

Applying 1 John

What are we trying to do? What are we not trying to do?

We are trying to draw out the key applications from each passage and be as practical as possible in applying what God's word is saying to us.

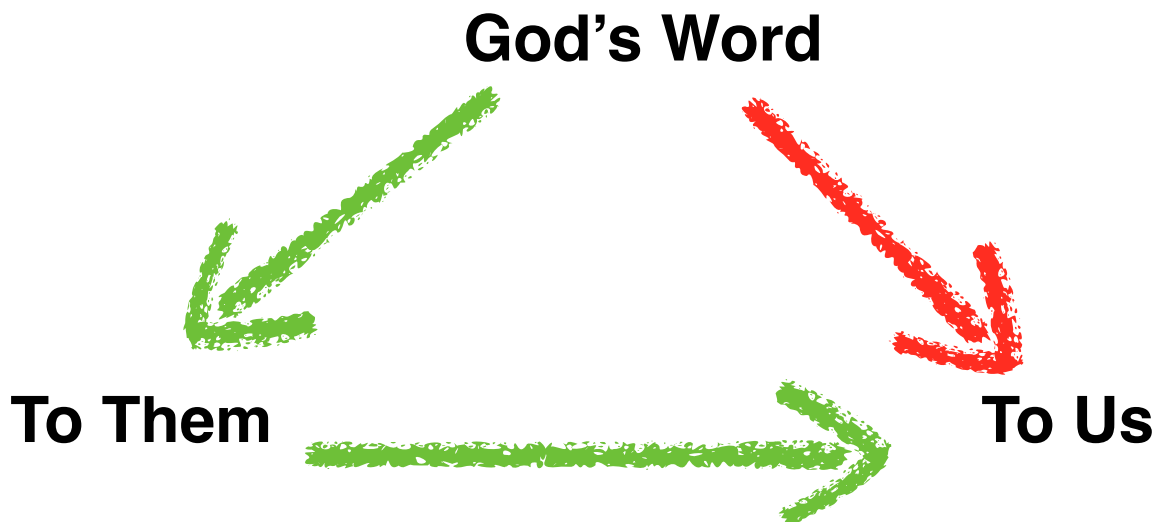
We are not aiming to do an exhaustive Bible study on every verse and every idea in the passage. We want to focus on a few key verses or ideas and work hard at applying these.

We are also not aiming to simply regurgitate the sermon that was preached. We want to grapple with God's word and not just the sermon (as good as that may have been.) To help us do this we are going to cover 1 John in bigger chunks in home groups than we are in the sermons.

The aim is for 1 John to dwell in us richly so that the word that we heard preached to us a few weeks or months ago, remains in us as we apply it now.

Key Principle of Application

1) God's Word → Them → Us

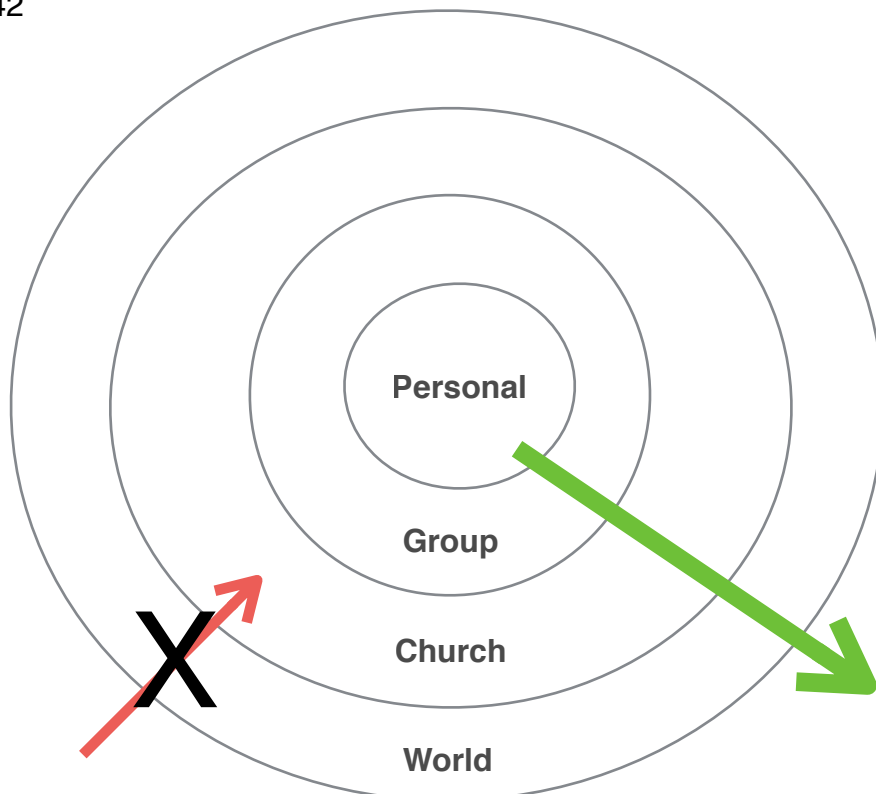


- **What had happened to them?**
 - 1:3 - *John and the apostles have proclaimed to them the true message of Christ who they were eyewitnesses to.*
 - 2:19 - *People have left the church and seemed to be claiming a better, higher form of Christianity that was undermining those who had remained in the church.*
 - 1:6-7, 2:4-6 - *These people are claiming to have fellowship with God yet they walk in darkness. They're claiming to know God yet they're not obeying God.*
 - 1:8-10 - *They are claiming to be sinless.*

- 2:9-11, 3:10 & 3:14-18 - *They don't love other Christians, indeed they hate other Christians.*
 - 2:22-23 & 4:3 - *They deny that Jesus is the Christ and they deny that he really did come in the flesh from God.*
 - 2:26 & 3:7 - *They are trying to lead those who have stayed in the church astray.*
- What is the big message to them?**
- 5:13 - *He writes to reassure them that they really do know God and therefore they really do have eternal life. The 'upgrade' that these people claim to have is a fake. As reassurance is a big theme we want to be on the lookout for reassurances (e.g 1:3, 1:7, 1:9, 2:1-2, 2:5-6, 2:12-14, 2:21, 2:24-29, 3:7, 3:23-24, 4:4-6, 4:13, 5:18-20.)*
- How is our situation different/ similar to theirs?**
- 1:3 - *We don't have John or another eyewitness actually proclaiming to us. But we do have their written testimony just as these first readers had.*
 - 2:18 - *We too live in the last hour/last days/age of the church. Like them we live between Christ's ascension and his return. This makes applying a book like 1 John easier than applying a book like 2 Samuel.*

2) Spheres of Application

Luke 6:41-42



Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 1:1-2:2

Context

We looked at the context of the book at our Small Group Leaders Pit Stop. You can find the notes for the 'Applying 1 John' session on the website.

Big Ideas

- **God is knowable through his revelation (1:1-4)**
 - John makes a big deal of the fact that he saw and touched and heard Jesus, the Word of Life (notice how he keeps repeating this in v1, 2 and 3.)
 - This means that John's message is not something he has made up. Instead the message that he proclaims to them is reliable because it is based on what he saw and heard from Jesus. When we think of the context and the people that had left the church claiming to have 'new' revelation, we can see how John wants to reassure his readers that they have the truth.
 - Another key part of this is that John's readers can have fellowship with God and with other Christians through John's message because John's message is true. Indeed we can only have true fellowship with God through his true revelation as handed down to us by Apostles like John.
- **God is Light and so his people must walk in light (1:5-2:2)**
 - God is a perfectly holy God. He is blazing like without even a spec of darkness in him. This means that not only is he perfectly holy but also that we cannot hide any of our darkness from him. It is futile to pretend we are better and brighter people than we really are because God sees all. We can't deceive him, instead we will just deceive ourselves and others.
 - God's holiness means that his people are to be holy. This is perhaps a daunting thought but it comes with both a command and a promise. The command is that we are to confess our sin, bringing it to our advocate, Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. As we are honest about the darkness in us we receive God's wonderful promise that through Jesus God will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Areas of Application

- Depending on your group you could choose whether to focus on one or both of the following areas of application. Alternatively you might see other areas of application that you think would be relevant for your group.
- **God is Knowable**
 - To claim that God is knowable is a huge thing in our culture today. To claim that God has revealed himself through the Bible and supremely through his Son Jesus is an incredibly controversial claim today but that is exactly what John is saying in 1:1-4.
 - Remembering that a key theme of the letter is reassurance you could spend time thinking about how these verses reassure us and give our faith confidence? You could think about how these verses might help us to answer people who say that God is unknowable or that Christianity is just based on myths and fairy tales?

- **God is Light**

- It seems that some of the people who had left the church were making the claims that John refers to in v6, v8 and v10. Most Christians would never actually claim to be sinless and we are often very wary of being called hypocrites. Yet even though we wouldn't say we're sinless we can often act around church as if we don't struggle with sin.
- We can give the impression that our lives are sorted and we don't have any ongoing struggles with temptation. We like to hide the darkness in us from one another because we're scared of what others will think of us and scared of being judged. We can give the impression that church is a place for 'sorted people' rather than a place where broken people come for forgiveness. Church shouldn't be museum for saints, instead it should be a hospital for sinners.
- It's one thing to know that we shouldn't be hypocritical and that we should be honest about our struggles but where does the motivation and power to change come from? These verses help us to see that they come from the forgiveness that Jesus offers (v9 and 2:1-2.) The more I see and believe that all my sin/darkness has been judged in Christ and therefore I'm completely forgiven, the more that will free me up to be honest about my sin and struggles.
- If I no longer need to fear God's judgment then I also don't need to fear the judgment of others. Similarly if I love the fact that God has forgiven me and no longer condemns me then I'll not stand in judgment over other people when they sin because I know that I'm no better.

Suggested Questions

In these questions I'm just going to focus on applying 1:5-2:2. If you also want to look at 1:1-4 then feel free to write your own questions to help you apply these verses.

Starter Question - When do you find it easy to be honest? When do you find it harder?

This study is going to focus on applying the idea of being more honest with one another about our sin and our struggles. To get us started we want to talk generally about the issues of honesty. Often we find it easier to be honest about something when we're proud of what we've done. The flip side of this is that we are often less honest when we're embarrassed about something.

1. What claims were some people making? (1:6, 8, 10)

People were claiming that they were done with sin that they no longer struggled with it. Don't get too bogged down on the exact nature of these claims. Try to keep the study moving.

2. Most of us would never actually say that we're perfect and never struggle with sin, but how might we give people this impression?

We might not say such a thing with our lips but we can often give that impression through our actions and through the sorts of things that we talk about. For example when a friend asks you, "How's your week been?" it's an opportunity to be honest but very often we like to give the impression that everything is fine even if it isn't. Similarly how we pray as a

home group and the sorts of prayer requests we share can give the impression that everyone is sorted and no one has any problems.

A phrase that is often used is that church should be “a hospital for sinners not a museum for saints.” You could ask the group what they make of this statement. When is church really like this and when is it not? This would lead into the next question...

1. Why do we do this?

If there are times when we pretend that everything is fine when it's not why do we do this? Why are we often tempted to try and present ourselves as a chiseled spiritual masterpiece in museum rather than admit that we're spiritually sick?

There could be all sorts of reasons for this but often it will boil down to things like; “I'm scared of what people will think. I'm worried they'll judge me. I don't want to seem weak or needy.”

3. Instead of pretending we're sorted, what are we told to do? (1:9)

1. What do you think it really means to confess our sins?

We're to confess our sins not just our sin. That means we're not just to admit to God that we're sinners but to confess the particular way that we are sinners. We're also to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). You might want to talk about how and where you'd actually do that but we are to do it somewhere.

4. If we confess our sins what promise does God make? (1:9 and 2:1-2)

This is really important so make sure people really get this! If we confess our sins God will completely forgive us and cleanse us of our sin. Our sin has been paid for in blood and death by Jesus on the cross and he is now our advocate who stands before the Father on our behalf. These are very familiar ideas for many of us but take the time to let the group really marvel at this wonderful promise. We'll only be truly honest with God and one another if we believe this promise.

5. If we believe this promise how do you think it will change us as individuals, as a home group and as a church? What practical things are we going to do because of these verses?

Try and leave a good deal of time to tackle this question and talk as practically as possible. Think about things like what sort of conversations we have before and after the service on a Sunday? Or perhaps you could change the way that you pray at Home Group so that there's greater opportunity for honesty and really praying for each other? Perhaps you are going to decide to pair up within the home group and meet up every few weeks to really be honest with and pray for one another?

Here are just a few suggestions I'm sure you can think of more. Perhaps you could ask the group to describe a church that is really shaped by God's promises in this passage? What would such a church be like? How can we become a bit more like that?

6. Is there a memory verse from this passage that we could learn to help us apply what we've learnt?

Sometimes memorising a verse can help us to remember what we've learnt and persist in applying God's word.

Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 2:3-14

Context

In chapter 1 we learnt that God is light (v5), he is consistently and perfectly pure, “in him there is no darkness at all.” Wonderfully we can have fellowship with God through the message that John and the other Apostles proclaimed (v3.) It is a wonderful thought to think that we can have fellowship with the God who is light, but what will it look like? How can you tell if someone has fellowship with God?

In John’s day there were people claiming to have fellowship with God but their lifestyles showed that they did not really have fellowship with God. They claimed to have fellowship with God “and yet walk[ed] in darkness” (v6). Through the letter John gives us a number of markers that show us whether we really do have fellowship with God (1:7, 2:5-6, 2:29, 3:7, 3:10, 3:14, 3:19-21, 4:7, 4:13, 5:1-3.)

One of the key markers that John repeatedly returns to is the mark of loving other Christians (2:10, 3:10, 3:14-15, 4:7, 5:1-3.)

Big Ideas

Obedience

You cannot miss the references to God’s commands and obedience in these verses (v3, v4, v5, v7, ,v8). God gives his people commands and he expects us to obey. We are not saved by our obedience but we are saved for obedience. As children we are to obey our Heavenly Father. John is clear that if we claim to be God’s children but don’t obey him then we cannot claim to truly know him (v4, v9, v10.) A key marker of being in the light is obeying the commands of God.

Love

Time and again in the Bible God’s commands are summed up in terms of loving God and loving other people (Mark 12:28-33.) Before Jesus goes to the cross he commands his disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35, 14:21-24, 15:9-14.) The thing that will mark us out as Jesus’ people is our love for one another. John reinforces what Jesus commanded. We are to love our Christian brothers and sisters in the church as Christ has loved us. He is therefore calling us to a sacrificial love not a sentimental love. He is calling us to love with actions not just words. If we claim to have been loved by God and to live with him and enjoy fellowship with him then we will live and love as Jesus did (v6.)

Reassurance

Some of John’s statements so far could cause believers to doubt whether they really do know God. As we examine our love for one another and our purity we may be worried that we are not genuine Christians. In v12-14 John reassures those he is writing to that they really have been forgiven by God and they really do enjoy fellowship with him. This is a key aim of the letter (see 5:13.)

Area of Application

My suggestion is that you focus on how we can practically love one another as a Christian brothers and sisters as this is the particular command that we are being called to obey in this passage. The possible applications of this principle are almost limitless so don't feel constrained by my limited suggestions, instead use them as a springboard. The big aim is to be practical and grounded rather than merely theoretical.

Depending on the people in your group you may want to draw out some of the encouragements and reassurances that come in v12-14. If I were you I would keep v12-14 in 'my back pocket' as it were and be prepared to look at them if you feel that this would be appropriate as part of the study.

Suggested Questions

Starter Question - Can you think of a time when you felt especially loved by another Christian? What was the situation? How did they love you? What did they do? Why has that stayed with you?

The aim here is to get the ball rolling in the direction of love. In particular we want to get the group thinking and talking about practical love. Give everyone the time to tell stories and celebrate examples of love that we have experienced whether this is in this church or another church.

1. The big application in this passage is that we are to love one another;

a) Why is loving each other so important?

In particular focus on v5-6 and v9-11. See how loving one another is something that God commands us to do! God says that loving one another is a key marker that we are his people. You could, but you don't have to, go to John 13:34-35 and 15:9-14 to see how Jesus addresses this in slightly more detail. Please remember that the aim of these studies is not to do an exhaustive Bible study on every text that addresses the issue of love. The aim is to quickly grasp the principle and then help one another to apply it. So think carefully before you introduce a cross-reference. Will this sidetrack your group and move you away from application? Do your studies have a tendency to run on too long so that prayer is squeezed out and people end up leaving too late? If so then be disciplined and just stay in 1 John.

b) What is the model for our love?

We are to live as Jesus did (v6) and so that means we are to love as Jesus loved (see John 13 and 15.) Get the group to think about how has Jesus loved us? What did he do? What did it cost him? How does Jesus' love compare with the ways that we normally think and talk about love?

2. Think about when we gather together as the church on a Sunday;

c) How could you come to church and practically love your church family as Jesus has loved you?

Here is where we really get stuck into application so make sure you give plenty of time to this question and the following questions. Encourage the group to think about all sorts of practical aspects to our time together on Sundays. For example;

How can we love one another in the time we arrive and leave?

How can we love one another in where we park our car?

*How can we love one another in where we sit?
How can we love one another during the service?
How can we love one another after the service?*

Throughout the discussion keep reminding the group of Jesus' love for us. What will it look like for us to love others as Jesus has loved us?

d) How could you come to church and not really love your church family as Jesus has loved you?

You could ask this question in parallel to the previous question. Think about the same aspects to Sundays e.g. parking, when we arrive and leave, where we sit, who we talk to etc.

Again keep bringing people back to Jesus' love for us. How might our love be superficial and worldly rather than Christ-like and costly?

3. Loving one another is about more than what we do on Sundays. How can we be a home group that love one another as Jesus has loved us?

Here you can think both about the time when you are actually together each week as well as the rest of the week when you're not together. If you were starting a group from scratch what would the group look like if it loved each other as Jesus has loved us?

What will this mean for our attitude to home group? Our attendance? When we arrive? When the group finishes? (As leaders we can love our groups by making sure that the group doesn't finish too late.) How we pray? How we answer questions? How we pray and support one another through the week?

There are so many different possible avenues of application for this principle so take the time to think and pray through the right areas to focus on. Don't try to cover every possible application.

Encourage your group to make particular changes as a result of the study. Let's do all we can to make sure that the seed that has been sown is not snatched away but instead produces a harvest. Why not start next week by talking about the different things that you planned to do as a result of this study.

Make sure that there is time at the end of this study to pray about the applications that you have discussed. Let's confess our lack of love where that is appropriate (remember the wonderful promise of 1:9) and let's also ask for God's help to love one another as Jesus has loved us!

Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 2:15-27

Context

This letter is full of stark contrasts such as light and darkness (1:5), love and hate (2:10-11) and truth and lies (2:21). At the heart of all these contrasts is the contrast between God and the world. John wants us to see that there is a black and white distinction between God and the world. In 2:15-17 he will tell us that we must make a choice; “Will we love the world or will we love God?” We cannot love both!

As we get our bearings it is also helpful to remember that John is writing to reassure Christians who are being unsettled by false teachers who are trying to lead them astray. We have already heard a bit about the claims of these false teachers in chapter 1 (1:6, 1:8, 2:4, 2:9.) Now in 2:18-27 we learn that they were denying the truth about Jesus (2:22-23 and 4:3.) They have left the church (2:19) and they are trying to lead those who have remained in the church astray (2:26.) John writes this letter to reassure his christian friends that they already know the truth (2:12-14, 26-27, 5:13-14) and therefore they really do know God and therefore they really do have eternal life! These false teachers claim to be from God but in reality they are from the world (4:5-6)

Big Ideas

This passage naturally splits into two sections (v15-17 and then v18-27) but they are held together by the themes of the world and eternal life.

Do not love the World

Believers are not to love the world (v15) and the antichrists who John targets in v18-27 are from the world (4:5.) Believers are not to love the world because the world here is humanity in opposition to God. The world is everything that is alien to God. It is everything that stops us loving and obeying God as we should. The world goes with the darkness that John has talked about in chapter 1. God’s love for the world in John 3:16 is a selfless love that wants to love and save and bless the world. The love that God forbids here is a selfish love that lusts for and idolises the things of the world. We are to be devoted to God rather than the world. That is why these verses starkly warn us that if we love the world the love of the Father won’t be in us. The more we love the world the more it will push out love for God. Jesus says exactly the same thing about love for money and love for God in Matthew 6:24. This is a very helpful cross reference to help us get a clear handle on these verses in 1 John. John wants us to see that the world and everything in it is passing away in contrast to God’s people who will endure forever. This is the ultimate practical reason why we shouldn’t love the world. To love the world is a bad investment.

Eternal Life

In both sections John reminds his readers that eternal life is for those who know and obey God (v17 and v25.) The crucial thing that we learn about eternal life in these verses is that Eternal life is something that we enjoy now as we have fellowship with God (v17 and v25). Eternal Life is not something that we look forward to when we die, it is something we enjoy now because eternal life is about being in fellowship with God. We might say that Eternal Life is not about how long you live, it’s about who you live with.

Areas of Application

The two sections contains distinct areas of application. I am going to suggest that you just focus on the first area of application in your study. Better to apply one thing well than to apply two things vaguely.

Do not love the world

This is the area of application that I would focus on because I think that it is such a big challenge for every Christian. Indeed I think that half the time we don't even realise that we love the world because everyone else around us is doing just the same. What it means to love the world is fleshed out for us by three statements in v16. Loving the world is about the lusts/desires of the flesh (lust for physical pleasures), lusts/desires of the eyes (lust for aesthetic pleasures) and then the pride of life (pride in what we have achieved and acquired.) Loving the world is therefore both about what we don't have (lusts) and what we do have (pride.)

The warnings in these verses are perhaps even more relevant today than they were in our day because we live in a visual world where advertising, the media and our culture is constantly encouraging us to lust for more. We're encouraged to lust sexually but also to lust for food, drink and other physical pleasures. We're encouraged to shop until we drop and to deny ourselves nothing. With retail parks, TV adverts and online shopping we are constantly being encouraged to lust for more. Now we need to be clear. The physical appetite for sex and food are good things that God has made. The problem is that we take good gifts and make them our gods. We look for sexual gratification outside of monogamous , lifelong, heterosexual marriage. We don't just eat the food that we need, we binge eat and our waistlines reflect this. A key part of this study will be helping the group to recognise the ways in which we love the world like everyone else. It will also be helpful for the group to think about what it will mean to enjoy physical pleasures in a way that honours God and in a way that is worldly. Where is the line?

Alongside lusting after what we don't have, the world encourages us to take in what we do have. Right from a young age we are encouraged to take pride in our achievements and what we have acquired. Now again we must be clear, God wants us to enjoy the gifts that he has given us. God provides everything for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 5:17) but the world encourages to forget where everything comes from. The pride that we are being warned against here is the pride of Nebuchadnezzar as he surveyed Babylon and said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built..." (Daniel 4:30.) It is the pride that pushes God aside and pretends that all that we have and all that we have achieved is down to us. Again this pride is everywhere because we live in a culture which denies the existence of God. If God is out of the picture then it is only natural that we will take the credit for our achievements. Again we need to help our groups to see the areas in which we are just like the world when it comes to our homes, our families, our work and our achievements.

Stick with what you have heard from the beginning

As in the 1st century there are sadly many 'christian' teachers today who sound like the real deal but are actually fakes. They might use all the right words but they are peddling a different Jesus and a different gospel and so they cannot offer eternal life. We need to make sure that we stick with the apostolic gospel that we have heard from the beginning and that we find in the scriptures. We need to be like the Bereans who carefully examined the scriptures to check that what Paul was saying was true (Acts 17:11). This means being discerning about what we listen and watch on Online or on TV. It means being discerning at BEC as well because the false teachers that John were countering came from within the church. If you decide to focus on this area of application then you should get the group

talking practically about how we can make sure that we stick with the truth. How can we improve our discernment?

Suggested Questions

I suggest that you focus on just v15-17 and really go deep and practical in applying these verses. If you decide to also look at v18-27 then be careful that your study doesn't run too long. Remember to leave time to pray in what you have been talking about.

Starter Question - What do you think are some of the most dangerous places in the world? *This might seem like a bizarre question at the start of a Bible study but one of the things that we will come to realise as we study v15-17 is that the culture we live in is actually very dangerous for Christians. We tend to think that the desert or a gangland ghetto are dangerous places (and they are) but where we live is full of many subtle but deadly dangers for the Christian. Our culture is constant encouraging us to love the world by lusting after what we don't have and taking pride in what we do have. These verses tell us that's deadly because if we love the world then we won't love God and we won't have eternal life!*

Introduction to the study - The big application of these verses is clear "Don't love the world!" To help us think about what that actually means we are going to think about the three phrases in v16; 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.'

1. Starting with 'the lust of the flesh,' in what ways does our culture encourage us to lust after physical pleasures?

The obvious physical pleasure is sex but it is by no means the only pleasure that our society encourages us to lust after. You could take different pleasures and think about the different ways we're encourage to lust after these things. You could think about the role of advertising, TV, magazines and in shops etc.

E. Does this mean that it is wrong to enjoy physical pleasures like sex and eating? What will it look like to love God as we enjoy these things?

We obviously have to eat and drink and food is a good gift from God that he has given us for our enjoyment. Similarly sex is a good gift from God that is to be enjoyed in the context of marriage. You could focus on one or two particular pleasures and talk practically about what it will look like for us to enjoy these things in a way that honours God rather than in a lustful way.

F. Take the example of food. When does godly desire for food become sinful lust of the flesh?

This question is similar to the previous question but is here to help tease out the difference between godly desire and sinful desire. You could talk about what this looks like when we eat out in a restaurant or when we're doing our shopping in the supermarket. I'm suggesting you focus on food because I think that we are often blind to the sinful attitudes and desires that we have towards food and gluttony. Most Christians know that sexual lust is wrong and look down on those who succumb to it but think nothing of eating to excess and gorging themselves on food. The lust of the flesh is about both the desires of the gutter and the desires of the gourmet. That's a challenging thought in an area like Bessacarr.

2. Moving onto 'the lust of the eyes,' in what different ways does our culture encourage us to lust with our eyes?

You might find that you have talked about this under the previous section. The aim is to help us see how visual our culture is and how we are constantly being encouraged to lust after what we don't have.

- A.** Take a look at Matthew 6:22-24. Why does Jesus say that what we look at with our eyes is so important?

Don't take too long on this question. The aim is not to do a long and exhaustive study of these verses. Instead we just want to see the big point that what we do with our eyes will have a big impact on the rest of us.

B. What difference will this make on the things that you watch, read and look at? *Here's a great opportunity to talk practically about the sorts of things that we engage with. Whilst we don't want to become legalistic and draw up a list of approved TV shows, websites and magazines we do want to encourage one another to think seriously about what we are looking at with our eyes. Different people will have different weaknesses and we need to recognise this.*

- 3.** The pride of life is about taking pride in what we have and what we have achieved. What sort of things does our culture encourage us to take pride in?

The list here could be endless because society tells us to take pride in everything we have. The obvious areas are career, family, homes, education but I'm sure you can think of others.

- A.** What particular things are you most tempted to take pride in?

This question is just here to supplement the previous question and help keep the discussion from getting too general. You might feel that this question isn't necessary depending on how the previous question went.

- 4.** Why is loving the world so deadly? (2:15-17)

Here's a crucial part of the study. Up until now we have seen how we can often love the world, now we see why it is so important that we don't! Help the group to see that we can't love both God and the world. It is either/or not both/and.

- 5.** How can we love God instead of the world when everyone else is doing the opposite?

- A.** What do we need to remember about ourselves? (v12-14, 17)

- B.** What do we need to remember about the world? (v15-17)

Here we want to see that as Christians we know God and so we have eternal life. In Jesus we have overcome the world and the evil one. We are on the winning side! Alongside this we also want to see that everything in the world will pass away. All the things that seem so permanent now and seem so important will be gone!

- 6.** What practical changes are you going to make in response to God's word?

Depending on your group you might want to discuss this in small groups or you might like to leave it as a question for personal reflection. The aim is for us to leave the study with a concrete action that we are going to take. It might be something that we are going to change or something different that we are going to do. You could even give your group a slip of paper to write down what they are going to do. However you approach this question, encourage the group to pray about what they have been discussing in this study.

Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 2:28-3:10

Context

Light and Darkness, Sin and Righteousness

Throughout the letter John has been drawing stark distinctions between God's light and the world's darkness (1:5-7, 2:8). God is light and so his people are to walk in the light. Another way of putting this is that God's people are to be righteous because God is righteous. God hates sin and has nothing to do with sin and so a mark that we are God's children is that we too are seeking to purify ourselves. We've seen this theme through chapter 2 and now it comes again in chapter 3.

Reassurance

John's stark distinctions and black and white statements could understandably unsettle some Christians. Verses like 2:4 or 2:10 could cause a Christian to worry that they are not really Christians. You may be finding that there are those in your group who are struggling with the question of assurance and certainty of their salvation. Alongside these stark verses we also need to hear John's repeated theme of reassurance (see 2:1-2, 2:12-14, 2:20-21, 5:13.) This theme of reassurance is also very important in chapter 3.

People try to lead them astray

There are people around who are claiming to be Christians but who are teaching another Jesus and another gospel which is really no gospel at all. As a result John repeatedly warns his readers about these people who are trying to lead them astray (2:26, 3:7.)

Big Ideas

Who we are - Dearly Loved Children of God

Just scan the passage and pick out how many times John emphasises that these Christians are God's children...

Just because the world doesn't recognise who we are doesn't detract from the fact that we are God's children. We are part of God's family, heirs of the kingdom. We've been born of God (again look how many times John says that in these verses...) And God's seed (I think this might refer to the Spirit rather than the word but either way the point is the same) has been planted in us, we are marked out as his. John wants us to take in how staggering it is that we are the beloved children of God, let's make sure we don't rush this in our study.

What will we be - Pure Like Jesus

When Christ appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Now we walk by faith and not by sight, but one day we will walk by sight and not by faith! On that day we shall be transformed to be like Christ. We shall have resurrection bodies like Christ (1 Corinthians 15) but here I think the focus is on our purity because of the references to sin and purity in the rest of the passage. One day you will be pure like Christ! How wonderful is that? Don't you long for that day when you will be completely without sin?

Again we need to stop and ponder this because the application flows from who we are and what we will be. If we don't see these clearly then we won't see why we need to be striving for purity now.

What we should be - Purifying Ourselves as Jesus is Pure

Once we understand who we are (God's Beloved Children) and what we will be (Pure like Jesus) then it follows that we will long to be increasingly pure like Jesus now while we wait. The implication is that if we don't believe we are God's children and that one day we'll be perfectly pure then we won't strive for purity. If we know that we're children of light then we will seek to be light now.

Purity and holiness can seem so old fashioned and boring to the church today but it is absolutely essential according to John. Perhaps we can easily slip into a lazy form of Christianity which is content with a certain level of sin in our lives, especially if those sins are 'respectable' sins. John doesn't say that "All new Christians who have this hope in him purify themselves..." Striving for purity isn't just for those who are enthusiastically starting out in the Christian life, it's for all Christians, no matter how long we've been running the race. Similarly John doesn't say they "purify themselves, just as others around them are pure." Our model of purity is not society, it's not even other people in the church, it's Jesus! He's the one we're focused on, he is the one that we aspire to be like.

Applications

Reassure those who are worried about their salvation

As we have already said there may be some Christians who are worried that they are not really Christians because of some of the stark things that John is saying. For these Christians we want to help them see the great reassurances that are in this passage and throughout the rest of the letter.

Challenge the complacent to pursue purity

"ALL who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." All of us could be purer and so because we one day will be perfectly let's encourage one another to really strive for purity. It's not an optional extra, it's a vital mark that shows we really are God's children. If we're not pursuing purity then it should cause us to question whether we really do have the hope that John speaks of.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE!

Find 10 differences between the 2 pictures!



Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 3:11-24

Context

Throughout the letter John has been telling us the marks of God's true children. We have seen that God's people believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son (2:22-23.) We have also seen that God's children do what is right instead of continuing to sin (2:3-6 and 3:4-10.) The third key marker is that we love rather than hate our brothers and sisters in Christ (2:7-11). John reintroduced this theme in 3:10 and it is the main theme running through 3:11-24.

Big Idea

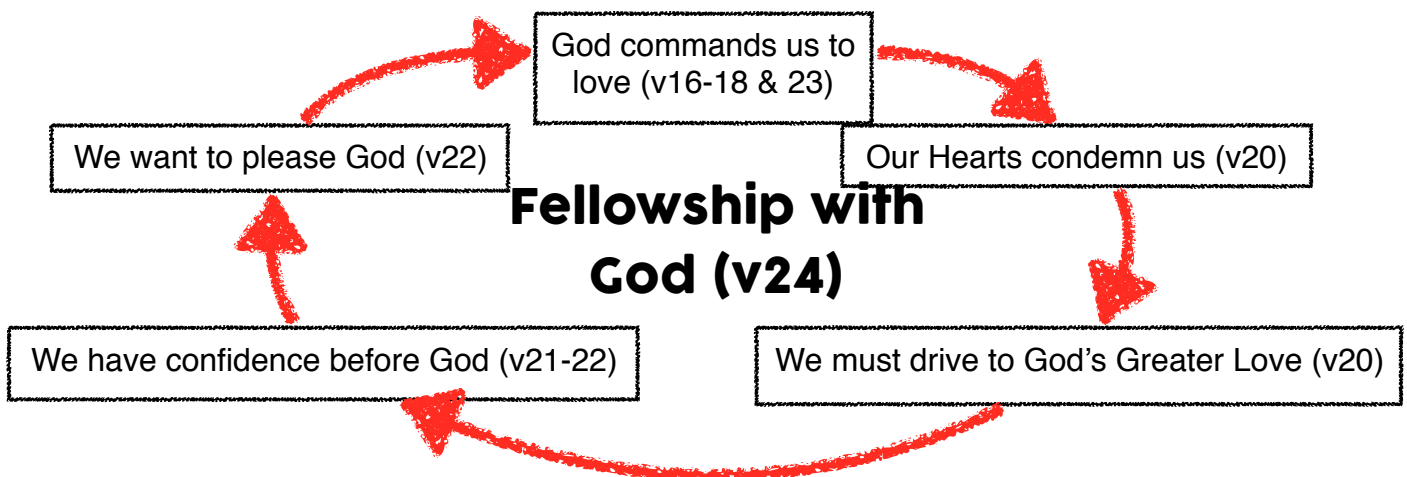
Love one another as Christ has loved us, not just with words but with selfless actions.

Applications

As we teach through 1 John we need to uphold the expectation that people should be able to identify Christians by their behaviour and their love not just what they profess to believe. Jesus is clear on this in John 13:34-35. Where we see God's love displayed through us it should encourage us as a sign that we really are God's children.

At the same time we need to remember that our ultimate assurance comes not from the quality of our love for others but instead from God's love for us. It may well be that there are many in your group who are struggling and doubting because of John's black and white statements such as 3:14. To those who are doubting their salvation this passage urges us to drive to God's greater love (3:20.) Only there can our hearts be put at rest and we can have confidence before God (3:21.)

Others in your group may actually be quite complacent in their salvation because they are confident that God loves them. To such Christians we need to help them to see that God's love for us should then spur us on afresh to love one another with that same selfless love (3:16 and 3:23.)



Questions

Starter - So much of 1 John is about being able to spot who the real Christians are. As something slightly different and a bit of fun why not start your study by playing spot the difference. I've attached a spot the difference that you could print off and give to your group.

1. Read v11-18, how do you spot a child of God?

The big thing is that they love other Christians with the same selfless love that Jesus has shown to them. They will not just talk about love they will actually express that love practically. To really help your group think this through you could use the following follow up questions;

- **What do they look like?**
- **How do they use their time?**
- **What do they treat others in the church?**
- **How do they view their possessions?**

Try and make this discussion as concrete and down to earth as possible. Don't just leave the conversation floating around on the abstract level, push it down to the ground and encourage the group to come up with what it would look like to really love like this.

2. Why do we find it so hard to love like this?

This question assumes that we don't always love the way that John describes. You could talk about the things that we love more than our brothers and sisters that stop us from loving them as we should. Perhaps we don't love like this because our appreciation of Jesus' love for us has grown cold. Perhaps it is because we don't find some of the people in church particularly lovely. Perhaps it is because we don't know people well enough to know their needs.

3. Who in the church/your group is in need at the moment?

- **What can we do to meet that need?**

Again we don't just want this to be a hypothetical discussion about love. We actually want to provoke one another to love and good deeds not just good intentions. If we are not aware of any needs then that should challenge us to go away and get to know people better so that we do become more aware of the needs.

4. None of us perfectly lives up to this standard of love. It can be very easy for our hearts to condemn us and we feel guilty because of our lack of love. We might even doubt whether we really are Christians. What encouragement does v19-24 give us?

When our lack of love leaves us feeling guilty and condemned it should drive us to God's greater love. If there's time you could turn to one of the many passages in 1 John (e.g. 4:7-11) to remind the group of God's great love for us. Help the group to see that all our sin and lovelessness can be paid for by Christ if we come to him in faith (3:23) and confess our sins (1:9). Help the group also to see that having received God's love and assurance we are then called to renew our efforts to love one another as he has loved us. If you find it helpful I have attached the diagram from the sermon below.

Prayer Spend time together confessing the times when our love has been lacking. Thank God for his greater love and the forgiveness and confidence that brings. Pray that God would empower us to love and serve one another as Christ has loved us.

1 John 3:11-24

1. Read v11-18, how do you spot a child of God?
2. Why do we find it so hard to love like this?
3. Who in the church or our group is in need at the moment?
4. None of us perfectly lives up to this standard of love. It can be very easy for our hearts to condemn us and we feel guilty because of our lack of love. We might even doubt whether we really are Christians. What encouragement does v19-24 give us?

Dear God,

Sorry _____

Thank you _____

Please _____

Amen.

Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 4:1-21

Context

Throughout the letter John is writing to reassure his readers that they are genuine Christians who have heard and believed the genuine gospel. To do this he shows us the key marks of both true and false Christianity. Genuine Christianity is marked by Christ-like love (1:5-6, 1:10, 3:14, 3:17-18), obedience (2:3, 3:6, 3:9-10) and holding onto the apostolic truth that John and the other apostles proclaimed (1:3, 2:24.) In contrast the false teachers are seen by their lack of love (1:9-11, 3:11-18), their lack of obedience (1:6-8, 2:3-6, 3:7-10), and their denial of apostolic truth (2:18-24).

This focus is seen in chapter 4 in two big ways;

Firstly chapter 4 is full of teaching on love. Here we learn that God is love (4:8, 4:16) and that all love comes from God (4:7) and that the supreme demonstration of God's love was in giving Christ to die as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (4:9-10) and that God commands his people to respond to his love by loving one another with that same sort of love (4:11, 4:19-21.)

Secondly the theme of truth and the need for discernment runs through chapter 4. Notice how the chapter starts with this theme in 4:1-6 and then returns to the theme in 4:13-16.

Throughout this chapter John is teaching us about what genuine Christianity looks and sounds like.

Applications

There are two big areas of application in this chapter. In your study you may decide to focus on one or both of these.

1. The Need for Discernment - There are all sorts of 'christian' voices around today claiming to proclaim 'christian' messages. The New Testament repeatedly warns us about these people (see Matthew 7:15, Mark 13:22-23, Acts 20:28-30 and 2 John 7). Christians are not to naively accept everything they hear just because the speaker claims to be Christian. Instead we are to 'test the spirits to see whether they are from God.' (v1.) Christians are to be discerning. There is a form of judgmentalism that God approves of! In today's world where technology gives us access to all sorts of teachers and preachers we need to be learning how to discern what is true and false teaching.
2. The Need for Love - You might feel like we keep hearing this over and over again in 1 John... and you'd be right! Jesus said that our love for one another is what will mark us out as his people so we shouldn't be surprised that John returns to this theme time and time again in his letter. I found David Jackman both incredibly helpful and personally challenging on this so here is a length quote from him that is well worth reading;

“Love for the unseen Lord is best expressed not just in words, but in deeds of love towards the Lord’s people whom we do see.

Is this not one of our greatest sins as Christians today? We may talk a lot about loving God, we may express it in our worship with great emotion, but what does it mean when we are so critical of other Christians, so ready to jump to negative conclusions about people, so slow to bear their burdens, so unwilling to step into their shoes? Such lovelessness totally contradicts what we profess and flagrantly disobeys God’s commands. It becomes a major stumbling-block to those who are seeking Christ and renders any attempts at evangelism useless. In many churches and fellowships we need a fresh repentance on this matter, a new humbling before God, an honest confession of our need and a cry to God for mercy and grace to change us.

Let us not avoid the plain teaching of Scripture. If we do not love those fellow Christians whom we know well and see regularly within our fellowship circles, we cannot be loving God. We may have occasional warm feelings, but these can be merely sentimental and unrelated to other people in their real-life situations. The proof of true love is not emotion or words, but deeds, which reach out to help others in need. But the other side of the coin is that such practical caring love can be a wonderful ground of assurance. There is a divine obligation laid upon us all in verse 21. The whole law is summed up in the royal law of love and we cannot love God without keeping his commandments. His will is that we should reflect the image of our Creator, who is love, by our love for one another.”¹

¹ Jackman, D., 1988. [*The message of John’s letters: living in the love of God*](#), Leicester, England; Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

Questions

Starter Question - In the past the only way that Christians could receive Christian teaching was by going to church. What are some of the different ways that you can get Christian input?

Imagine what it would have been like to be a typical Christian in the 17th century. There's no TV, no radio, no internet. If you are able to read you might have access to one or two Christian books at most. Your main way of accessing Christian teaching was by reading your Bible and by going to church.

Fast-forward to today and we have an endless supply of Christian books, TV channels, radio shows, podcasts, blogs, websites, Facebook posts and online sermons. We have access to so many different sources of teaching. On the one hand this can be great (there's good stuff out there) but on the other hand it can be very dangerous (there's lots of bad stuff out there.)

We just want to start by getting people to recognise the many different sources that are now open to us.

The Need for Discernment

1. According to v1-6 and v13-16 what are some of the marks of false teachers?

The aim here is to get people's heads into the passage. Notice what these people say about Jesus. You could also go back to chapter 2 or you could look up some of the cross references mentioned above to get a fuller picture. Just be careful that you don't take too long doing this.

2. Why do we need to be so discerning about who we listen to?

This might be obvious but it needs to be said - false teaching is dangerous. False teachers are trying to lead people astray (3:7). Notice too that when we start believing false teaching our relationship with God is damaged (4:15.) Who we listen to online really does matter!

3. How can we be more discerning when it comes to what we read, watch and listen to?

For some of us we need to start by recognising that everything that claims to be Christian isn't necessarily the real deal. We need to test the spirits. We need to examine what we hear and hold it up against the truth that the apostles have passed on to us in the Bible (4:14.) The better we know the truth, the better we'll be able to spot the lies.

The Need for Love

4. What do we learn about God's love from v7-12?

This might be familiar but it's good to get us actually looking at the text. In particular we notice sacrificial nature of God's love (v9-10), the cost of his love (v9) and the fact that God loved us when we didn't love him (v10.) This is to be the pattern of our love for one another.

5. God loved us when we didn't love him (v10.) What will it look like for us to be a church marked by this sort of proactive love?

There will always be people in church who we don't naturally warm to. They might come from a different background or ethnicity to us. They might not be particularly nice, they might rub us up the wrong way. They might not have made a good first impression or they

might have said or done something that hurt us. God calls us to take the initiative and move towards them in love even if we're not sure that they will reciprocate that love.

This has implications too for newcomers and those outside the church. Will we take the initiative to welcome and reach out or will we just wait for people to come to us?

6. God loved us by sacrificing what was most precious to him (v9.) What sort of things are most precious to us?

There might be all sorts of things that are precious to us like our money, our time, our family, our relationships and our work.

1. What would it look like for us to sacrifice these things for the sake of our church family?

This is probably the hardest and most personal question of the study but also potentially the most valuable. Many of us live such busy lives that what little free time we do have is incredibly precious to us. Our instinct is to use that time to do something that we enjoy with people we enjoy being with. When someone uses what little time they have to serve others in the church, go to home group or the prayer meeting or help teach or lead a group that's sacrificial love.

7. In what ways are we tempted to water down this teaching about love?

God's definition of love is so much higher than ours. We'd much rather settle for a form of love that looks like everyone else's love because that will be less costly and inconvenient.

8. Looking at v7-12 and v16-21 why is our love for one another so important?

It's vital for the world looking on (v12) as Jesus said in John 13:34-35. It's also vital for us because as we see this sort of love in us it gives us a sense of assurance that we really are God's people (v17-18.)

Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 5

Context

As he comes to the end of his letter John takes many of the key threads and weaves them together. Throughout the letter John has highlighted three marks of a believer and these are all found in 5:1-5. A genuine Christian 'believes that Jesus is the Christ' (v1), they love God's children (v1) and they obey God's commands (v2.)

In the final chapter we also found John explicitly telling us his reason for writing in 5:13 '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.' John has written this letter to reassure believers that in spite of what other people might be saying they really do have eternal life. This theme of Eternal Life is not new. John began the letter by describing Jesus as the one who was 'from the beginning... the Word of Life... The life [who] appeared.' (1:1-2). When we come to the end of the letter we find John describing Jesus in similar terms, 'He is the true God and eternal life' (5:20.) Jesus is not just the one who can give us eternal life, he IS eternal life and so John wants to reassure the believers that because they have the real Jesus they have eternal life!

Big Idea

There are many different threads in this chapter and if we try and follow each of them it might get quite confusing and take a long time. I think that the best approach is to focus on the big idea that is central to the chapter which is the theme of eternal life in v11-13. Many of the other threads in this chapter are actually attached to this central theme.

Areas of Application

As group leaders we need to be clear in our minds about application. If we go into the study with some vague ideas about application then our groups will have little chance of coming to any meaningful application. With this in mind let me suggest that you focus your application in two specific areas;

Contentment - As a society we are never content. We are all wanting more. We're always looking for different things (work, relationships, family, friends, home etc) to give us life! As Christians we are often no different to everyone else. We often seem to be just as discontented as everyone else. Yet God says that he has given us eternal life in Jesus!!! If we really believed this then wouldn't it dramatically change our attitude to our careers, relationships, families, and possessions?

Compassion - We can often be secretly envious of our non-christian friends, neighbours and colleagues. They look to be having a great time and really enjoying life and in comparison the Christian life can look pretty life-less. Yet God says that 'whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.' Again if we really believed this then it would dramatically change our attitude to the non-Christians we know. Instead of envying them we would have deep compassion for them. They are life-less without Jesus!

Questions

Starter - "Life is..." How would different people finish that sentence?

Use this question to get the group talking. Try and come up with as many different ways that different people finish the sentence. Tell people these don't have to be their own answers, we're just looking for all the different ways that people today would answer the question. Imagine stopping random people on the street, what would they say?

1. Look at 5:11-13, what does God say about life?

To help unpack this question you can use the 3 supplementary questions to help the group dig into these verses. In addition you could look up some of the following references from John's gospel to help - see John 5:20-30, 6:53-57, 10:10, 11:23-27, 17:1-3.

1. What is eternal life?
2. Who has it?
3. How do we get it?

Make sure that the group see that eternal life is not just about life after you die. Eternal life starts now when we become Christians because eternal life is to believe in Jesus and to know God the Father and the Son. The problem is so often that our definition of life (even as Christians) is so vastly different to God's definition.

2. If you were being honest, what things other than Jesus do you think will give you life?

I many ways this question is returning to the starter question but in a more personal way. This time we're not interested in what other people think, we're talking about us. As we look at our lives, how we use our time and money and priorities what do we really believe will make us alive? To help people be a bit more honest you could split the groups into 2s and 3s to discuss this question.

3. If we really believed v11-13 then how would it change our attitude to...

1. Non-Christians we know?
2. Work and Career?
3. Relationships and Family?
4. Homes and Possessions?

Take the time to work through each of these areas. Take the central truth of v11-13 and work out how it should change us. Before you get to the study make sure that you have your own personal answers to all these questions.