

VAUGHN WEATHERFORD

**FIVE**

MINUTES  
CLOSER

JAMES

1 & 2 PETER

1, 2, & 3 JOHN

You can be five minutes closer  
to the person God created you to be!

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# Five Minutes Closer

James  
1 & 2 Peter  
1, 2, 3 John

Vaughn Weatherford

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Unless noted, all scripture quotations from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016.

Welcome to *Five Minutes Closer*!

Thanks for checking out this sample of *Five Minutes Closer: James, 1 & 2 Peter, and 1, 2, & 3 John*. This sample includes devotions from 1 John. I hope you enjoy them! You can purchase the unabridged edition at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). The book is based on the podcast *Five Minutes Closer*, available on Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music, Podbean, or wherever you get your favorite podcasts. You can find out more at [www.FiveMinutesCloser.com](http://www.FiveMinutesCloser.com).

I also have several Christian novels available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). I hope they will be a blessing to you and your family.

### **The Round Mountain**

Jim spent his summers exploring his grandfather's farm on the Round Mountain. This summer was different. Jim and his cousins make an important discovery and, in doing so, add a new twist to the storied history of Central Texas. The discovery may endanger their lives, but it may also prove to be the richest find in the annals of Lone Star treasure hunting. Or maybe not. Follow the pages of *The Round Mountain* and discover the treasures of faith, friendship, and a good rope.

### **The Cabin at Mt. Bonnell**

Growing up is hard enough, but what if your family might be involved in the most significant crime and cover-up in the history of Austin, Texas? Pete Dengar learns that making friends is tough; learning your true legacy can be even more complicated. Pete and his friends attempt to unravel an Austin mystery, navigate racial divides, and solve multiple decades-old murders, all while making plans for the next school dance. It's going to be a long semester.

### **Coming Soon: The Princess of Coryell County**

In a sequel to *The Round Mountain*, follow Jim's discovery of his roots as he finds the love of his life during his studies at Baylor University. Jim and Missy meet while on a geology field trip to the Round Mountain. Their relationship leads them to learn more about the Princess of Coryell County, a woman who may or may not be related to Jim. Her life and the relationship of Jim and Missy intertwine in a story of faith, adventure, and family.

Thanks again for checking out this sample of *Five Minutes Closer*. My prayer is that it will help you to be five minutes closer to the person God created you to be!

Blessings,

Vaughn

## *1 John 1:1-4*

Don't miss a thing.

My dad always liked to get to football games early. Not just before the kickoff—he wanted to be there before the players came on the field for the game warm-ups. I used to think it was because he wanted a good seat, but he did that even when we had reserved seats for a game.

I finally realized what it was: he didn't want to miss anything. As a former football coach, he wanted to see the players getting ready for the game, watch the coaches, and see who was running well and who wasn't. We didn't leave games early, either. We stayed until the final seconds had ticked off the clock. Dad didn't want to miss anything; he wanted the complete game experience.

John didn't want believers to miss anything. He wasn't just waiting for heaven. He wanted to experience the fullness of Christ now, and he also wanted that for other believers. In part, that is why he wrote the letter we call 1 John.

### 1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

“That which was from the beginning”—the words echo John 1:1—“In the beginning was the Word,” which echoes Genesis 1:1. In no uncertain terms, this verse describes the God of creation. Nothing else has been from the beginning.

Verse one then lists evidence that Jesus is one and the same as the God of creation. Each proof is more compelling than the one before. First, they heard him. That’s good, but people also heard God in the Old Testament. But there was more. They saw him “with our own eyes.” It was not a dream or a vision. They saw Christ in the flesh. But there was more. Not only had they seen him, they had touched him. This was no ghost, no ephemeral spirit. They touched him. He was the Word, the Word of life.

In verse 2, 1 John gives a parenthetical statement to explain further and bolster what he wrote in verse 1. “Made manifested” means “to make known that which already exists.” Again, there is the emphasis on the fact that John personally witnessed the living Word and that the eternal life they have proclaimed is based upon a literal Jesus. The distinction is crucial. It was essential to the people of the first century; it is important to us today.

Knowing the reality of Christ, John couldn’t keep it to himself. He wanted everyone to know. John and the other disciples did not want to keep the blessings they knew in Christ to themselves. He wanted others to know the fellowship with God he and the other disciples knew. His emphasis is not on heaven or the material blessings God might bring. Not that John was not grateful for those, but they were not the reason for his joy. His joy was in a personal relationship with Christ. Heaven and abundant life resulted from that personal relationship, but was not the goal. The goal was to know Jesus.

His sincere desire was that others would know Christ, too. That’s where his joy would be complete. By sharing Christ, he multiplied his joy. The great English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “Having found the honey, we cannot eat it alone.”

Birthday parties were always a reason for anxiety for me growing up. I was always afraid no one would show up. I’d be there with all the cake, ice cream, and party hats, but no people.

You could argue that having all that cake and ice cream to yourself would be a good thing. You don’t have to share with anyone, and it avoids having anyone at your party you didn’t want to come. You won’t have to put up with anyone you don’t like if no one is there.

But that defeats the purpose of having a party in the first place. No one wants to throw a party and have no one show up. If you throw a party, you're planning for people to attend.

John realized the same truth about his faith in Christ. His life overflowed with blessings from the Lord, but he discovered an important fact. Those blessings were even more fun to share. Besides knowing Christ, John's greatest joy was in sharing Christ.

We will find that same truth. There is no more significant experience for the Christian than to be used by God to share your faith with someone else. The next time you watch the baptism of a new believer, look around the congregation. I guarantee the people with the biggest smiles will be those who shared a part in leading the person to Christ. The Sunday School teachers, friends, and family members who told them about the Savior will be grinning ear to ear. There is extraordinary joy in witnessing the salvation of another.

Don't miss it. Join the joy.

#### Take Five

1. Think of one thing that makes you happy about your relationship with Christ.
2. Think of one person and tell them about it. You want them to be happy too, right?



## *1 John 1:5-7*

Walking in the light is much easier.

I once explored a cave. Don't be too impressed. It was a cave, not one of the tourist attractions along the freeway, but it was still well-traveled and not dangerous. Much. At the mouth of the cave, there is a sign that says the lights stayed on during the daytime hours. Good to know. The only problem was the cave "lights" were a relative term. The lights were not exactly bright. They were more like night lights than anything else. They did a reasonably good job lighting the cave ceiling. You could get a good look at some cave formations. Unfortunately, I don't know how to walk on the ceiling. Very little light filtered down to the floor, so you took every step at your own risk. Others informed me that bats lived in the cave, so I may not want to see where I'm walking. True, but it made balance a problem. The rocks and holes along the path could be a surprise. At one point, I tripped on a rock and reached out to steady myself against a cave formation, only to discover that the formation was just some other poor guy who, like me, wished he had brought along a flashlight.

Walking in the dark is a disconcerting experience. That can be even more true spiritually. Fortunately, we don't have to walk in the dark.

### *1 John 1:5-7*

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 cleanses us from all sin.

John had heard Jesus on several occasions describe himself as the Light of the World (John 8:12; 9:5). In the Old Testament, light is often used as a symbol for God, describing his revelation and salvation, his holiness and perfection (Psalm 27:1; 36:9; Isaiah 49:6). Jesus' reference to himself as the light gives these same connotations and identifies Jesus as one and the same with the God of the Old Testament.

The reasons for using light as a symbol of God are apparent. Light is the closest thing we have in the physical world to describing something pure. Light reveals impurities in the world around us. With enough light, we see things as they are.

Light also provides the energy for life. Put your favorite potted plant in the closet for a month, and you'll have a nice, brown, crunchy stick. Without God, we are without hope. Without Christ, we are lost.

In Christ, there is no darkness. That means it becomes relatively easy to tell how we live our lives. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

We don't have to live a lie. We can live in the light of Christ. John puts it directly: we can live in the light because Jesus is the light. In the cave, once we got in and realized we didn't have enough light, there wasn't much we could do but keep going. I couldn't point my fingers and have light shoot out of my fingernails, although that would have been cool. But it just didn't work; in the dark, I'm stuck in the dark.

That is not the case for the believer. Once we realize we have been living in darkness, we don't have to stay in the dark. Christ is the light, and he is right there with us.

The light of Christ does more than reveal. It cleanses. When the sunlight shows the dust in the house, it doesn't take it away. The light of Christ, when we allow it to invade the corners and crevices of our life, not only has the power to reveal the sin we have hiding but also to forgive and cleanse that sin. This truth leads to the powerful statement made in verse 9:

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 cleanses us from all sin.

You can walk in the light.

## Take Five

1. Set aside some time today to turn on the light. Spend some time asking Christ to illuminate some of the dark areas of your life.
2. You may not like what you see, but there is good news. Jesus takes away the darkness! Thank the God of Light for not only revealing the darkness in your life, but delivering you from it.
3. Make a pact with your eyes, ears, and mind to live in the light.

## *1 John 1:8-10*

You can be clean.

My carpet was stained. I don't know how it happened. Maybe I spilled something. Perhaps somebody had something on their shoe. I realize that blame was not the issue. Getting out the stain was the issue. So I went to the store and looked for some carpet cleaner. There were several choices, all promising to remove my stain. However, one product pledged to remove the stain and vowed to provide "deep cleaning." It even had "deep cleaning" in the name, in bold yellow letters, no less. That was what I wanted. As long as I cleaned the carpet, I wanted to clean it deep.

I took the product home and read the fifteen paragraphs of warnings, ensuring I didn't swallow it or use it on my gardenias. I followed the instructions to clean the carpet: spray on the cleaner, let it sit for 30 minutes, brush lightly with a moistened towel or soft brush (I did both), let stand until dry, then vacuum. During the process, the stain was covered by a bright, shiny white foam, bubbling and gurgling as it deeply scrubbed every fiber of the carpet.

Finally, the moment of truth. The cleaner had dried into a fine white powder. I carefully pulled the vacuum cleaner over it to reveal my deeply cleaned carpet. It was deeply cleaned, alright. The carpet was as fresh and new as the day it had been installed, making the stain stand out even more. The spray had removed every speck of dirt except the stain, which now shined brightly for all to see. I finally had to make peace with the situation, realizing that even though I still had a stain, at least now, it was a deeply cleaned stain.

That wasn't my goal. It is certainly not what we should look for in our spiritual life. We don't need partial forgiveness. We need deep

cleaning, stains and all. In one of several memorable passages throughout 1 John, the scripture provides us with this great truth: Jesus cleanses it all:

1 John 1:8-10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John begins by saying that we all need a bath, spiritually speaking. Somehow, we convince ourselves that we don't. We fool no one but ourselves. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Maybe you've heard a few of these:

- If you swallow chewing gum, it stays in your digestive system for seven years.
- If you go swimming less than an hour after you eat, you will get a cramp and drown.
- Federal law allows only the Texas state flag to be flown at the same height as the United States flag.
- If you fill up your car in the morning when it is cool, you will get more gas for your money.

All of these statements claim to be true. Many people believe them to be true. None of them are. They fall into the category of "urban legends." Though it's probably not a great idea to swallow it in large amounts, chewing gum passes through your digestive tract just like anything else. Eating before swimming doesn't cause cramping. The Texas flag is no different than any other state when flying it with the United States flag. There is a negligible change in the volume of gas based on its temperature. However, since the gas is stored underground, its temperature will differ from the air temperature and remain constant, so it doesn't matter when you fill your car.

We may think we don't need forgiveness, but we would be wrong. We all need forgiveness. Every day. We all need cleansing. Every day. The good news is Jesus provides precisely that. Every day. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Every day.

Jesus, and Jesus alone, provides exactly what we need: cleansing and forgiveness. Trust me. You need it just as much as I do.

### Take Five

Take some time to reflect on the areas where your life needs deep cleaning. Confess them to Jesus and receive the forgiveness and cleansing only he can give.

## *1 John 2:1-2*

Do you want the good news or the bad news?

My junior high speech teacher provided an example of capturing an audience's attention with a good introduction. An eighth-grade girl stood before her speech class and passed out a sack full of leaves. Each student took a leaf as she encouraged them to hold, study, and smell it. After allowing everyone to examine their leaf, the girl announced, "I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that my speech is about poison ivy. The good news is that the leaves you currently hold are not."

That would get my attention. Glad to get the good news. I John 2:1-2 has good news and bad news. The bad news is we are separated from God because of our sin. The good news is that Jesus has solved our problem.

### *1 John 2:1-2*

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John realized that what he had written could be misunderstood or misused. If Christ will forgive us when we sin, then why not go ahead and sin all we want? The exact opposite should be true. Knowing that Christ will forgive us should keep us from sin. John was writing about Christ's forgiveness so that we might not sin.

To continue to fall back into sin intentionally would be like Lazarus, as Jesus raises him from the dead and calls the mourners to turn him

loose from his grave clothes, thanking Christ for bringing him back and then wrapping himself back in his death shroud. "But it was so warm and comfortable in there. And slimming, too. You really shed those unwanted pounds when you're dead."

That's not what Lazarus did. No one would. Jesus told the people to turn Lazarus loose from his grave clothes because he knew Lazarus wanted out of there. Anyone who has ever been in a cast for a few weeks knows how wonderful it feels to get the cast off. Finally, you can scratch that itch that you couldn't reach.

We need to see sin that way. Yes, we must realize that we are imperfect and still fall short of what God would have us do. And, yes, we are forgiven every time. But it should be our joy to seek to live for Christ in every way. God gave us the scripture so that we might not sin.

There is more good news. We have someone on our side.

We have an advocate. In these verses, John further explains how Christ forgives and cleanses us when we confess our sins (1:9).

#### 1 John 2:1b-2

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John uses a legal term, describing someone who pleads the case of the accused. And what a lawyer! He is Jesus, the righteous one. Christ defends us as the only one who has kept the law completely.

But Jesus is more than just our heavenly attorney. He not only pleads our case, he makes it. Jesus is not trying to get us off on a technicality. He acknowledges our sin and our guilt, but he takes the punishment. He is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice. And that sacrifice is available to anyone who will receive it. His sacrifice covers the sin of the whole world. In his death, he has paid for the sins of anyone who will, by faith, come to him and receive him as Lord.

He is our advocate and redeemer, having paid the price for our sin.

We stand guilty before God because of our sin, but the one who pleads our case has also paid our penalty. Through His sacrifice on the cross, He died in our place and for all those who would, by faith, come to Him.

As the Civil War hymn proclaims:



As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free.

So let us live in everything we do to let the world know what we have found in Christ—eternal life and deliverance from sin. He took our place so that we might live. You have an advocate who paid the price for your freedom. Live like it.

Take Five

1. List three reasons you are grateful for the forgiveness you have in Jesus.

2. List three ways you can express that appreciation through your life today.

## *1 John 2:3-6*

What type of tree are you?

Some people have an uncanny ability to identify the types of trees. They immediately identify that one tree is an elm, another is an oak, and another is a nonflowering plum. I can usually tell if they are trees, although sometimes I get that wrong, too. "Nope, that's not a tree; that's just one of the weeds in my yard."

I could improve at identifying types of trees. However, on a trip to California, I immediately recognized an orange tree—so did everyone else. Why? Because it had oranges on it.

It's easy to identify an orange tree when it has oranges. 1 John tells us it should also be easy to identify Christians. How? Because they live like Jesus.

### *1 John 2:3-6*

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The person who truly knows God will seek to keep his commandments. How can we know if we know Christ? If we are genuinely seeking to keep his commandments. This does not mean we will keep them perfectly. John has already written that to say we are without sin is deceiving ourselves. Nevertheless, we still should seek

to keep God's commands. The word for "keep" means to keep on keeping, to make a habit of keeping. We will do this if we love God.

It's like eating. I love food, but it would be unbelievable to say I loved food and never ate. Not only would it be unbelievable, but I wouldn't do it. I would die without food.

Occasionally, I do miss a meal. And now and again, I may eat the wrong meal and have an upset stomach. But that doesn't mean I stop eating. If I miss a meal, you can bet I will be back for the next one.

That is the idea here in 1 John. As Christians, we will sin; we are still imperfect beings. But just because we falter does not mean we stop serving God. The opposite should be true. When we sin, confess that sin, and experience God's forgiveness and cleansing, it should give us even more inspiration to keep serving him. If we know God, we will keep on keeping his commandments.

As we keep God's commands, a wonderful thing will happen. We will grow closer to him. We will gain knowledge of God through experience. We are saved by the grace of God, and through that grace, we can grow closer to him every day. How? By following his command. And how do we follow his command? By living as Jesus lived.

1 John 2:6

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The more we practice a Christ-like life, the closer we will grow to him.

As you practice something, you will learn more about it. Practicing that piano will make you more accustomed to the instrument. The more you practice, the easier it will be to play. The more you play, the more intricate the pieces of music you will be able to perform.

But you have to start somewhere. Even Bach and Mozart played "Chopsticks" sometimes. Well, maybe not "Chopsticks," but they didn't start with a Fugue in D Minor. To be able to play with that kind of talent took practice.

We will not become some kind of super-Christian through our efforts. We depend entirely on the Holy Spirit's strength to serve Christ. We can't do it on our own. But neither will we grow in the Lord if we do not obey his command. As we obey him, a wonderful thing begins to happen. The more we follow him, the closer we grow to him.

Take Five

1. Identify one command of Christ you have difficulty following.
2. Determine one thing you can do today in obedience to that command.

## *1 John 2:7-11*

Tell me if you've heard this one.

They say if you leave clothes in your closet long enough, they will come back into style. It doesn't mean you'll be able to fit in them, but at least you can say you have them. Unfortunately, my blue polyester leisure suit will never come back into the fashion trend. Now that I see it again, the suit wasn't all that fashionable when I wore it the first time.

Some things are better left in the past. Some things are timeless. They are the same in every age. As John writes to believers about Christ's commands, he describes a vital truth: Christ's commands never grow old.

### *1 John 2:7-8*

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

John told his readers, "You've heard this one before." They had heard it in the teachings of Christ.

### *John 13:34*

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Jesus taught his disciples to follow his example, and one of the primary ways they could do that was by loving one another as he had loved them. The command to walk as Jesus walked is directly connected to the command to love one another. When we recognize Christ's love and the sacrifice he has made on our behalf, it is difficult to think that we should not love others with that same love. Especially when that's what he has told us to do.

John encourages believers to do what they already know they should do.

We sometimes make things more complicated than they are. I was trying to open a bag of almonds. I pulled and tore at the seal on the top, but it wouldn't budge. I tried the seal on the other end of the bag without success. I don't know what they made the bag out of, but you could have hidden nuclear secrets inside it, and I didn't have clearance.

Finally, I hunted through the house for scissors and cut the bag open. No almond was going to escape me. As I began to chew on my first handful, I noticed the red letters on the front of the package: "Easy open, resealable tab." You're supposed to open the little tab and then reseal the bag with the zip lock under the tab. The tab and zip lock worked great, but the seal didn't work so well when you cut off the top of the bag.

It helps to read the instructions. Jesus's teachings to his followers were simple. Live like I live. Treat others the way I treat others. Walk in the light.

#### 1 John 2:9-11

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Claiming to know Christ but hate your brother is like claiming that it's daytime at midnight. John notes that our forgiveness in Christ is not simply to bring about an absence of sin but also the presence of Christ's love in us. We don't just live trying not to sin; we live for Christ.

So often, we focus on what not to do. We are like the restaurant that guarantees it won't serve you food that isn't fresh. You go back three or four times, and the sign on the door always says, "Closed, come back

tomorrow." Finally, you call the owner and ask when the restaurant will be open.

"As soon as I have some fresh food."

It's great to have fresh food. I don't want to eat anything that will make me sick. But I also would like to eat. A restaurant that is never open will never make you ill, but it could make you starve.

We need to know what not to do. There are essential things for us to understand not to do. They will destroy our lives. No wonder God warns against them.

But when you read the scripture, God's word is far more expressive about what we should do than what we shouldn't do. A relationship with Christ is not just about avoiding sin but much more about living in his grace. As we love others through the love he has shown us, we reveal what we know to the world. His love leads us to love. Make sure you show his love today.

#### Take Five

1. Think of one way you could express the love you know in Christ to someone in your life.
2. Make a point to do it.

## *1 John 2:12-14*

You've got a bright future!

History, if nothing else, points us to a great future. That's true if you know Christ.

### *1 John 2:12-14*

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

As a believer, you have a great heritage. John describes the heritage of three groups of people: children, fathers, and young men. "Children" appears to be used in the same way he uses the term in other places in his letter (2:1) to reference all the believers he is writing. "Fathers" refers to those believers who were mature in their faith, while "young men" refers to newer believers growing in their faith.

First, John describes how all believers (children) are forgiven. Then, John focuses on two groups of believers—new and mature. John describes the heritage revealed in the lives of mature believers. They know God's promise, not just from the words Jesus spoke, but from their experience. They know that God's promise is real. They could give testimony to how God had been there for them through the most challenging times of life. They had known God day by day. This was



not some fly-by-night experience. Through the years, God proved the validity of their faith. They are living testimonies to God's power, mercy, and sustaining grace.

If you have ever been on Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago, you have undoubtedly seen the Chicago Water Tower. The building looks out of place amid all the modern high-rises and skyscrapers. Initially, it was the site of Chicago's water distribution system, pumping water to its citizens, but the city long ago replaced it with a modern system.

But the tower remains for a reason. It was the only public structure in the burn district that survived the Great Chicago Fire. The tower became a symbol of Chicago's recovery and growth. For the thousands of people who walk down Michigan Avenue daily, it is a constant reminder of their city's "can do" spirit.

Mature, growing Christians are more than just a visible reminder of the power of God. They give testimony to the faithfulness of God. It is one thing to hear from the pulpit that "God will see you through." It is quite another to have a trusted believer look you in the eye and say, "I've walked the road you are walking. God was there for me; He will be there for you, too." Mature believers are a living testimony to God's power. We can see God's power in you.

John also addresses a second group, new believers who had just come into the church. They were an essential part of God's kingdom as well.

New believers, especially, are sometimes surprised by the vicious attacks against them: friends who no longer want to be around them, ridicule from former associates, and temptations that seem to face them at every turn. John provides words of encouragement and hope. Young and old believers can know that God has already won the battle. Satan is defeated.

I made a trip that included an airplane flight. We had some turbulence. Not enough to threaten the plane, but enough to make passengers understand why airlines require you to wear a seatbelt when seated. The flight lasted over two hours before we finally landed.

Not once did I wonder where we were going. Not once did I question if when I got off the plane where I would be. All the turbulence, turns, and time flying never negated the fact that my ticket told me I was on a flight headed home.

Some people worry about flying, and I know there are incidents when flights don't go as planned. That's the incredible truth about

following Jesus. When we know Jesus, we know who is in control, where we are going, and that we will arrive safely at our destination. The difficulties and trials of this world won't change that.

We also have the advantage of knowing those who have gone before, the memory of those who have gone on to glory, and the example of those who continue to live for Christ right here with us.

Our legacy in Christ is great. Our future in Jesus is fantastic. Today looks awesome, too.

#### Take Five

1. Knowing that your future in Christ is bright, what is one thing you could stop worrying about today?

2. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the future God has for you.

## *1 John 2:15-17*

The game is rigged (and that's a good thing)!

I could never quite figure out carnival games as a kid. I can't figure them out very well as an adult. I remember one where the guy running the game held a bundle of strings. The strings ran through a short wall to prizes on a back wall. Purchasing a ticket allowed the player to pick one of the strings. Then, you yanked on your string, and whatever popped over the wall attached to your string was your prize.

There were great prizes on the wall: giant stuffed animals, radios, model airplanes. Somehow, though, none of those ever came over the wall. Little dinky prizes were all I was ever able to win. I would walk away with my pinwheel that didn't work, wondering how to win one of the good prizes.

My sister finally clued me in. She told me the game was rigged. None of the strings went to the good prizes, only the cheap ones. I was astonished. How could that man take a little kid's carnival ticket under false pretenses? My sister just shook her head and said, "Welcome to the real world."

I don't know if she was right, but John is correct as he gives believers a similar but far more critical warning. Whatever string we pull in this world, we will be disappointed.

## *1 John 2:15-17*

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing

away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Everything the world has to offer falls short of the one thing we need—God's love. The love of the things of this world does not come from God. Augustine put it this way: How tragic would it be if a bride began to love her wedding ring more than she loved the husband who gave it to her?

Placing the things of this world above God is the same mistake. It puts the gift above the giver. "Cravings" in verse 16 describe those desires for the things that will eventually pass away. "The lust of the eyes" describes an envious desire for what one does not have. "Boasting of what he has and does" describes the one who only sees the outward life.

None of that ends well.

What we have to understand is that the world does not have what we need. God does.

1 John 2:17

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

It's not a bad thing that the world is passing away. There are quite a few things in this world I could do without: ragweed, mosquitoes, toothaches, just to name a few. The list of things I won't miss is pretty long.

What God provides, however, is worth waiting for. When I went to the store as a child, I always found something I wanted. The store always had a new comic book, a new toy, and a new kind of candy, all at the kid's-eye level. When I told my mom, she always said the same thing: "If you want it, save your allowance, and you can buy it."

By the time I had saved enough money, I didn't want it anymore. My mom was a brilliant practitioner of child psychology. The desires of this world will pass away. All the things you so desperately want, one day, you will not want them anymore. What God gives, however, is something altogether different. Ultimately, the only thing that will matter is what God has for you: eternal life in Christ. Knowing that today can save a lot of heartache tomorrow.

## Take Five

1. List three things you want.
2. Review your list to determine which of your desires are for the things that will last, and which of your desires will be gone tomorrow.
3. Make a prayerful decision not to focus your life on things that will not last.

## *1 John 2:18-3:1*

Who are you?

We've all had the experience. You see someone at the grocery store and know that you should know them, but you cannot remember who they are. You realize they don't know who you are, either. The conversation continues until finally, someone stops and says, "Who are you?"

Who are you? It is essential to know who you are—not just your name, occupation, marital status, and all that stuff you would put on an employment application. But to be able to know who you are, really.

God knows who you are. He knows you better than you know yourself. He made you. If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, here is what God says about who you are:

1 John 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Who you are depends upon whose you are. John has just finished a section in verses 18-29 in chapter 2, detailing how to determine whose you are. He sums it up in verse 23:

1 John 2:23

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

Whose you are depends upon your relationship with Christ. If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, by receiving him as Lord and Savior, by trusting in his grace, then you are of God. If you deny Jesus, then you are not of God. It's pretty cut and dried.

This leads John to make the incredible statement in 3:1 that we are "the children of God."

Growing up, it was always fun to be a part of a group. We used to form neighborhood clubs to have a group to belong to. We would start the club of all the kids in the neighborhood over three feet tall. Or the club of all kids who owned roller skates. But when we formed the club, the first thing we did was try to keep people out. It was for boys only; no girls were allowed. It was fifth graders only; fourth graders, make your own club. Then you had to know the secret knock and the secret password, the secret handshake, the secret whistle. Soon, we would have so many regulations that no one could join.

So we would make a different club.

God's family is not that way. There is only one way in, and the rules don't change once you are there. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His love remains constant. We may falter from time to time, but his love does not. And what a love it is. It makes us new. It makes us free, genuinely free. It gives us life—eternal life. And so much more.

Most of all, his love makes us who we are. We are children of God. Far too often, we depart from God's path for our lives simply because we forget who we are. We live as if we belong to this world, sometimes even as if we are enemies of God. Don't do that! If you know Christ, you are a child of God. Live like it.

#### Take Five

1. List three things that are different about your life because you belong to Christ.

2. List three things you are going to do today because you belong to Christ—then do them!

## *1 John 3:2*

You can't imagine what's coming!

I remember my first real bicycle: a red Schwinn two-wheeler with white wall tires and no training wheels! I couldn't wait to show it to my friends at school, but there was one problem. I couldn't ride it because my feet wouldn't quite reach the pedals. I tried to describe it to my friends, but my words couldn't do it justice. Eventually, I had to tell them, "Just wait. You're not going to believe how great it is!"

John has the enthusiasm of a seven-year-old with a new bicycle, and then some. He tells believers what I told my friends, "Just wait. You're not going to believe how great it is!"

1 John 3:2

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

John repeats what he said in verse 1, that in Christ, we become the children of God. As impressive as that truth is, that's only the beginning.

"What we will be has not yet been made known."

John recognized one of the great truths that every believer holds dear: we look forward to the day we will be together with Jesus in heaven. Our human curiosity leads to the question: What will that be like? What will it be like to walk on streets of gold? What will it be like



to meet heroes of the faith like Moses, Peter, and Paul? Most importantly, what will it be like to see Jesus?

John acknowledges that we are limited in our finite human understanding. We cannot yet fully know what it will be like. It goes beyond our human ability to comprehend. We have glimpses of it in the New Testament. John describes the New Jerusalem in Revelation. Paul explains how we now see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). Like looking through a smoky piece of glass, we see shadows, but we are limited to what we can fully comprehend. We don't have human words to describe it.

That's how great it is!

Anyone who has ever had to wear glasses knows the feeling of the first time you walk outside with corrective lenses. The trees have leaves! You read street signs from the street! People look the same twenty feet away as they do when you are standing right beside them.

Correcting your vision opens up all kinds of possibilities you never thought possible, and the strangest thing is that you didn't notice it before. You had no idea what you weren't seeing because you had never seen it.

That's part of our problem with heaven. What we see now is distorted by our limited understanding. We cannot conceive of eternity—time without end—much less what it means to be standing in the presence of Christ.

But what we can know is that it will be great. What we have now is tremendous. We are children of God. What we will have then is even greater. We can live confidently, knowing that what we look forward to is far beyond anything we can imagine. Or, put another way, think of the very best thing you know, the most fulfilled you have ever been, the greatest joy you have ever experienced. Heaven will be even better than that.

How can that be? John sums it up in one statement: We will see Jesus as he is. We can live by faith today, knowing we will see Jesus by sight one day. I don't know everything about heaven. I can't tell you everything that will be there. This side of glory, I don't think anyone can. But I do know this. Jesus will be there, which means it will be great!

Christians can live lives of faithful confidence today because we know what lies ahead tomorrow.

## Take Five

1. What are five things you look forward to doing in heaven?
2. Name one thing you will do differently today knowing what is waiting for you in heaven.

## *1 John 3:3-10*

This is serious.

Newscasters deliver the news. However, there are times when they want your attention. The news report is preceded by a clear message that this is "Breaking News"—news just now coming to their attention that you need to know. Or, there are the emergency news reports; the newscaster breaks into the middle of Wheel of Fortune to tell you that the weather service has sighted a tornado in your area.

It's incredible how many people get upset about those. "Thanks for the weather info, but I want to know if that guy kept the million-dollar wedge!" But if a tornado is about to hit your house, it doesn't matter if Vanna is about to reveal the next letter in the puzzle. If nothing else, you need to get under the couch.

John wanted his readers to understand the serious nature of the truth about sin. The letter addresses sin first as a problem solved. Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin. If we confess our sin by faith, he forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

The simplicity of that statement should not obscure the seriousness of the situation. Faith may sound so simple that we might find ourselves tempted to think that sin is no big deal. That's not the case. Sin is serious business. To emphasize the point, John makes the same statement twice, in verses 3-6 and 7-10. He comes to the same conclusion twice:

1 John 3:6, 10

6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

A teaching in the New Testament era implied that it didn't matter how you lived as long as you understood the truth. John did not want to leave any misunderstanding that our forgiveness in Christ implies any such thing. He makes no bones about it. Sin is serious business. According to verse 4, the nature of sin is lawlessness, a transgression of God's law, a violation of God's command. In verse 8, John goes one step further, writing that sin is of the devil, and the person who sins is of the devil. That's as serious as you can get.

John then points out that Jesus came to defeat sin and its effects. Verse 5 describes how Jesus came (appeared) to take away our sins. Verse 8 describes how Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil—serious business. Jesus came to destroy sin—not to excuse it, not to wink at it, but to destroy it. If that's why Jesus came, how could any follower of Christ desire to continue in sin?

When we sin as Christians, it goes against our very nature, against who we are. When we see what sin is, we don't want anything to do with it. The blinders come off. We see how sin hurts and destroys us and those we love. We see how sin grieves God. We want to get away from it as fast as possible.

I heard a man give his testimony of how God had saved him from a lifestyle of drugs and alcohol. A friend who was not a believer asked him how he could give all of that up. He replied, "Hey, I still do all the drugs I want, drink all the booze I want, and run around all I want." So what's the difference, his friend asked. He told him, "The difference is, I don't want any of that stuff anymore."

Sin is serious, which brings us back to the beautiful truth John has already proclaimed in his letter. We see sin for what it really is and know the way out. Sin is serious, but God's grace is greater still. We know a better way.

#### Take Five

1. Write down at least one impact of sin you have experienced in your life.

2. Recognizing the danger of sin, pray specifically that God would give you the wisdom and strength to avoid that sin (and its effect) in the future.

## *1 John 3:11-15*

Live what you believe.

For some stores, it is easy to determine what they sell by the store's name. Toys R Us sold toys. Batteries and Bulbs sells batteries and bulbs.

Retailers whose names are not quite as specific work very hard to make known what they sell. The name McDonald's doesn't immediately say fast food hamburgers, except for the fact that they have spent billions of dollars marketing themselves as precisely that. When you walk into a McDonald's, you aren't expecting to buy batteries and bulbs. You are looking for a quarter-pounder with cheese. That's what they do.

John has identified the doctrinal core of Christian belief: God is light, and Jesus died for our sins. In the third chapter, he turns to the practical core of Christianity. Because of what we believe, this is what we do:

### 1 John 3:11

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

John repeats what he wrote in 2:7, a reminder that this was from the teaching of Jesus. John wasn't making this up. This was not some new philosophy. The teachings of Jesus were the same as the teachings God had proclaimed from the beginning of creation itself. In verses 12-15, John describes how this teaching goes back to the time of Adam and Eve, illustrated in the events that transpired between their sons, Cain

and Abel. What they needed to understand is precisely what we need to understand.

John wrote his letter because the church was getting into some difficult situations. Facing various heretical teachings from without and within, believers may have wondered what they could do. John's message was simple:

Go back to the beginning.

They did not need a new teaching to arrive at the answer. They already had what they needed in Jesus. They just needed to go back to the beginning.

We need to do the same. We will face many confusing teachings in our lives. People will come at us from all sides with "something better." When that happens, go back to the beginning, to the time you found Christ as your Savior. Remember why you followed Jesus.

In doing so, remember the message of Christ. You will quickly discover an important truth: you won't find anything better than what you already have in Jesus.

Our relationship with Christ has a genuine impact on the way that we live. We are not the same anymore. John sums up the effect in words it is impossible to misunderstand:

1 John 3:11

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

John is repeating what he heard Jesus teach.

John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Most of us have realized that when a product is advertised as "New and Improved," it's the same old product that costs more. New philosophies are just tired old heresies in bright new packages. There is nothing new under the sun.

The good news is that we don't need anything new. What we have in Christ is all we will ever need. Jesus tells us to love one another, to love each other as he loves us. If we know the salvation that only Jesus provides and live in that knowledge, that's what we will do. We will love one another.

### Take Five

1. List two important people in your life, and two people you have found difficult.
2. Beside each name, list one way you can love them as Jesus loves you.



## *1 John 3:16*

Good example.

I was trying to fix our treadmill, which needed a new belt. I called the manufacturer, who assured me it was a simple fix. They promised to send the necessary parts along with the complete installation instructions.

Everything arrived as promised, including the parts and very detailed instructions. The instructions came with drawings to show what I was supposed to do. Soon, though, I discovered a problem. Unfortunately, the instructions were not for the treadmill I own. It didn't even look the same.

So, I called the manufacturer. They were very sympathetic. Indeed, I did have the wrong instructions, but I had the right parts. Unfortunately, the company discontinued the treadmill, so they didn't have copies of the repair instructions. However, the voice on the phone assured me that the instructions they sent would be "close enough."

I discovered an important truth that day. "Close enough" is a very general phrase. I did finally get it fixed after several hours of trial and error. The examples in the instructions would have been a great help if I had owned that specific equipment. As it was, they might as well have been telling me how to fix a toaster oven.

We need clear examples in life. The problem is some of the examples we turn to don't fit. We see how people live their lives on TV and in the movies, but when we try to follow their example in our own lives, it's not even close to our reality.

This is particularly true when it comes to the most significant things in life, like love. The love portrayed in the media isn't even close to what we experience or need. So, what is love, really?

Good news! We have a perfect example of what love is. The Bible tells us about it in 1 John 3:16:

1 John 3:16

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Jesus's death on the cross shows us the ultimate example of love. He gave everything so that we could live. Love is not about what you get. It's about what you give. That's a difficult concept for us to grasp—it's different from anything we usually see. That's why we need an example. And we have one in Jesus.

Romans 5:8

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Knowing Jesus leads us to the conclusion John provides. We need to follow the example of Jesus. John knew many fellow believers would risk their lives to proclaim the gospel. We should be glad they did. Had they not risked and, in many cases, lost their lives in the cause of advancing the gospel, we likely would not know Christ today. The gospel message would have been silenced, the church would have withered away, and we would not know the saving message of Jesus.

They were willing to give their lives so their friends could hear. They were willing to give their lives so that we could hear. What will we be willing to do to make sure others can know Jesus? What are we willing to do to make sure our friends and neighbors know that same truth? What are we willing to sacrifice to make sure our world has an opportunity to hear the gospel? Are we willing to give? Are we willing to go?

That's what love is.

Take Five

What are three specific actions are you're willing to take this month to tell the people you love the truth about Jesus?

## *1 John 3:17-18*

Love is a verb.

In an early English grammar class, we learned the difference between nouns and verbs. Our teacher told us that verbs were action words, like "to see," "to eat," or "to run." I raised my hand and asked if "to sleep" is a verb. When I sleep, I don't do anything, so does that count as an action or not?

The teacher told me to see her after class. She said that to me a lot.

As the old saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." John tells believers not only to speak but to act.

### *1 John 3:17-18*

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Hate characterizes the world around us. It's a dog-eat-dog world, every man for himself. In the previous verses, John calls that the way of Cain, who killed his brother Abel in a jealous rage. Abel's death was the direct result of Cain putting himself first.

Our belief in Christ reverses that formula. John says we should be characterized by love, putting the needs of others above our own. He provides a specific example in verse 17: if you see someone in need and do nothing, how can God's love possibly live in you?

Living out the love of Christ is who we are as Christians. The world says, "Look out for yourself—nobody else will." The scripture says, "Love your neighbor as yourself, for such is the will of God." We should be known for our love. That is precisely what Jesus said: "This

is my commandment—that you love one another." That's pretty straightforward.

But what is that love?

When I bought my first car, I also purchased a Chilton manual. My dad had a whole collection of Chilton's for all his vehicles, so I assumed that was what you were supposed to do when you got a car. The manual describes all kinds of different car repairs and how to do them in your driveway.

I quickly discovered an important truth: having the manual didn't fix my car. Also, whoever was fixing their car in the driveway in the book had a much better-equipped driveway than I did. I had a wrench, a screwdriver, and a hammer. That didn't go very far when it came to the instructions provided by Mr. Chilton.

So when I needed a car repair, I used the manual to prop up the phone book when I called a mechanic. I didn't just need to know the instructions; I needed someone to do what the instructions said.

There is no question about the blessing of having the scripture. Knowing the word of God is one of the greatest things you can do.

But just knowing the word of God is not enough. The Bible is not written for that purpose. The Bible is written so that we can do what it says: know our need for Christ, receive his grace by faith, and serve the Savior who gave himself for us.

The love we have in Christ is more than a noun. His love is a love that calls us to action. What will you do today that will show the love you know in Christ to someone you know?

Take Five

Determine one thing you can do to show someone in your life the love of Christ and do it today.

## *1 John 3:19-22*

You can know the answer.

Everyone who has been in the third grade knows the feeling. Third grade, for most students, is the year when teachers begin to invite students to come to the chalkboard and solve a math problem in front of the class. I typically tried to avoid that scenario like the plague. My greatest fear was that my teacher would call on me. So, I learned the art of not making eye contact. I looked at my desk, at the door, at the trash can—anywhere but at the teacher until she called on someone else.

Then, one day, I realized I knew the answer to the problem. In a case of temporary insanity, I volunteered to go to the board and write out the answer. Somewhere between my desk and the chalkboard, the answer fell out of my head. I stood in front of the class, chalk in hand, with no idea what to write.

Not a great feeling. It felt much better sitting at my desk, knowing the answer but doing nothing. Believers of John's day had much the same feeling. In Jesus, they knew the answer but hesitated to share it with the world, fearing they might somehow lose the answer in the process.

John assured them, and the Bible assures us we can have confidence in Jesus.

### *1 John 3:19-22*

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we

receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

These verses describe the fact of our assurance, the importance of our assurance, and the result of our assurance in Christ.

We can know. The word John uses means we can be assured, persuaded, and convinced. Verse 20 describes the significance of that assurance.

Sometimes, in our humanness, we may doubt. We may wonder, "Am I saved?" Those doubts may occur because we falter somewhere along the way and stumble into sin. We may wonder because our eyes can't see beyond the physical world, whether the spiritual promises of Christ are true.

But scripture assures us of what we cannot see. Our hearts have partial knowledge; God has full knowledge. We may question, but God doesn't. When we know Christ as Savior, we can know our salvation is secure in him. This confidence is not a license to sin. We will stumble along the path of life, but we will not want to stay down in the mud. We know something better. We know our salvation is secure in Christ.

Assured of our security in Christ, we can have confidence in serving Christ. Despite the circumstances that might come our way, we can stand firm in our faith.

Robert and Mary Moffat were early missionaries but saw no results of their labor for years: no converts, no new church members, nothing. The directors of their mission work in London began questioning whether they should stay on the field or come home. Perhaps the mission should be discontinued due to a lack of response.

A friend wrote to Mrs. Moffat asking what they could send to help with the mission. Mrs. Moffat requested cups and utensils for serving the Lord's supper, stating simply, "It will be sure to be needed."

As the supplies were shipped, the Lord moved through the Moffat's work, and six people came to Christ, forming the nucleus of a new church. The items for serving the Lord's Supper arrived just one day before the first planned celebration of the Lord's Supper in this new congregation.

It would have been easy for the Moffats to give up their mission to question their effectiveness. But they stayed the course. They continued in confident service, knowing the Lord was there, even when circumstances seemed to say otherwise.

We can know the same thing. Even when circumstances dictate otherwise, we know that the Lord is here. Even when our heart seems to tell us that we cannot serve, we can know the truth. You can serve God in confident assurance.

Take Five

1. Write three questions you have for God.
2. Write three things you would do if God answered your questions. Then do them! God has answered our questions in Jesus!

## *1 John 3:23-24*

Here's the plan.

I remember backyard football. Kids in the neighborhood gathered in someone's backyard, and we had the Super Bowl, at least the Super Bowl of our block. Every play was a "big play." Whoever was quarterback would bring us into the huddle, and we would devise pass routes and blocking schemes that would make Andy Reid proud.

And then it wouldn't work.

So we would gather back in the huddle and do it all again. Sometimes, explaining the play in the huddle took longer than running it, but we would run it anyway.

And it wouldn't work again.

Third down, last chance, and someone would say, "Okay, here's the plan." And they would devise a foolproof, no-lose play that would end all plays.

"I'm going to throw you the ball. You catch it and run."

Sure enough, it worked. With everything simplified, we had a winning play.

1 John simplifies things for us as Christians. Sometimes, we wonder how we are to live our lives and what we are supposed to do. John repeats what he remembers Jesus saying to him and the disciples when they had the same question.

1 John 3:23-24

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.



And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

I like a plan, especially when it is easy to understand. Jesus gives us the plan: Believe in Him and love others like He does.

No doubt, John remembers when he heard the plan from Jesus. On that day, religious leaders had approached Jesus with a question they thought would surely trip him up. They asked him to name the greatest commandment. This was sure to, at the very least, start an argument. The Pharisees were the self-proclaimed experts on all the religious law. They argued endlessly among themselves about all kinds of minutia. No matter what Jesus said, he would make someone mad. It was a question he couldn't get right.

Or so they thought.

Matthew 22:37–40

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

I'm guessing John remembered the look on the faces of the Pharisees that day. Now, he restates what Jesus said. In this passage describing how we can know that we know God, John says one way is to look at our life and see if we are following his command.

Do we believe in Christ and love each other like he told us?

That makes the plan easy to understand. First, we have to ask ourselves: Do we believe in the name of Jesus? John was restating what Jesus had said, quoting from the book of Deuteronomy: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

We have to ask ourselves, "Do I believe in Jesus with everything I am?"

Then, we must ask ourselves, "Do I love my neighbor like myself?" Do I care about other people as much as I care about myself? If we believe in Jesus, we will do as he commanded us to do—we will love one another. Because God loves us and because God loves others, Jesus

commands us to love others. If we are following Christ, that's what we'll do. It's where we will feel most at home.

I remember when I took our cat to the vet. It was while she was just a kitten, and I made the mistake of taking her out of her pet carrier too soon. She took one whiff and one quick listen and realized that dogs were there, too. That wasn't the place for her. So she climbed to the first high spot she could find, which just happened to be the top of my head. No dogs up there. She was comfortable again, but I wasn't doing all that well. I either had to decide to wear a cat for a hat for the rest of our visit or put her back in her carrier where she could feel comfortable. I chose the carrier.

As Christians, we will feel most at home when we abide in Christ by living in obedience to him. We will be miserable when we live in disobedience to Christ. Nothing will work out right.

We will only find true satisfaction in the message of this passage: to believe in Christ and love one another. Abide in Christ, grow in Him, and love one another; that is the only place you will truly feel at home.

#### Take Five

1. Think of one way that you can grow in your walk with Christ today.
2. Think of one way you can love someone in your life today like Jesus loves you.
3. Do both things today.

## *1 John 4:1-3*

Know the truth.

I have always been fascinated by space exploration. As a child, I followed every mission NASA undertook. I remember seeing a moon rock up close in a museum. I anticipate with great interest all that scientists will discover from the samples NASA retrieved from an asteroid.

I'm glad they have people smarter than me working on that. When my grandchildren bring me a rock and ask me what it is, after much deliberation, I usually pronounce, "Yep. That is a rock."

It's important to know what you have, not just when it comes to rocks. The Christians of John's day found themselves bombarded with all kinds of ideas claiming to be the truth. In I John 4, John writes that they must be careful to discern what is the truth and what is not. He provides them with a simple test that we can use today.

### *1 John 4:1-3*

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Everything that sounds good is not the truth.

The Christians of John's day, like believers today, were bombarded with all kinds of false information. John writes a simple command:

Don't believe everything you hear. Don't get caught up in every new philosophy that comes along. They may have a slick presentation; it may sound perfect, but don't believe it.

In the second part of verse 1, John explains why we should guard what we believe. False prophets are in the world. In the next verse, John gives the solution. We will hear every kind of theology and philosophy bantered about. It almost seems like there is somebody somewhere who believes just about anything.

But that doesn't mean we have to believe it. We need to hear the warning that all kinds of false teachings will surround us. We are not to become anxious or worry about it. Scripture provides a simple test to know what is true. Just ask yourself the question: What do they believe about Jesus?

Everyone that believes Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. John notes two essential truths that must be a part of that belief: the belief must be that Jesus is the Christ, that the same Jesus, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary, raised in Nazareth, who taught and performed miracles throughout Judea, who died on the cross and rose again—this same Jesus is the Christ.

The second part of the belief is that this same Jesus Christ has come in the flesh—not appeared to be flesh, or only claimed to be God, but this same Jesus was and is who he said he is—the Son of God in the flesh.

To claim that Jesus was who he said he was means to accept his teachings and commands. You cannot truthfully claim that Jesus is the Christ and then not follow the scriptures. So, if someone claims that Jesus is the Christ but their teaching somehow denies the scripture, they have not genuinely claimed that Jesus is the Christ. The test is what they believe about Jesus. That's the foundation of everything they teach and do.

It is like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. This famous bell tower in Italy is known worldwide as one of the greatest architectural mistakes of all time. Construction began in the 12th century but halted when the builders realized they had made the foundation too shallow to support the building. Over the next two hundred years, builders tried to fix the structure, but with no success. Construction concluded in the 14th century, two hundred years after it began, with no success in correcting structural problems. Today, the tower leans 21 feet out of plumb.

The building won't stand straight if the foundation isn't right. John writes that belief is the same. If the foundation isn't Jesus, it isn't true. You can know the truth when you see it.

Take Five

1. Identify three common teachings that are not true because they disagree with what the Bible says about Jesus.

2. How can you avoid incorporating those teachings in your life?

## *1 John 4:4-6*

God is bigger than your fear.

The people receiving John's letter were afraid. They had reason to be. Because of their faith in Christ, people were trying to kill them. At the very least, they wanted to discredit, destroy, or run them out of town. The believers were not sure if they could make it.

John was. He writes that, though what they faced was fearsome, they need not be afraid. Neither do we. The God we serve is bigger.

### *1 John 4:4-6*

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

How could they know that they would survive? How could they know that the false teachings would not defeat the gospel? First of all, because they could know they were of God. Despite what circumstances might appear, God was with them. Despite what the false teachers might claim, God was with them. No one could change that or take it away. They could have confidence because God was with them.

When I was young, I listened to the radio before going to school. That was because my mom and dad had left for work. I had about thirty minutes alone at the house before leaving for school. The radio provided background noise, a calming effect on most days, but for

some reason, the station seemed to choose that time to broadcast police bulletins. Knowing that an escaped prisoner was roaming the streets of my hometown was not what a nine-year-old needed to hear alone in the house. Those mornings were thirty minutes of terror. Every noise was the escaped convict breaking into our house.

When Mom and Dad were home, it didn't matter what the radio said. I never worried about it. Truthfully, I never listened to the police reports. Whatever happened, I knew Mom and Dad would take care of me.

Sometimes, this world can be terrifying. We look around, and all that we see is agony and despair. In those times, we need to remember we are not alone. When we know Christ as our savior, our God is always there. Not only is he with us, but he also has the power to take care of our problems. He can protect us and save us from the evils of this world. We do not have to live in fear. We can live in the confident knowledge that our God is here.

The commentator Henry Alford describes this as "faith outrunning sight." What we see in this world can be terrifying, but what we know by faith is that our God is bigger. Jesus put it this way: I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

Whatever you face today, you can know that God is bigger.

#### Take Five

1. List your top three concerns.
2. Beside each concern, write "My God is bigger." Because he is!

## *1 John 4:7-12*

Love one another.

"Love one another." That may be one of Jesus's best-known statements during his earthly ministry. John certainly remembered it. He recorded the statement in his gospel (John 13:34) and quoted the statement twice in 1 John (3:11; 4:7). In 1 John 4:7-12, John provides an extended explanation of why this matters.

Why should we love one another? Some of the "anthers" in our lives don't do very lovable things. Shouldn't we be able to smack them around, at least sometimes? At the very least, we should be able to love a few people less than others. That kid who put Jello in my shoe in the fourth grade deserves less of my affection. He deserves Jello in his shoe. I had to wear tennis shoes that smelled like lemon-lime for a week.

John, however, is precise.

### *1 John 4:7-8*

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Not only should we love one another, but if we don't, we deny the God we claim to serve. Why? Because God is love. In verses 9-11, John describes the depth of God's love for us. God sent his only Son for us, without which we would be without hope. Jesus stepped out of heaven into our dirty, grimy, sinful world, knowing that he would face mistreatment, ridicule, and crucifixion. Why would Jesus come into



our world knowing all that? Because there was no other way that we might be saved.

He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). John summarizes the reality.

1 John 4:11-12

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

If God loved you that much, if God abides in you, if God's love abides in you, then you must love one another. We have no other option.

I remember when a member of our church returned from the Vietnam War. He had been a POW. That's a big deal in any war, but if you grew up in the '60s, you remember how significant POWs were in that era. People wore metal bracelets engraved with the name of a POW, vowing never to take them off until that soldier returned home. Some wore those bracelets for decades.

This guy was a real live hero, and our church celebrated his return. People packed the church on the Sunday night when he spoke, thanking those who had prayed for him. He described the horrible conditions he and others had faced during their experience. As I listened, I could only think about how he and other soldiers who had paid the ultimate price had put everything on the line in service to the nation. Through the years, as I have performed funerals for veterans, I have always expressed gratitude to their families and watched with awe as current and retired soldiers performed military honors in tribute to the veterans and their families. I've never left one of those services without a renewed conviction of how we should never take our nation's freedoms for granted.

When I think of Jesus and what he did for me, I am in awe and have great conviction. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). I don't deserve that, but He did it anyway. His love for me means I should love others—even the kid who put Jello in my shoe. If Jesus loved him, I should, too. You can love the "anthers" in your life, too.

## Take Five

1. List five “anothers” in your life.
2. Beside each name, write one way you will show Christ’s love to them this week.

## *1 John 4:13-17*

The evidence is clear.

I love a good legal thriller. An innocent person faces imprisonment, or a guilty criminal stands to go free when new evidence appears at the last second. The innocent go free. The guilty go to jail. The final credits roll.

If only life worked that way. Sometimes, things are not as clear as they seem on TV.

But sometimes, things are obvious. John wrote the letter we call 1 John, in part, to provide assurance to believers of the first century. They questioned the reality of their salvation. It's not hard to see why. Believers of the first century faced tremendous persecution, even death, from the day they professed Christ as their Savior. According to traditional Christian history, all the disciples except for John faced martyrdom because they were preaching about Jesus. Though not executed, John experienced exile on a deserted island. That didn't seem to scream "victory in Jesus." How could believers know if their faith was real?

In chapter 4, like an attorney giving final arguments in a case, John provides evidence that their faith in Christ was not in vain. They could know without question the validity of their faith and victory in Jesus.

The first evidence is in their love for each other.

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Our love for each other is clear evidence that we know the love of Christ. That love is evidence that we have been born of God and know God. In verse 13, John moves to another clear piece of evidence:

1 John 4:13

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is evidence that we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. We can know the reality of our salvation because God is with us. John then lists another piece of evidence:

1 John 4:14-15

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

When we testify about Christ's work in our lives, we provide evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, that God abides in us, and that we abide in God. Our witness is evidence of the validity of God's promise.

John concludes by returning to his original evidence.

1 John 4:16-17

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

The evidence is clear: the love of God in us, our love for each other, the presence of God's Spirit in us, and our testimony to God's work in our lives all prove that the promise we know in Christ is true.

When I was ten, I spent the night at a friend's house. His family was having pizza for dinner. I had never eaten pizza. Yes, I lived a sheltered life. I wasn't sure about this strange round thing covered in tomato sauce and cheese. I didn't like tomatoes. The only cheese I ate came in square slices out of plastic wrapping.

But my friend told me to try it. He took a bite and said, "See, it's really good." So I took a bite. I've been eating pizza ever since. Once I had his testimony and the evidence of my taste buds, I was convinced.

Our world needs evidence that Jesus is real. They approach faith with the same trepidation I had with pizza. They haven't experienced Jesus as we have. We need to show them that what we have in Christ is real. How do we do that? Through our love for each other, through our testimony to God's work, and through the presence of Christ in our lives. The evidence is clear.

### Take Five

Write down at least one of each of the following evidences in your life:

1. Describe one way you have shown God's love to someone else.
2. Describe something God has done in your life this week.
3. Describe how you know Christ is with you.

## *1 John 4:18-21*

Live without fear.

In my one week on the football team at my high school (I didn't make the team), our coach told us we needed to approach every play the same way: with no fear. I had some difficulty assimilating that plan. First of all, I was afraid of failure. There were so many things that could go wrong. I could miss the pass or the tackle, be out of position, or, in some other way, cause the team to fail. Looking like a failure did not increase my chances of making the squad.

However, failing to make the team was not my greatest fear. We had tryouts the first week of school. Everyone else had a more significant growth spurt over the summer than I did. It didn't help that this was the third year in the ninth grade for some of those guys. I knew I was scrawny, but it would do permanent damage if one of those guys hit me.

I decided to go out for the golf team. The only thing to fear there was my slice.

I had always dreamed about playing football. Fear eats dreams for lunch. John recognized that fear could paralyze the first-century Christians. They had plenty to fear: persecution, imprisonment, exile, and death were real possibilities for them. However, John knew the answer to their fear.

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

John concludes the fourth chapter by summarizing what he had said before, describing how our love for each other displays the love we know in Christ. He goes so far as to say:

1 John 4:19-20

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

The proof is in the pudding. We know love in Christ and that love will prove itself through our love for each other. John concludes with a final recognition:

1 John 4:21

And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Sometimes, it is tough to love others. Sometimes, we might even be afraid to do so. Will we appear weak? Will we somehow lose our position in life?

Those fears focus on the wrong thing. Instead of focusing on what we might lose, we should focus on what we already have in Christ. The love we know in Jesus is something we cannot lose.

We can love others because Christ loves us.

Take Five

1. Name three things you fear in life.
2. For each fear, describe how Christ conquers it. Try to find a verse of scripture describing Jesus' power over your specific fears.

## *1 John 5:1-5*

V-I-C-T-O-R-Y!

Cheerleaders have a tough job at sporting events. They are there to cheer on their team and rally the fans, no matter what is happening in the game. I have been to games where the cheerleaders needed clarification, like when our cheerleaders were leading the chant of DE-FENSE! DE-FENSE! It would have been a great cheer, except our team had the ball. Or the time they were chanting "V-I-C-T-O-R-Y, that's our football battle cry" when our team was behind 48-0. On that particular occasion, though, it didn't matter. Most of the fans had already left the stands.

Cheerleading aside, we all want our team to win, or at least to be cheering for the team that will win. It's no fun to be a fan of the losing team.

John identifies the believer's claim to victory in Christ in 1 John 5. He focuses on three tests, identified by John R. W. Stott as obedience, love, and belief. Verses 1-5 identify these three tests and then describe the outcome:

1 John 5:4-5

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John uses two forms of the word for "overcomes." The first, in verse 4, describes what God has already accomplished. When we are born of God, we overcome the world. It's not something we are waiting to



happen. It has already occurred. It's a done deal. When on the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished." He wasn't making a hopeful statement. Jesus paid our debt in full. Jesus completed the victory. We live in the reality that Jesus has overcome the world.

The second usage of the word describes a continuous action in which the believer overcomes the world. Christ's sacrifice on the cross completed our victory, and victory continues in the life of every believer.

John describes how this plays out in the believer's life. Because of our love for God, we love others. Our love for God defines our love for others, revealed through keeping His commands. John describes the same victory revealed in the Ten Commandments. The first commandments describe our fidelity to God; the final commandments describe our responsibility to others. How we treat others is an outgrowth of our belief in God.

In this, John writes, we overcome the world. Instead of defeat, we live in victory. That's not just a hopeful cheer. It is our reality, now known by faith and one day fully revealed by sight. Stott summarizes John's reasoning this way:

Christian believers are God's children, born from above. God's children are loved by all who love God. Those who love God also keep his commands. They keep his commands because they overcome the world, and they overcome the world because they are Christian believers, born from above. (John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 175.)

Our victory in Christ is real, and your obedience to Jesus' command reveals your victory in Christ. You can live in victory.

#### Take Five

Develop a statement celebrating your victory in Jesus. Write it down and tape it to your bathroom mirror where you will see it every morning before you begin your day. You have victory in Jesus!

## *1 John 5:6-12*

If the testimony is true, the outcome is sure.

I have only been involved in two trials in my lifetime, once as a juror and once as a witness. They were very different experiences. As jurors, the court tasked us with listening to testimony and deciding whether or not it was credible. As a witness, the court tasked me with giving credible testimony. I served on the jury several years before being called as a witness in another trial, so I wondered what the jury thought about my testimony.

It's not like it is on TV. The attorneys in the trial where I was a juror did a good job, but the trial itself would not have made for good television. I would have changed the channel. Truthfully, I would have changed the channel for my testimony as well. Not exactly riveting stuff.

What John describes in 1 John 5 truly is riveting. It is the most crucial testimony ever given. He describes a threefold witness:

### *1 John 5:7*

For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

Not all scholars agree on the specifics, but John appears to refer to three realities: two historical events and one continuing presence. The historical events are the baptism of Jesus and his death on the cross, represented by the water and the blood. Jesus's baptism began his earthly ministry, complete with the Father's recognition of the Son. His earthly ministry concluded with his death on the cross, in which the

Father turned his back on the Son as Jesus took on the punishment of the sins of all who would believe in him.

Now, the Spirit gives testimony to the Risen Savior. John writes that these three unmistakable witnesses provide complete proof for his conclusion.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

In the trial where I was a juror, the prosecution provided numerous witnesses, each with compelling testimony. The defense provided nothing. No witnesses, no closing argument—nothing. I'm not sure of the reasoning. It felt like a complete waste of the court's time, not to mention mine. It's not hard to guess the jury's decision. We found the defendant guilty. If all the evidence points to guilt, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, only one decision makes sense.

Or so I thought. The jury spent two hours in deliberation. I'm not exaggerating. I don't know if they thought we were in an episode of Law and Order or what, but they seemed determined to waste the entire day. I kept thinking to myself, "There's nothing to argue. All the evidence points to one decision. Exactly what is there to discuss?"

All the evidence in scripture points to one truth: whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life. There is no other decision that fits the evidence. The testimony is true; the outcome is sure. You can be sure that what you know in Christ is true.

Take Five

Write down three evidences that the scripture is true. For example, no finding in archeology has ever refuted any fact in the Bible (now you only have to list two!).

Describe one decision you will make this week because you know the Bible is true.

## *1 John 5:13-15*

Know that you know.

I took a class on how to take a test. I was attempting to get into a graduate program, and to do so, I had to pass an entrance exam, the GRE. Similar to entrance exams like the SAT and ACT, the GRE measures proficiency in educational disciplines like math and reading. I hadn't taken a math or geometry class in several years, so I wasn't sure if I could solve for the area of a triangle or any other shape. I was a little more secure in my reading ability, but I remembered the nightmare of vocabulary tests on the SAT and ACT. "Lights is to wingspan as spaghetti is to \_\_\_\_\_." I had no idea, so I took a class designed to prepare people for the GRE. The course reviewed some basic disciplines (the area of a triangle is one-half of the base times the height) and provided some tactics for taking the test. One suggestion was not to struggle with a single question too much. Our final score came from the number of correct answers, not the number of answers missed. In other words, missing one question would not hurt you as much as running out of time and missing credit for twenty answers you could have gotten right. Our instructor told us, "If you don't know the answer, make your best guess and move on. Don't get stuck for an hour trying to remember the formula for the area of a trapezoid." This turned out to be good advice; I still can't remember what a trapezoid is.

John concludes his letter by reminding his readers of the reason he wrote the epistle. He didn't want them to become paralyzed because they didn't know a crucial truth: anyone who knows Christ has eternal life.

1 John 5:13-15

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

John wrote his letter because of a false teaching prevalent during the first century that caused believers to doubt their salvation. Facing persecution for their faith, it is not hard to understand that they might have questions. John leaves no doubt. If you believe in the name of the Son of God, you have eternal life. Period.

Knowing this led to another important truth. If we believe in Christ, we can have confidence that God hears our prayers. Our confidence is not only in our eternity with Jesus. It is for the present moment. We know He is here with us now. No doubt, John remembered Jesus's example of how to pray. As we seek God's will, we know He will do it. As sure as we are of heaven, we can be sure of God's presence with us daily.

John identified the reason for writing his gospel in John 20:31.

John 20:31

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John wrote his gospel so that people might believe in Jesus. He wrote his letter so that those who believe in Christ might have confidence in their faith. Knowing what we know in Christ, we can have confidence in Him. We know He is here right now, that He will be here tomorrow, and that we will be with Him for all eternity. You can live your life in that confidence.

Take Five

If you had a friend who was questioning the validity of their faith, what would you tell them?

## *1 John 5:16-19*

### The Winning Team

My Little League coach used to tell us to play like winners. That was tough to do when it was the bottom of the ninth, and we were behind by ten runs. He told us not to worry about the score. "Go up to bat and swing like your run could change the game," he told us. "Because it might." He wasn't kidding. The way kids pitched in my Little League, it wasn't unusual for a team to walk in fifteen or more runs in an inning. We had some long and high scoring games.

As Yogi Berra reportedly said, "It ain't over 'til it's over." Whether he actually said this is up for debate, but the meaning is not. No one knows who will win until the game ends, so keep swinging the bat.

John wasn't managing a baseball team, and he wasn't merely providing encouraging quotes to prop up the sagging emotions of believers facing horrible persecution. John told believers to keep serving the Lord because they knew Jesus had already won.

### 1 John 5:18

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

This verse appears in a passage much debated amongst scholars. In verses 16-17, John appeals to believers to continue praying for each other as they faced the various temptations of the world. He mentions sins that don't lead to death and sins that do. Precisely what John refers to here is not completely clear. He refers to a specific issue facing the readers of his letter so they would know what he describes in these

verses. Since we don't know the precise details, we can only speculate, using other scriptures as our guide. John is certainly not limiting the power of prayer, nor is he limiting the people for whom we should pray.

John's focus is on believers, who, in verse 18, he describes as those born of God. They will not keep on sinning. Notice he doesn't say that they won't sin. The end of the first chapter of his letter reminds believers to confess their sins to God and find forgiveness and cleansing. The key is that the believer will not keep on sinning. Sin does not become their way of life. There is no one more miserable than a believer living outside God's will. The non-believer does not realize what they are missing; the believer, however, knows what sin is and its devastating nature.

John encourages believers to live like the person God has created them to be. God is protecting them; Satan cannot defeat them. Live like it. When you know Christ, He lives in you. Satan cannot change that reality. Live like the Spirit of God lives in you because he does. You can live like you are on the winning team because you are. Live like it.

#### Take Five

What would you do different today if you knew you couldn't lose? In Christ, the victory is won! Name one thing you can do differently today knowing that Christ has won.

## *1 John 5:20*

How do you know?

A young man asked me a question one evening after I finished leading a bible study with a group of college students. His family lived in the Middle East and faced tremendous persecution because of their faith in Christ. He asked me, "How can I believe in a God who would allow that to happen?" Tough question.

John faced the same question in his day. 1 John is written, in part, to assure believers of their security in Christ. Believers in the New Testament era faced almost unimaginable persecution, practically from the first day of their conversion. Mistreated, beaten, and humiliated, believers faced losing their jobs, homes, and families. Angry mobs forced them from their communities. Many had died excruciating, horrible deaths, all because they followed Christ as their savior. Amid this persecution, John writes of their eternal security in Christ.

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

Their tormentors might take their livelihoods, homes, and loved ones. Believers might even lose their lives.

But no one could take away what they had in Jesus. They could know that they had eternal life. John wrote his letter to assure them of this fact.

But how could they know? Circumstances seemed to indicate otherwise. It's hard to keep the faith when beaten, bloodied, and facing execution.



John concludes his letter with words of conviction and assurance, three things that every believer can know. First, believers can know that they were born of God (v. 18). Their new life in Christ revealed itself in their lives. They did not keep on sinning. They might falter, but their faith changed their focus. Instead of focusing on themselves, their eyes remained squarely on Jesus.

The second affirmation initially sounded less optimistic. Believers can know that Satan is alive and well in the world (v. 19).

1 John 5:19

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Why did terrible things keep happening? This world lies in the power of the evil one. Satan continues to wage war against the kingdom of God.

However, the third affirmation trumps Satan's power.

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

We who follow Christ can know that we have eternal life. No matter what this world does to us, we are safe in the arms of Jesus. Our eternity is secure, but what about right now? Things look pretty bleak. We know that Satan is alive and well in this world. We see the evidence in the evil around us. We see the evidence in his attacks on our own lives. We know we will be in heaven one day, but how can we stay strong right now?

Because we know the Son of God has come. He gives us understanding. We can know the one who is trustworthy. Satan's most potent attacks cannot take that away. Jesus, alone, is the true God and eternal life.

As Stephen faced losing his life because of his faith in Christ, God opened his eyes.

Acts 7:55-56

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Whatever you face today, you can know He is the true God and that you have eternal life in Christ. No matter what Satan throws in your path, you can know that Jesus is the true God and eternal life. No matter what.

Take Five

1. Write down five things you know about Jesus.
2. For each thing you know about Jesus, identify one thing you can do today because of what you know.

## *1 John 5:21*

Don't touch.

If you travel to the amusement park Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri, don't miss the hole in the wall. Hidden behind one of the attractions (Grandfather's Mansion, if I remember correctly), a large sign warns, "Don't Look In This Hole!" pointing to a knot hole in the wood. Of course, practically every person who walks by looks in the hole, making for great photos of people not following the rules. In this case, the folks at Silver Dollar City don't mind. It's why they put up the sign in the first place, to make people want to look. It's like the classic experiment of placing children alone in a room and telling them not to eat the marshmallow on the plate in front of them. Almost every one of them eats the marshmallow. I probably would have done the same thing, and I don't even like marshmallows. Something about someone telling us not to do something makes us want to do it. For example, if I told you not to think about marshmallows, you would probably have difficulty avoiding the thought. You are probably thinking about them right now. Sorry about that.

The folks at Silver Dollar City don't mind people looking in the hole despite the sign to the contrary. They do, however, have other warning signs they want people to follow. Every ride cautions visitors not to ride if they have back problems or are pregnant. I appreciate the warning. I don't want to hurt my back, and I don't want someone going into labor in the seat next to me.

John concludes his letter with a word of warning. It is not of the hole-in-the-wall/marshmallow variety. This warning is one everyone should heed.

1 John 5:21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

John concludes his letter with a term of endearment, “little children.” John cares about the folks he writes as much as a parent would their child. Like any parent, he wants the best for them. He wants them to avoid the pitfalls and dangers in the world around them. All parents try to give their children the tools to do so. They impart such wisdom daily, such as when my mother told me, “Get out of the street!” not because she was trying to ruin our football game but because she knew how people drove in our neighborhood. Playing football in the street was not healthy for ten-year-olds, or thirty-year-olds, for that matter.

John’s warning is clear: keep yourselves from idols. Though he certainly would include any false gods made of wood or stone, his warning likely extends to anything that would take our eyes off the one true God. His warning grows out of the three affirmations that precede it: that we know we are of God, that we know Satan is alive and well in the world, and that we know Jesus, alone, is the true God (vv. 18-20).

Knowing what we know, turning to anything other than Christ, makes no sense. It would be like building a house out of Jell-O. You could try if you wanted. You could even create a partial wall. But no one is going to make a house out of Jell-O. Indeed, no one will live in a house built out of Jell-O. The first rainstorm would be a problem, not to mention the ant infestation.

John concludes his letter with a similar warning about anything that might divert your focus from Christ. Only Jesus is the true God and eternal life. Anything else is melted Jell-O.

Take Five

1. List three things you need to give up because they divert your attention from Jesus.
2. List three ways you can ensure that Jesus is your foundation in life.

*Thank You!*

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### **The Round Mountain**

Jim spent his summers exploring his grandfather's farm on the Round Mountain. This summer was different. Jim and his cousins make an important discovery and, in doing so, add a new twist to the storied history of Central Texas. The discovery may endanger their lives, but it may also prove to be the richest find in the annals of Lone Star treasure hunting. Or maybe not. Follow the pages of *The Round Mountain* and discover the treasures of friendship, loyalty, and a good rope.

### **The Cabin at Mt. Bonnell**

Growing up is hard enough, but what if your family might be involved in the most significant crime and cover-up in the history of Austin, Texas? Pete Dengar learns that making friends is tough; learning your true legacy can be even more complicated. Pete and his friends attempt to unravel an Austin mystery, navigate racial divides, and solve multiple decades-old murders, all while making plans for the next school dance. It's going to be a long semester.

### **Coming Soon: The Princess of Coryell County**

In the sequel to *The Round Mountain*, follow Jim's discovery of his roots as he finds the love of his life during his studies at Baylor University. Jim and Missy meet while on a geology field trip to the Round Mountain. Their relationship leads them to learn more about the Princess of Coryell County, a woman who may or may not be related to Jim. Her life and the relationship of Jim and Missy intertwine in a story of faith, adventure, and family.