

1 John



A PLAIN & SIMPLE BIBLE STUDY

BY MICHELLE MAXWELL NEBEL

Hi, friend!

I'm so glad you're here to study God's word. Over the years, I've really come to appreciate a plain & simple approach to Bible study. You see, I believe that the *whole counsel* of Scripture is for *all* believers – but too often, most of us let lots of things intimidate us away from simply studying the Bible for ourselves.

It's my hope and prayer that this method will draw you closer to God and allow you to see the beauty of His grand story.

Keeping things plain & simple means that you won't get a lot of funny stories or witty quips from me as you make your way through this six-week study of 1 John.

What you *will* get is a guided set of simple prompts to help you open your heart, open God's Word, then open your eyes, mind, and hands.

All you'll need is your Bible (or a Bible app) and this book. If you don't have access to a printer, you can view on your device and jot your answers in a notebook. For some questions, it might be helpful to have a resource like the notes section of a study Bible or the commentaries available freely at www.biblehub.com.

If you're doing this study with a group, each member should do the "Open Your Heart, Open God's Word, & Open Your Eyes" sections on their own before you meet together. Use the "Open Your Mind" questions to guide your discussion and read the suggested references aloud. Finally, close your time together with the "Open Your Heart" application questions, but assure members that no one has to share those responses with the group.

Let's get started!

With love,

Michelle

Week 1

Open Your Heart

Each week when you begin your time of study, pray that God would open your heart to the truth He has for you in His word. You might say:

Almighty God, creator of every good gift¹, thank you for the blessing of your Word. Help me to see these verses in a brand-new light, and make them plain and simple in my understanding. Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence in my life. Lead me in the truth, as Jesus promised you would². I trust you to give me wisdom to apply this Scripture to my life, and I thank you for what you have for me in these pages. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Open God's Word

Read 1 John 1:1-10.

Open Your Eyes

When we study the Bible, the first component of making it plain is to learn a little about the *context* of this letter. We want to know who wrote the passage, when & where it was written, who the original audience was, and where this passage fits into the big story of Scripture.

This information about context can be found in the introduction or study notes section of a Bible. If you're using technology, check out BibleGateway.com or BlueLetterBible.com for free access to lots of study helps! To save you some time, I'll share a brief overview of context here, but I encourage you to find even more on your own over the next few weeks.

1 John was most likely written by John, the beloved disciple, who also wrote the Gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation. It is dated by Bible scholars no later than the 90s A.D., and it was probably written from a region in modern-day Turkey where John was living and ministering.

After we understand the context, we move to what we can *observe* with our own two eyes. If you're new to the idea of observing a passage, consider these questions about the verses you just read. You may find it helpful to read the passage in more than one translation of Scripture.

¹ James 1:17

² John 16:13

Open Your Mind

Now we'll go a little deeper and consider questions of *meaning*. **What did this passage mean to the first audience?**

Notice how often John uses words like heard, seen, and touched. It's important for us to know that of the more-than-500 eyewitnesses to the resurrection³, John was the final living eyewitness. His testimony of what he experienced would have carried great weight with the people who read his letter.

Those words are also important in light of a heretical⁴ teaching known as Gnosticism (NOS-tuh-siz-um) that was present at the time. Gnostics taught that Jesus didn't have a physical body, and John's opening to this letter refutes that notion by emphasizing that the resurrection was real in a physical sense and was experienced by the apostles and eyewitnesses with all of their senses.

1. What does it mean that God is light? Consider John 1:4, John 8:12, and Psalm 119:105.

2. What does it mean to walk in the darkness? To walk in the light? Read 1 Thessalonians 5:5, John 3:20, and Acts 26:18

3. What does fellowship mean in this passage? (Look for who has fellowship with whom in this passage.)

³ 1 Corinthians 15:6

⁴ Heresy is a belief or teaching that runs counter to the true doctrines of the church. "Heretical teaching" means teaching that embraced one or more heresies.

“True Christianity is rooted in revelation and realized in relationship – with God and with other believers. This two-dimensional fellowship should be deepening in both directions. If you’ve been a Christian for a while, you should know God better than before. And you should be deepening your relationships with God’s people. Unless you’re in solitary confinement, you cannot be a growing Christian in isolation from other Christians.”

–Steven J. Cole

Open Your Hands

Finally, it’s time to *apply* a passage of Scripture. This is when everything we have seen, thought, and felt comes together—with the guidance of the Holy Spirit—to prompt us to action.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking⁵, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV) Every time we come to God’s Word, there is an opportunity for the Lord to teach us, to encourage us, or to correct us when we are in error.

The application questions suggested each week could be used with almost any passage from the Bible. If one of these questions resonates with you, use it often as the Lord nudges your heart.

1. When I think about my daily life, what lie have I been believing that this passage confronts as untrue?

2. What action(s) will I take, beginning now, because this passage is true?

⁵ sharply disapproving, or strongly criticizing

Week 2

Open Your Heart

Each week when you begin your time of study, pray that God would open your heart to the truth He has for you in His word. You might say:

Heavenly Father, I praise you for the work you have done and continue to do all around me. I want to walk in the light, so open my eyes to see your truth today. Convict my heart where it needs correction, and strengthen me where I am weak. Thank you for loving me enough to save me and thank you for promising never to leave me⁶. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Open God's Word

Read 1 John 2:1-17.

Open Your Eyes

To continue our examination of the *context* of 1 John, we can take up the question of the first audience. This letter lacks some of the hallmarks of other Biblical epistles, such as an opening that names the author and the recipient. However, knowing that it was written by John near the end of the first century allows us to conclude that this letter was likely sent to churches in the region surrounding Ephesus, where John lived at the time.

After your first reading, go back and *observe* by asking questions of the text. Pay attention to the words which are repeated in this passage. Then consider:

1. What reason does John give for writing this letter/sermon?

2. How do we know that we have come to know God – what evidence should we see?

⁶ Hebrews 13:5

3. If we hate a brother, what does this passage say about us?

4. Who does John address this letter to? What does he call the audience?

5. What does this passage tell us about God the Father?

6. What does this passage tell us about Jesus Christ?

Open Your Mind

As we dig deeper into Scripture, we go beyond what we can see at first glance and begin to put our minds to work. Questions of meaning – both what this meant to the first hearers, as well as what it means to us today – require us to focus on smaller details and then pull back to examine the bigger picture.

You may want to use a search engine, a study Bible, or a concordance to help answer some of these questions.

1. What does propitiation mean?

2. Why would John use phrases like, “that you may not sin,” “keep his commandments,” and “keeps his word,” but also go on to explain what happens if anyone *does* sin?

3. John talks about hating “a brother.” What does that mean? Who is our brother? Consider Mark 3:31-35, Hebrews 2:11-12, and Galatians 3:24-27.

4. What does it mean to “walk in the same way in which [Jesus] walked” (v.6)? Read John 15:10-14, 1 Peter 2:21-25, and Ephesians 5:1-2.

Open Your Hands

As we turn our attention to application, let me encourage you to make this personal. It's common for all of us, when we read verses that point to sin or prompt us to take an uncomfortable action, to find ourselves thinking about all the other people who need to hear the message. We might even find ourselves wishing to answer application questions with generalities, like “People should xyz.” Resist that urge!

Jesus taught, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in

your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye." (Luke 6:40-42)

Allow God's Word to invade your own heart and submit your conscience to the Holy Spirit for a true examination. Our ability to lovingly correct a brother or sister who is in error should always only come after we have been teachable, ourselves.

1. How does this passage impact your life when you are feeling the weight of a habitual sin or a sin which is a frequent temptation?

2. Examine your heart, your priorities, and what captures your attention – and compare them to verses 15-17. What "loves" do you need to renounce?

Week 3

Open Your Heart

Pray for God's blessing on your time studying His word this week.

Almighty God: Father, Son, and Spirit, thank you for everything you have taught me so far. Help me to read with fresh eyes, whether this is my first time or thirtieth time seeing these verses. It never stops amazing me that you want to have a closer relationship with me! I never want to take it for granted. You are good in everything you do, and I want everything I do to bring you glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Open God's Word

Read 1 John 2:18-29.

Open Your Eyes

This week, let's examine the context of the word that carries the most baggage in this book. If we want to study God's Word as the plain and simple truth that it is, we need to make every effort to come to this chapter without the images and notions that movies, books, and pop culture have given us. We don't need to be afraid of it, we just need to decide we are going to apply ourselves to understanding⁷.

Only John's letters (1 John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3 and 2 John 1:7) use the Greek word **ἀντίχριστοι (antichristos)**. Jonathan Edwards, a famous preacher in the 1700s, associated "the beast" of Revelation 13:11 with antichrist, and that's become a common association that you may have heard before, but there is no mention of "antichristos" in the Greek manuscript of the book of Revelation, even though it was inspired by the same Holy Spirit and penned by the same John who authored 1 John.

John makes it clear that many antichrists⁸—many people who will oppose the truth about who Jesus is, what He did on the cross, and His relationship to God the Father⁹—will exist. He also makes it clear that their mission is to deceive others¹⁰, but that we

⁷ Proverbs 2:2

⁸ 1 John 2:18

⁹ 1 John 2:22

¹⁰ 1 John 2:26

who have trusted in Christ as our only salvation have received the Holy Spirit¹¹ and can discern the truth.

Now, observe what the text says. You may want to underline or highlight words or phrases that jump out to you. Then answer these questions:

1. How does the Holy Spirit keep us safe from false doctrines?
2. What did the listeners/readers “hear from the beginning” (v. 24)? Why does John urge them to let what they heard continue to abide in them?
3. What reason are we given (in v. 28) to maintain a close relationship with Jesus?
4. What words are repeated in this passage?
5. What does this passage tell us about the character, actions, and will of God the Father and of Jesus Christ?

¹¹ 1 John 2:20

6. This passage is the first place in this book where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. What does this passage tell us about the Holy Spirit?

Open Your Mind

Consider what this passage meant to the first Christians who heard its message. John's audience had certainly experienced some sort of shift in the local body of believers (v. 19: "they went out from us"). We don't know the details, but we can gather that it must have shaken them enough that they needed to hear from this wise disciple. What do you think they would have taken the most comfort and encouragement from in this part of John's letter?

Now, let's consider what this means for us, the modern audience. The amazing nature of God's Word is that it endures. Across all times and in all places, His truth remains.

1. Why does John say it is the last hour (or the last time)? When we consider how many years ago this letter was written, would we still say we are living in the last hour? Read 1 Peter 1:3-5 and 1 Timothy 4:1.

2. What does it mean to describe some as "those who went out from us"? Does this refer to a person who leaves one church to go to another? Read Mark 9:38-40 and Matthew 13:24-30.

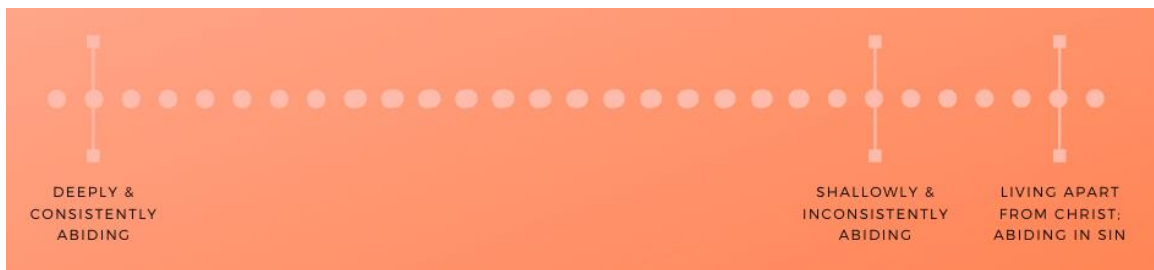
3. What does it mean to abide in Jesus? Consider John 15:1-10 and Galatians 2:20.

Open Your Hands

As you apply this passage to your own life, pray for wisdom and discernment.

1. Since we know from this passage that “in these last days” false teaching will be abundant, how can we be sure not to be led astray?

2. If you rate yourself on a sliding scale for how you’re abiding in Christ, where are you right now?



What actions do you sense God is leading you to take so that you can abide more fully in Jesus?

5. How should we show our love for others?

6. How may we reassure our hearts (or “be confident,” or “set our hearts at rest” depending on your translation)?

Open Your Mind

When we consider the meaning of a passage, it’s always important to ground our understanding in what the whole counsel of Scripture says. That’s why the “mind” section of our study includes references to other verses outside the book we are studying. As you become familiar with certain parts of God’s Word, you will find that it comes to mind as you study less familiar passages, illuminating and deepening your understanding. The Holy Spirit teaches us truth by showing us the connections between all the parts of God’s grand story.

1. What does it mean when John says that *what we will be has not yet appeared*? Read Matthew 17:1-2; Philippians 3:20-21; and 1 Corinthians 15:35-40, 44, 49, & 51-53.

2. Even though our human nature makes us all susceptible to sin and temptation, John contrasts those who make a practice of sinning with those who make a practice of righteousness. What does righteousness mean? Check a Bible dictionary or glossary, and read Genesis 15:6, Deuteronomy 6:25, 1 Kings 3:6, Matthew 6:1, and 2 Corinthians 5:21.

3. What does it mean to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters? Consider Matthew 12:48-50, Romans 12:9-13, and Philippians 2:3-4.

Then focus on the way John makes his point moving from verse 16, through 17 and then 18. Though he begins with the large concept of laying down a life, his example is about an 'everyday' occurrence of how we use our material goods. Does that change your understanding of what it means to lay down your life?

Salvation is easy for us, because it cost God so much. But the exhibiting of salvation in my life is difficult.

--Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*

Open Your Hands

What strikes you from this chapter that applies to you today? Is there a word, phrase, or idea which the Holy Spirit has used to prompt you? Consider these questions as you meditate on how to apply this truth to your life.

1. Do you make a practice of righteousness, or a practice of sinning? How do you know?

2. How do you specifically show your love for others with actions and in truth?

Week 5

Open Your Heart

Before you study, take time to pray. You might say:

Lord, thank you for the truth of your Holy Word. I confess that I haven't always made it the most important thing in my life. I want to love it and to understand it more with every passing day. Help me to be sensitive to Your leading, and give me wisdom to see more of you in these pages. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Open God's Word

Read 1 John 4:1-21.

Open Your Eyes

1. How does John address his readers in this chapter (*i.e.*, *what does he call them in verses 1 & 7*)? Why does he call them this name instead of "little children" (*which he used in chapters 2 & 3*)?

2. Why should we not believe every spirit (or prophecy, depending on translation) we hear?

3. How do we test the spirits or prophecies we hear?

4. What reason does John give that we have overcome the spirit of antichrist and false prophets?

5. When or how does John say that God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (look for the "if")?

6. What emotion/attitude has no place in love?

Open Your Mind

1. Verses 1-4 speak of testing spirits (or prophecies). Consider these passages: Matthew 24:23-25, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, 1 Corinthians 12:2-4, and 2 Peter 1:20-21.

What does John mean when he tells the believers to test the spirits?

2. What does “day of judgment” (v. 17) mean? Read Matthew 12:36, Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 2:5, Hebrews 9:27, and Revelation 20:11-15 as you form your understanding.

Open Your Hands

1. Do you test the spirits and prophets in your life? Depending on your context and circumstances, they may not go by those labels. However, most of us are listening to people who claim to represent God. Do you test the words they say and carefully weigh their guidance and direction?

2. What fears are holding you back from experiencing God’s perfect love?

3. Who testifies to the truth in verses 6-12?

4. According to this passage, what is a believer to do if they see a brother sinning?

5. Whose power is the whole world under at this time?

Open Your Mind _____

As we think deeply about the meaning of this chapter, we will need to consider passages from other parts of the Bible to best understand this one. It's always a good practice to let God's Word help us interpret (or make meaning of) God's Word. If you don't want to flip back and forth or if you feel lost going through multiple books, you can use the search engine of your favorite Bible app to make navigating to these verses easier.

1. What does it mean to "overcome [*or conquer, depending on translation*] the world"?

The Greek word used here is *nikāo*, from *nikē*, which refers to conquest or victory. Read the following verses and note who or what is said to overcome in each one.

Romans 3:4 _____

John 16:33 _____

Revelation 3:21 _____

Romans 12:21 _____

1 John 2:13-14 _____

1 John 4:4 _____

1 John 5:4-5 _____

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, & 26 _____

Revelation 3:5, 12, & 21 _____

Revelation 12:11 _____

Revelation 15:12 _____

Revelation 21:7 _____

This term is most frequently used to describe believers! What does it mean that the victory, or the power, to overcome the world is our faith?

2. Let's turn our attention to what John means when he says "there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood." First, read Deuteronomy 17:6 and Deuteronomy 19:15. Then, read Matthew 18:16 and 2 Corinthians 13:1. What do these verses say in common?

Read Romans 8:16 and John 16:13 about the Spirit.

Read Mark 1:10-11 and John 1:32-34 about the water.

Read 1 John 1:7 about the blood.

Taking all of these passages together, what do you think John wanted his readers to understand?

Matthew Henry's commentary points out that some have said this passage could also be thought to refer to three markers in the Christian life, since we receive the Holy Spirit when we are saved, follow Christ in the waters of baptism, and remember his shed blood when we observe the Lord's Supper.

Open Your Hands

When you think about applying this passage to your life, ask yourself these questions.

1. Do I believe it's true that God's commandments are not a burden? Have I been behaving as if certain commandments are a burden?

2. Is there any obstacle or any worldly interest which I need to overcome? How can I apply my faith in action to conquer something that is distracting me, tempting me, or causing me to sin?

A Note in Closing:

As you have studied the book of 1 John for the past six weeks, I pray that you have learned more about God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and that you have felt the power of applying His truth to your life. You can use the method and rhythm of this study with any passage of Scripture! Simply begin with prayer, observe the text carefully, consider the meaning, and then be eager to apply it to your life. God promises that His Word will not return void, but will accomplish exactly His will. I believe that includes transforming *YOUR* life. May God be with you until we meet again in the pages of another plain & simple study.

With love,

Michelle