts that honor You and others. Lead me to my next steps so I know how to handle this situation in a way that honors and glorifies You and You alone.



Are you experiencing a battle in your heart right now? I encourage you to act today. Use this prayer as a starting point. Restore fellowship with your Father and then with anyone else you need to. Write your personal prayer below, along with any steps God leads you to take.

And as a last step . . . maybe the most important step . . . accept your Father's forgiveness. Walk in the safety and security of His eternal,





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unchanging, everlasting love. Never forget that there is NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus! As far as the east is from the west, that is how far God has removed our transgressions from us! (Psalm 103:12)



Read Psalm 119:30. What does the psalmist choose? Where do we find the way he has chosen?



Read Proverbs 6:20-21. According to Solomon, what should we do with God's teachings? What does it mean when it says, "fasten them [God's teachings] around your neck"? The Voice says, "engrave them on a pendant, and hang it around your neck."



Continue reading verses 22-23. What specifically does God's Word provide for us?



Read Psalm 19:8. What does this verse teach about God's Word and its role in our lives?

Apply It

John has now exposed the first of two diametrically opposed teachings that had been misleading and confusing his audience. We'll hear about the second teaching in the next section.

This first teaching claimed that those who intentionally choose to sin can maintain fellowship with God. John labeled this for what it was. A lie. We cannot maintain fellowship with a holy God if we continue to walk in darkness. To walk outside His will and His way. To accept the lies of the evil one as truth.

So, the moment we sense we are drifting away from the light and moving into darkness, we must change direction and walk back into the light. Below is a helpful script to follow when we find ourselves in this place. We must *choose* to:

- ♥ **interrupt** our thoughts,
- ♥ **confess** our sin,
- ♥ **turn around**, and
- ♥ **take a step** back into the light.

Step back into the light of His Word . . . His presence . . . Christian fellowship . . . praise and worship . . . Bible study . . . prayer.



Take some time to contemplate your fellowship with God. Do you find yourself walking more in the light or in the darkness? What choices do you need to make to walk more consistently in the light? Commit to take one step today to turn back to or assure you remain in God's light.



DAY FOUR



The Battle Within

MEMORY VERSE: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

*H*ow are you coming along with your memory verse? This is the first of five verses you'll be hiding in your heart. Commit a little bit at a time to memory, and you'll have it memorized before you know it!

Digging Deeper

Read 1 John 1:8.

John takes this opportunity to address another false teaching, one that claimed once a person is saved, she is without sin. John labeled this lie for what it was and publicly denounced those who professed it.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Salvation—confessing our sin and inviting Jesus into our hearts—does not make us sinless. Sin will be our constant companion until



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Jesus returns to rule and reign for all eternity! Then and only then will God transform us fully and completely into the flawless image in which He created us.

But the Gnostics taught otherwise. They led God's children to believe the lie that salvation—accepting Christ as their Savior—eradicating their sin nature and gave them a new, perfect nature.

This teaching is not biblical. Christians are not sinless. We are not perfect. Christians sin. We sin because, although we are saved, we still live in a fleshly body that seeks to satisfy its own desires. Jeremiah says it well, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV 1984).

As a saved child of God, yes, we receive a new nature. But that new nature lives inside our old body. Sometimes we succumb to our sinful nature even when we know it's wrong. We shift back to our old way of thinking; to that which is familiar and comfortable. Pride, lust, fear, anger, bitterness, jealousy, unforgiveness still struggle for control.

The capacity to sin remains as our two natures wrestle for power (Galatians 5:17). Sometimes our new nature prevails and sometimes, sadly, the old wins out.



Describe the places in your life where you experience this struggle.

The good news, my friend, is that this struggle within does *not* affect our salvation, our status in God's eyes. We are blood-bought daughters of the One True God. When we receive God's forgiveness and Christ's righteousness, it's for eternity. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus. It's our inheritance, and nothing can ever take it away.



Read John 10:28–29. These are Jesus’s words. What do they speak to your heart?

God’s beloved King David classically illustrates the battle within (2 Samuel 11–12). Remember God’s name for David? “A man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). But how can that be? In 2 Samuel 11, David violated not one but several of the Ten Commandments. He embarked on a notorious enterprise of sinful activity. He sinned in thought by lust-ing after another man’s wife. He sinned in action when he sent for that woman and slept with her. Their illicit liaison resulted in a pregnancy.

Instead of openly confessing his sin, David schemed, not once but several times, to hide it. On his first attempt, David called the woman’s husband, Uriah, back from the battlefield and encouraged him to sleep with his wife. That would have solved his problem, for sure. Uriah humbly refused. What an honorable man. One would think his noble response would have convicted David’s heart. But it didn’t.

Instead, David made another attempt to conceal his scandalous behavior. He invited Uriah to eat and drink with him. David “made him drunk,” hoping Uriah would then go home and sleep with his wife. That plan failed as well.

As a last resort, David sent Uriah back to the battlefield, ordering his commander to send Uriah to the front lines to ensure he would be killed in combat.

Talk about interrupted fellowship! Not exactly a stellar example of a man who made wise, godly decisions.

David lied to God and to himself. He ignored his sin while attempting to carry on his royal duties. It was not until the prophet, Nathan, confronted David that he finally confessed. It took someone else holding him accountable to bring him to a place of repentance.

David’s repentance restored his fellowship with God.





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God forgave David because when, brought face-to-face with his sin, he humbled himself and confessed. Not just once but many times.

David's humility led God to honor David with a special title, a name for which he will be remembered for all time . . . a man after God's own heart.

Never forget, friend, nothing and no one can ever take away your promise of eternal life. Jesus bought it at a great price. Not even Satan can steal it!

However, our sin does interrupt our fellowship with God. And although God forgave David's sin, it did not erase the consequences of that sin. But that is another story for another day.

To summarize . . .

We are fallen people, with a fallen nature that leads us to sin.

That sin interrupts our fellowship with God.


We are also a saved people, indwelt with God's Spirit who empowers us to obey.

We have two sets of desires warring within us, so it comes down to choices. God gives us freedom to choose. We can choose to walk in the light and live in its glorious radiance, or we can choose to succumb to temptation and slither off into the darkness. It's those choices that move us toward the light or away from the light.



Read Galatians 5:16–23.

How do verses 16–18 in this passage support John's teachings? What is the key to conquering sinful desires?



What is the poison fruit of our sinful nature? (See verses 19-21; Romans 1:29–31.)



What is the blessed fruit of our new nature? (See verses 22–23.)

John made it very clear. There is no perfect new nature! We sin. But God, through His Holy Spirit, empowers us to overcome that sin.

It begins with a submissive, obedient heart. It requires day-by-day, step-by-step obedience.



Read Galatians 5:24–26. What are some keys to keeping “in step” with the Spirit in this battle?

Apply It

The Lie:

We are sinless.

Those who taught this twisted truth were fooling themselves and were “strangers to the truth” (1 John 1:8 The Voice). John makes it clear that if we claim to be without sin, we “deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:8).

The Truth:

We are not sinless.

In Jesus, we are forgiven. We are redeemed. We are empowered.

And as we draw closer to Jesus and walk in the radiance of His light, His Word and His Spirit heighten our awareness of the darkness. Words we spoke and actions we took that never bothered us before feel uncomfortable, maybe even shameful.





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God knew this, and that's why He gave us His promise in 1 John 1:9. Don't undervalue the wonderful promises found in this verse, which we'll study in the next section.

Before we close, take a few minutes to work on your memory verse.

DAY FIVE



God Is Faithful to Forgive

MEMORY VERSE: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

*W*e are nearing the end of our first week! Let's summarize what we have learned so far.

- ♥ God invites us into an intimate relationship with Him.
- ♥ God desires for us to be comfortable in His presence.
- ♥ The key to this comfort is walking in the light and avoiding darkness.
- ♥ Those who claim to have fellowship with God but who simultaneously walk in darkness, lie.
- ♥ Those who claim sinlessness based on salvation are deceived.²

John has taught us about counterfeit Christians, false teachers, and their false claims. He presented biblical truths to combat their



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lies. Here, in 1 John 1:9, John stops debating and presents the beauty of the gospel:

“But if we own up to our sins, God shows that He is faithful and just by forgiving us of our sins and purifying us from the pollution of all the bad things we have done” (The Voice).

Friend, the bottom line is grace.

Our fellowship with God is not contingent upon our sinlessness but upon His forgiveness.

Let me say that again. Our fellowship with God is not contingent upon our sinlessness but on His forgiveness.

The incredible reality of grace is that even though we are imperfect, even though we sin, even though we disappoint God daily, He still loves us and makes a way for us to remain in fellowship with Him!

Digging Deeper

John asks us to “own up to our sins.” Other translations use the word *confess* (NIV). To confess simply means “to acknowledge.” The Greek word here is *homologeō*, which means “to speak the same thing.”³ Owning up to our sin or confessing our sin is not a simple apology. It’s not a quick “I’m sorry.”

Confession is acknowledging our sin and agreeing with God that it really is a sin, not making excuses for it or justifying it.

I am so good at the second part . . . justifying my sin. How about you?

If you and I are truly serious about walking closer with the Lord, we must be willing to see our sin for what it is, confess it, and allow God’s refining process to do its work in us. Malachi 3:2–3 says:

“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will

sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.”

God’s ways are not our ways. Seldom does being immersed in a fire ever result in anything other than utter destruction, loss, and death. The dark days following 9/11, forever etched in our minds, revealed the all-consuming destructive power of fire.

Proverbs 25:4 says, “Take away the impurities from the silver, and a *good* smith can create something *of value*” (The Voice).

The King James translation says, “Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.”

Dross is defined as waste matter, refuse, that which is worthless and of no value.⁴ In this process, fire consumes dross and brings to the surface the impurities of that which is being burned.

Malachi 3:2 describes God as a “refiner’s fire.” Hebrews describes God as a “consuming fire” (12:29). “He is like a fierce fire that consumes everything” (The Voice). God’s holy fire consumes our dross . . . our flesh . . . our human desires . . . our secret sin. When we are intentional about walking in the light, it’s imperative that we invite God to excise what is unholy so He can unveil what is holy.

Malachi 3:2 also compares God to lye soap. The ESV says God is like “fullers’ soap.” I was not familiar with this term, so I looked it up. A *fuller* was someone who cleaned and thickened freshly woven (usually woolen) cloth. His chief task was cleansing and whitening garments for festive and religious occasions. White garments typify Christ’s righteousness.⁵

The cleansing process involved cleaning, bleaching, wetting, and beating the fibers to a consistent and desirable condition. Fullers’ soap was the strong, lye-based soap the fuller used to bleach the impurities from the new cloth.

And why the name “fuller”? It came from the actual field by that name referenced in the Old Testament (2 Kings 18:15–17, Isaiah 36: 1–2), an area west of Jerusalem where the fullers cleaned and bleached the





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woolen cloth. They washed the cloth with the soap and then placed it on rocks and beat it with sticks until it was free of all impurities.⁶

Both the refining process and the fullers' soap process stressed thoroughness and severity.

It's a bit frightening that God compares His work in our lives to a consuming fire and the laborious and arduous cleansing work of the fuller. But in the hands of a loving God who wants only our highest and best, we can trust His process. We can trust that His refining and cleansing methods draw us closer to His heart and work toward conforming us into the image in which He created us.

This process makes it more important that we agree with God about our sin. If we don't, we erect a barrier between ourselves and God. God took care of our sin on the cross. He died for all our sins . . . past, present, and future.

However, this truth does not give us license to sin. The crimson stain of sin interrupts fellowship with our Savior. It's the confession of our sin, the admitting and taking responsibility of it, that opens the way for God's mercy and grace to flood our hearts and wash away every crimson stain so that not even a blush of color remains.

We are washed white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). The Voice says, "*made clean again like new wool.*"

Confession accomplishes above and beyond restoring fellowship. It gets us on our knees and reminds us of who we are and who God is. It aligns our hearts with His and makes us pliable so He can sculpt us into the women He created us to be. It purges shame and condemnation. It ushers in freedom and renewed fellowship with our Creator and Father!

Are you struggling with a sin today? Join me in walking through a time of confession.

Find a quiet place.

Prepare your heart by offering up praise and thanksgiving to your Father in heaven.

Admit your sin and agree with God about that sin.

Confess your sin.

Receive God's forgiveness!



Reread 1 John 1:9. What promise is yours after you receive your Father's forgiveness?

God's promise in 1 John 1:9 begins with forgiveness, but it ends with something richer and greater. Purification. He purifies our hearts. God's grace reaches into the deepest, darkest spaces and unearths our hidden motives and desires. Over time, His grace shifts and shapes us into the gloriously beautiful image in which we were created. His image.

Let's spend a few minutes with Paul and dig a bit deeper into the topics of sin and temptation.



Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–13.

What story does Paul share in verses 1–4?



List the sins of the Israelites in verses 6–10.



What does Paul say was the reason these things occurred (verses 6, 11)?





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What is Paul's warning in verse 12?



What does Paul teach us about temptation in verse 13?



What is God's promise in that verse?

Temptation itself is not a sin. Jesus was tempted. YIELDING to the temptation . . . that is the sin.



Describe a time of temptation. How did God provide a means of escape? Did you take it?



What is your "go to" strategy when you are being tempted?

Apply It

God calls us to walk and live in the light . . . to be holy as He is holy. It sounds impossible, but with God it's totally possible. He created us in His image and, thankfully, He doesn't see us as we see ourselves. He sees beyond our sin, beyond our human frailties. He sees the woman He created us to be and the potential we have.

Walking in the light equips us to become that woman.

Walking in fellowship with Christ, day-by-day, step-by-step, ensures we live a life set apart from the world in our thoughts and actions. Ensures that we walk a consistent walk, one in which who we *say* we are and who we *really* are match.

God's way requires . . .

- ♥ intentional choices.
- ♥ knowing truth so we can identify lies.
- ♥ turning away from darkness and walking toward the light.
- ♥ agreeing with God about our sin.
- ♥ humbly confessing our sin.
- ♥ complete dependence upon Him.
- ♥ refusing to yield to temptation.

Sin is inevitable. Temptation happens.

But we are never alone. God is ever present. He indwells and empowers us. He equips us with spiritual discernment to alert us to the people and situations seeking to lead us away from the light and into darkness. His Spirit provides the courage to resist temptation and to stand firm on the truth. His Spirit opens the line of communication so we can cry out in prayer and hear His answer and leading.



What steps do you need to take to be a woman known by her godly actions and not her sinful reactions?



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VIDEO LESSON 1

Walk in the Light

If you are doing this study with a group, watch video lesson one and use this space to take notes. Then use the questions on the next two pages as a guide for group discussion.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Group Discussion Questions

1. John had the privilege of being the last man standing, the last living apostle to speak for God. He spent those last days standing strong in God's Word, proclaiming the truth about Jesus, and inviting his listeners into true fellowship with Him.
 - a. What does it look like for us today to stand firm and hold fast to the Word of God?
 - b. What are ways we can invite others into our faith walk and into true fellowship with Jesus?
2. Do you have a person in your life for whom you are praying to come to know Jesus?
 - a. If so, in what ways are you living to make Jesus appealing and inviting?
 - b. Share a step (or two) you are willing to take to come alongside that person and join God in His work to answer your prayer.
3. This week we talked about the distinguishing marks of a believer. I shared how I lacked patience and self-control (two fruit of the Spirit). Evidence of God's fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control) is a beautiful mark of a believer.
 - a. Choose one fruit you feel marks your life. How does the presence of that fruit encourage others and draw others to you and to Jesus?
 - b. Choose one fruit (yes, only one) you lack. What are some ways you can work with the Lord to increase the presence of that fruit in your life? If you have time, find a few Scriptures to pray and personalize, as I talked about in the video.





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4. God calls us to stand up for truth, even when it's hard and makes us uncomfortable (like my friend did at her dinner party). He asks us to represent our faith well. To take our faith to deeper more mature places.
 - a. What steps are you taking toward this kind of maturity?
 - b. Do you hear God's voice as my friend did? If so, how does He speak to you? If not, what can you do to ensure His voice intersects with your everyday life?
 - c. Share a few Scriptures you have tucked in your heart so you can recall them the moment you need them. If you don't have any, choose one or two to memorize.
5. At the end of the video, I invited you to take one step to live out what you have learned today. What step will you take?