

DAILY BIBLE READING GUIDE

ASSURANCE

1 John series



STPETERSTAMWORTH

Assurance

that you are a child of God

One of the things the Lord wants us to know is whether we are truly his child or not. This is of eternal significance. 1 John was written so that Christians can be sure they have eternal life. This is a marvellous thing to be sure about!

- Set aside time (15-30 minutes) in your day to meditate on the passages proposed and to talk to your Lord. You can tick off the days you have done as you work through these. If you are married, you could do this with your spouse each morning as you start your day.

These verses will also be part of the sermon series and studied in more depth in our Growth Groups in the second half of term 4. Using this guide will be a good way for you to get more out of Growth Groups and Church gatherings and will help you to be a blessing to others.

Yours sincerely, Xavier



	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Week of 9-13th Nov					
Week of 16-20th Nov					
Week of 23-27th Nov					
Week of 30 Nov-4th Dec					
Week of 7-11th Dec					
Week of 14-18th Dec					

Day 1

Fellowship with God

READ: 1 John.1-4

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

REFLECT: The author in this passage (quite possibly the apostle John) is speaking about Jesus, the word of life, and how his readers have eternal life through him. It is an extraordinary thing to think that you can have eternal life through believing in the word of life, Jesus.

- What relationship does the author claim to have with Jesus, the word of life?
- What authority does the author have to testify to this word of life?
- The author claims that you can have fellowship with the Father and the son. How do you have fellowship with God according to this passage?

You can have fellowship with God through receiving and believing in the eyewitness account of the Lord Jesus. Jesus said “Blessed are those who have not seen yet who believe.” (John 20.29)

PRAY: Thank-you heavenly Father for revealing to me the word of life Jesus through the eyewitnesses of our Lord. Thank-you that by believing in Jesus I can have fellowship with you and with others who also believe. Help me to appreciate the enormity of this privilege.

Day 2

God is light

READ: 1 John 1.5-7

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. 6 If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practising the truth. 7 If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin

REFLECT: If you were asked, “What is the Christian message?” I’d be surprised that you would say, “God is light.” Yet this is what the author says! Remember what Jesus said, “*I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.*” (John 12.46)

- What connotations do light and darkness have in the Bible? (See John 1.5)

Light can carry a *revealing* connotation, like when you say ‘the lights came on for me’, in other words you understood! Light can also have a *moral* connotation. To be in the light, is to live an upright life of integrity. To be in the dark can refer to doing evil deeds that you don’t want exposed. God is light, he is morally pure and he also reveals himself through Jesus. The metaphor of light might also be used here to split the world up into two domains: the domain of life and its associated themes (light, righteousness, holiness, love), and the domain of death and its associated themes (darkness, sin, hate, fear). Jesus by revealing himself to you and dealing with your sin brings you into the domain of light.

- What do you think it means to walk in the light?

PRAY: Heavenly Father thank-you that you are pure in love and holiness and thank-you for revealing yourself to me in Jesus and dealing with my sin. Please help me to live in the light by trusting Jesus and living for him.

Day 3

Sin and the truth

READ: 1 John.7-10

7 If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

REFLECT: The author describes three ways in which you can be tempted to respond to your fellowship with God who is light:

- You can say you have fellowship with God but not live accordingly (1:6), which is a lie.
- You can claim you have no sin (1:8), which is self-delusional.
- You could say you have not sinned (1:10) which makes God out to be a liar, because his word clearly states that all people are sinners (cf. Ps 14:1-3).

These statements contain one key concept: you are a sinner, we all are. It is a delusional lie to think that once you have believed Jesus is the Christ and you have fellowship with God, that you are somehow immune from sin. We all sin and will continue to sin. This truth is important to lock into your thinking as you read 1 John to understand his comments on sin in the life of a believer. It is also important to recognise this reality in your own life as it is part of the truth.

- To walk in the light is to acknowledge this truth about yourself. If you do that, what does verse 7 promise you?
- What sin or sins do you need to confess to God and perhaps to someone else to ask for forgiveness?

PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, I confess, that even as I trust in Jesus, I am still a sinner. Please forgive me for my evil thoughts, words and deeds. Help me to ask forgiveness of others when I wrong them, and help me to live more like Jesus.

Day 4

Jesus and your sin

READ: 1 John 2.1-2

1. My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one. 2 He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

REFLECT: The previous passage clearly demonstrated that you are a sinner and you sin, as we all do.

- What provision has God made for you in your sin?

The way God deals with your sin is by the death of his Son, Jesus. In 1:7, it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses you from all sin ('blood' here refers to Jesus' death). Just as those you have wronged are angry or upset and deserve restitution and an apology, God is angry with you because of your sin, and requires his anger to be dealt with. It is the sacrificial death of Jesus that propitiates his anger, turning it away (2:1-2). It is Jesus who appears in heaven for you, to plead your case. So God, through Jesus cleanses, forgives, and turns his anger away from you. What great news this is! It is the basis of your assurance before him.

PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, thank-you that you forgive my sin, that you turn away your rightful anger because you sent Jesus to die for me and you have established him as the one who pleads before you on my behalf. Thank-you for your love and mercy to me, a sinner.

Day 5	Keeping God's commands
<p>READ: 1 John.2.3-6</p> <p><i>3 This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know him," and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: 6 The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: This passage, like the previous one, is about assurance. It is about how you can know you are a true Christian.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you know that you are truly in a relationship with God from this passage? • People often claim to know God and to be on good terms with him when they are not. How does this passage relate to that? <p>This passage may seem to undermine your assurance because who does God's commands completely! Didn't we see two days ago that we are all sinners! However the author's purpose is to reassure his readers that they are true Christians. In a few days time you will see that the commands that the author has in mind have a very particular focus in regards to loving other Christians. If you are loving other Christians (maybe not perfectly but sincerely), this is a sign you truly know God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do Christians show love for each other? How can you obey our Lord's command to love your brother and sister in Christ? <p>PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, I want to obey your commands and I believe this is a sign that you have worked in me by your Holy Spirit. Please help me to obey you, especially your command to love my brothers and sisters in Christ.</p>

WEEK of 16-20th November

Day 1	The old new commandment
<p>READ: 1 John 2.7-8</p> <p><i>7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the word you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: There is assurance in doing God's commands. The author starts to indicate which command in general we should keep. The commandment is not new but old; it is something they have known from the very beginning. This is the command to love and it is as 'old' as God for God is love. The people of Israel had this commandment from the start (see Lev 19:18). It is also new, however, because Jesus reissues the commandment to love in John's gospel chapter 13. Further, it is true in Jesus and the readers (and us) because now it can actually be realized. Unlike the Old Testament Israelites, Jesus did live a life of love, obeying the commandment. His love, seen in his death and resurrection, brings to an end the darkness and results in the true light shining. That is, Jesus makes this commandment new because he finally does it, and opens up the possibility for his followers to also love since he has brought in the new age through his death and resurrection. To what extent do you realise you are called to love like God?</p> <p>PRAY: Lord Jesus Thank-you for loving me and pouring your love into my heart by your Holy Spirit. Help me to love.</p>

Day 2

False assurance

READ: 1 John 2.9-11

9 The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

REFLECT: The author's aim is to reassure the Christians he is writing to that they are true born again believers. Yet there are some people who feel quite assured that they are right with God but who are in reality deluded. They may have been troubling these true Christians.

- What might indicate that someone who thinks they are walking in the light is actually walking in the dark?

You will see later in the letter that there were some 'so called' Christians who withdrew from meeting up with other Christians. They went out from the community of believers. They still claimed to be ok with God but their actions denied this. This might be what the author is referring to when he uses the strong language of hate. To stop relating to Christians, when one was still physically able to do that, was like 'hating' them.

- How do these verses encourage you or challenge you?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, to love you is to love your disciples. Please work in me so that the fruit of the Spirit might be displayed in my life and help me to love you by loving your disciples.

Day 3

To the one who has...

READ: 1 John 2.12-14

12 I am writing to you, little children, since your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one. 14 I have written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one.

REFLECT

Jesus said, 'To the one who has more will be given.' This doesn't seem fair does it? But it is true in the Christian life. If you have been given forgiveness, you will be given eternal life. If you have been given the Holy Spirit, you will be given an inheritance in heaven. To the one who has, more will be given. The author of this letter encourages his readers with what they have.

- What are the things that these Christians have? List them out.
- The author uses the present tense, 'I am writing to you' and the past tense 'I have written to you', in triplets. I have just noticed this! I wonder what is behind this? Your thoughts?

The list of things these Christians have is true of any real Christian. Meditate on what God has given you through your trust in Christ.

PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, thank-you that I have been forgiven on account of Jesus' name. Thank-you that I know you for you have made yourself known to me, thank-you that you have conquered the evil one for me. May your word remain in me.

Day 4

Christians in the world

READ: 1 John 2.15-17

15 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. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

REFLECT: Christians are not to 'love' the world for it is dangerous.

- Consider verse 16. What does the author mean by 'the world'?
- Why should you not love the world?

The world is a dangerous place for Christians because we can lust after or find pride in the things of this world. This is not from the Father. Furthermore the things of this world are passing away, they are no solid basis on which to place our hopes or security. Jesus warned that the cares of this world would choke out the word of life in people's lives (Mark 4.19). This is tricky for us as Christians to get right. On the one hand we give thanks to God for the good things he gives us on the other hand those things can become what we love over and above our heavenly Father.

- In what ways is this exhortation challenging you? Where are you in danger of lusting or having pride in things of this world?

PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, help me to have you and the Lord Jesus as my greatest treasure. You know the temptations I feel concerning what I see, what would like to have and what I'm tempted to boast in. Please help me to see that these things are passing away so that I would put my hope and security in you alone.

Day 5

Christians in the world and antichrists

READ: 1 John 2.18-19

18 Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.

REFLECT: The Christians the author is writing to need assurance that they are true children of God as we do. We tackle now what was troubling them in their assurance. It has to do with antichrists.

- What time does the author say it is?
- The 'antichrists' were once a part of the congregation but have gone out from them. What does their leaving reveal?

The word 'antichrist' just means someone who is anti Christ—that is, someone who denies that Jesus is the Christ, God's promised king.

It is quite possible that the people who left the community and denied that Jesus was the Christ are Jews. Their leaving demonstrates that they were not true believers and not part of the group. The readers of 1 John are quite likely Jews who were looking out for the Messiah and who identified Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) of Old Testament expectation. So when the readers doubt that they know the truth because some of their fellow Jews have left the congregation, John affirms that they do know the truth about Jesus because they believe Jesus is the Christ.

- Who do you say Jesus is? Would you affirm he is the Christ, God's long awaited eternal king who now rules?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, I do believe that Jesus is your eternal king who now rules. This is not something I discovered but something you revealed to me. Thank-you. Help me to point others to him.

WEEK of 23rd-27th November

Day 1	Christians anointed by the Holy Spirit
<p>READ: 1 John 2.20-23</p> <p><i>20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 21 I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. 22 Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: If you were part of a Christian community, then some of the people you knew and appreciated left and started to say you didn't really know God, this would be troubling wouldn't it? It may rock your assurance. This is what was happening to the Christians John was writing to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What assurance does John give them that they know the truth?• If you confess that Jesus is the Christ, God's son, what do you have? <p>It is the 'anointing' of the Holy Spirit which brings someone to confess that Jesus is the Christ, God's son. This is not something that comes from ourselves. If you confess that Jesus is the Christ, God's heavenly king, this is a sign that you know the truth and God is at work in your life. The result of this is that you have the Father, in other words, you are a true child of God.</p> <p>PRAY: Thank-you heavenly Father for the free gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank-you that through his work in my heart you assure me, that by believing in Jesus as your Son, I am truly your child.</p>
Day 2	Remaining in him
<p>READ: 1 John 2.24-27</p> <p><i>24 What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life. 26 I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: Jesus said, "<i>The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.</i>" (John 15.5). Those who left the community didn't remain because they denied that Jesus is the Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do these verses teach you about remaining a Christian?• What is the link between the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the message of Christ in this passage? <p>It is the message of the gospel that identifies Jesus as the Christ and brings eternal life (v. 25). The anointing of the Holy Spirit you have received points you to this truth. As you abide in this message—the gospel of Jesus' death for your sin, and his resurrection to rule—you abide in the Son and the Father. This passage shows you that you cannot separate the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in us so that we continue to believe in the gospel of Jesus as God's Son. As we remain in this teaching, we remain in relationship with the Father and the Son through the work of the Spirit.</p> <p>PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank-you that your Spirit helps me to remain in you by continuing to believe in your Son. Please work in those who have heard the gospel (<i>put names in you know</i>) that they might remain in you also.</p>

Day 3

Unashamed before him

READ: 1 John 2.28-29

28 So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

REFLECT: Remaining in Jesus, in relationship with him and the Father, is vital in the Christian life. We saw in our last reflection how the message of the gospel and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit helps us to remain in Christ. This passage tells us why it is important to remain in Christ and how we identify those who are in Christ.

- Why is it important to remain in relationship with Christ?
- How can we identify those who have been born of God?

The only way you can have confidence before God and be unashamed at Jesus' return is by remaining in Christ, continuing to believe in Jesus as God's son who died for you and dealt with your sin. To deny Jesus as being the Christ, God's son, is, in effect, to say that Jesus is not righteous. This will lead to shame when Jesus, who is the Christ, returns. This passage also shows us the connection between believing in Jesus as being righteous and godly living. Those who are born of God, acknowledge Jesus as being righteous and will produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. John helps his readers to identify those who are truly born of God. There are people who left their community and who claim to know God but they are not displaying fruit in their lives - they aren't continuing to love their brothers and sisters in Christ. A mark of a true Christian, is not only their confession that Jesus is God's son, but also the fruit that follows from that, displayed primarily in love for fellow Christians.

PRAY: Thank-you heavenly Father that you tell me that I have no reason to fear or be ashamed before you when Jesus returns. Help me to remain in Christ for he is my righteousness and my hope before you on the day of judgement.

Day 4

Children of God

READ: 1 John 3.1-3

1 See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children—and we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know him. 2 Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.

REFLECT: John is confident that the people he is writing to are truly God's Children for they believe that Jesus is God's son (*this belief comes from God*), they keep meeting with and loving their brothers and sisters in Christ (*this is also from God - the work of the Spirit in their lives*), they are loved by God and because of God's work in their lives they are therefore seeking to obey God's commands.

- If you believe in Jesus, what else do these verses have to say about you being God's child?
- What is the result of realising you are a child of God?

Can there be a greater privilege than being God's child? What comes with that? Knowledge - you are loved by one who controls all things. Purpose - you will become more and more like Jesus and so you seek to purify yourself. Understanding - it helps you to understand why non-Christians don't 'get you' (*Just as people don't 'get' who Jesus was*).

PRAY: Father thank-you so much for making me your child you love, help me to purify myself from sin, as Jesus is pure.

READ: 1 John 3.4-6

4 Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he was revealed so that he might take away sins, and there is no sin in him. 6 Everyone who remains in him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen him or known him.

REFLECT: This is a challenging part of I John, it is difficult to understand and it is difficult because it also deals with the reality of sin in your life.

- Firstly, John doesn't define sin as simply breaking God's law (*although sin does do that*), he says sin is lawlessness. What do you think he means?

Sin as lawlessness is the absence of law. It is when someone sees themselves as a law unto themselves, with no external criteria by which they live by. In other words, lawlessness is at the heart of what sin is. Sin is to reject God as the one who determines how life is meant to be lived. You probably know people who live by their own standards of what is right and wrong, John would call this lawlessness. However John goes on to say, everyone who remains in Christ does not sin!

- What do you think John means when he's says that everyone who remains in Christ does not sin and cannot sin?

These verses may have troubled you because you know you sin! Yet you also might be thinking, "Isn't this letter meant to give me assurance as a Christian?" These statements seem to be more troubling than reassuring. What could John possibly mean?

The first thing we need to remember is that John began his letter saying that all people, including those who are Christians, are sinners and continue to sin (*See 1 John 1.8*). Unless John is contradicting himself he can't be saying that Christians don't sin any longer. So what does he mean?

He could be saying that one day, for those who remain in Christ by faith, sin will be done away with. This is true. However this doesn't fit the context as John is seeking to help his readers identify true Christians from false ones. He could be saying that true Christians are 'clothed' in Christ's righteousness and therefore in that sense they are without sin. Again it is true that Christians are holy in God's sight. Yet again this doesn't help the Christian identify the true Christian from the false one. In the context of the whole letter it is best to understand what John is saying in regards to those who have left the community. They are troubling the Christians who have remained and they are claiming to know God. These people however *continue* to sin for they refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and they *continue* to sin for they are no longer loving those who are God's children - they have left them. Continuing in sin in this way shows that you are not a true child of God.

PRAY: Thank-you heavenly Father that your ways are right and that I have come under the law of Christ to live for him. Help me to resist the temptation to live for myself, which is lawlessness, and help me to believe that your ways are best. Amen.

WEEK of 30th Nov-4th December

Day 1	Identifying true Children of God II
<p>READ: 1 John 3.7-10</p> <p><i>7 Little children, let no one deceive you. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works. 9 Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. 10 This is how God's children and the devil's children become obvious. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: We have seen that those who had left the Christian community to whom John is writing, denied that Jesus is the Christ, God's king, and they stopped loving the brothers and sisters in Christ. They claimed to know God yet in denying Christ and failing to love God's children they were continuing to sin. The devil is behind these false teachers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does John say about the devil in this passage?• How can you identify a true Christian from this passage? <p>Jesus said, "<i>Beware of false prophets, who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognise them by their fruit.</i>" (Mat 7.15-16)</p> <p>To do what is right is to do God's commandment. God's commandment in this letter is, "<i>...that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us.</i>" (1 John 3.23) . Doing this is to do what is right, rejecting this is to be of the devil.</p> <p>PRAY: Dear Father, you tell me that there are false teachers and prophets in the world who claim to know you yet deny your Son. They may look attractive and sound persuasive. Please help me to discern those who are truly your children and not be trapped by the lies of the the devil. Amen.</p>
Day 2	Identifying true Children of God III
<p>READ: 1 John 3.11-15</p> <p><i>11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, 12 unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: A test of whether someone is a true Child of God resides in whether they love their brothers and sisters in Christ. The false teachers weren't loving them for they had left the Church. It is very hard to love someone if you don't spend time with them (<i>That is of course if you are physically able to</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are a child of God, how will the world treat you?• According to John, there are two categories of people in the world. What are they? <p>Humanity is made up of children of God or children of the devil. This stark contrast is evident in the nature of people's actions. If someone does not practise righteousness or love their brother, then they are a child of the devil.</p> <p>Cain is the prime example of this in the Old Testament. He did not love his brother Abel but killed him. John describes Cain as of the evil one—that is, the devil was his father. This indicates that the idea of fatherhood in this passage is not biological but rather adoptive. People's actions reveal who their father is.</p> <p>PRAY: Dear Father, as I was once in darkness and a child of the devil, please have mercy upon (...<i>put in name</i>) who doesn't know you yet.</p>

Day 3

Children of God - love in action

READ: 1 John 3.16-18

16 This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.

REFLECT: The people who were troubling the Christians John wrote to, claimed to know God, but their actions denied this - they didn't love other Christians in practice.

- Try to define love from this passage, what would you say it is?
- What is God encouraging you to do in this passage?
- Is there anyone you know from your congregation or Growth Group you could love in a practical way?

Note that John is not talking about all humans, he limits it to "the brothers and sisters". This is not to say that you shouldn't be generous to all people, but John especially points to providing for other Christians. This should be your priority without neglecting the other (See Galatians 6:10).

PRAY: Dear Father, your love for me was not simply in word but in action. Your son gave up his life for me. Help me to love my brothers and sisters in Christ in a sacrificial way and help me to do that with a willing heart. Show me how I can love like this today. Amen

Day 4

When your heart condemns you

READ: 1 John 3.19-24

19 This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. 23 Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. 24 The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

REFLECT: Your heart or conscience can condemn you. It can act as a judge on your behaviour and thoughts. Sometimes your conscience judges you rightly - you have thought or done evil and your conscience lets you know. Sometimes your heart judges you unjustly - you feel you have done wrong but you haven't really. Some Christians have a very tender conscience and whip themselves more than they should.

- What do these verses say about your heart and God?
- How can your heart be reassured?

You can find reassurance, when your heart condemns you. If you have shown love for your brothers and sisters in Christ, even though that love may be imperfect, it is a sign that you are a true child of God.

The passage also says God is greater than your heart. This is worth pondering. Could John be saying that God is the greater judge of your behaviour? Remember chapter 2? When your heart condemns you, you are reassured knowing you have an advocate before the Father. You mustn't think however that God is less willing to forgive you than Jesus. It is not like that. It is God the Father, in his desire to forgive you and have a relationship with you, who provided the Lord Jesus for you. Furthermore God is also greater than your heart when your heart condemns you unjustly. He knows the reality of your situation even better than you do and so you can be grateful that he has done all that is necessary for you as you struggle in your conscience.

PRAY: Dear Father, when my heart condemns me, help me to remember you are greater than my heart and you have provided the Lord Jesus for me. Amen

Day 5	Pleasing God
<p>READ: 1 John 3.19-24</p> <p><i>21 Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. 23 Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. 24 The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: Christians know that God was and is pleased with his Son the Lord Jesus. Sometimes a child grows up in a home with parents that are impossible to please. This can be a very painful and upsetting experience. Could you say that God is pleased with you? Let's think about that.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you please God from this passage? • What is God's command that he wants you to obey in this passage? <p>There is great reassurance here. If you are believing in Jesus as God's Son, the Christ and if you are seeking to love your brothers and sisters in Christ, you are obeying God and he is pleased with you. This means you remain in him and this is a sign of the work of God's Spirit in you. This also means that as a child of God, God listens to your prayers and is attentive to what you have to say to him. Isn't that marvellous!</p> <p>PRAY: Dear Father, to know you are pleased with me as your child is an extraordinary thought. I struggle with that. Yet I believe because of your work in me by your Spirit and because of the Lord Jesus you are happy to hear my prayers. Please help me to seek the things that please you that I might be more like Jesus. Amen</p>

WEEK of 30th Nov-4th December

Day 1	Testing the spirits
<p>READ: 1 John 4.1-3</p> <p><i>Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world.</i></p>	<p>REFLECT: If the world was full of truth, and nothing but the truth, life would be simpler. The Bible, however, acknowledges that in the world there are many lies that mislead, destroy and can shake the assurance of God's children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should God's children do? • How can God's children test the messages they hear? <p>The test of any so called 'spiritual message' or 'message from God' relates to the identity of Jesus. Getting Jesus' identity right is critical. Who Jesus is and what he has done is absolutely central to God's message to the world. Those who deny that Jesus, the Palestinian man of the first century, is the Christ, possess the spirit of the antichrist. They are not from God. To claim that Jesus is the Christ, is not to simply acknowledge that he came as a man, but that he is now also Lord for he has risen from the dead. No false teacher can affirm this because they want to maintain some authority over Jesus rather than obeying him and his words.</p> <p>PRAY: Heavenly Father, in a world where lies concerning Jesus abound, help me and your people to test what is said in light of who Jesus is as Lord and Christ. Amen</p>

Day 2

Conquering the world

READ: 1 John 4.4-6

4 You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

5 They are from the world. Therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.

REFLECT: The world is a battlefield! Not simply physically, (*and how one might long for wars to cease!*) but also spiritually. The world has a certain view of Jesus, those who are of God have another view.

- What do these verses say about the world?
- What is the relationship of God's child to the world?
- How can you work out those who are from God and those who are of the world from these verses?

The world is a battlefield of conflicting views of Jesus. This is not simply of trivial academic importance, it relates to whether you are a child of God or not. The battle however is not evenly balanced, for God is greater than the spirit of the antichrist who is in the world. Those who listen to, heed and believe the apostolic eyewitnesses in their teaching on Jesus (*the 'us' of this passage*), are from God. This is how we can discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of the evil one.

PRAY: Heavenly Father, how I long for a world which was full of the truth concerning your Son. Thank-you that you help us to discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of deception. Help me to be attentive to the teaching of the apostles that I might listen to you, who has conquered the world. Amen

Day 3

God is love I

READ: 1 John 4.7-8

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

REFLECT: God is...you can put so many words after 'is' to describe God's character. God is kind, patient, full of joy, judge, holy, all powerful...can you think of others? At the heart of who God is is love.

- What do these verses say about God and love?
- What is the relationship between God as love and our love for others, especially other Christians?

It is at the heart of God's character to love. God is love and he is love always and forever. In eternity God is love. Before he created anything God was love, God is now currently love and God will always be love. Love is outward looking. We'll think more about this in our next meditation. God in eternity is love in relationship. The Father loved the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Holy Spirit loved the Father and the Holy Spirit loved the Father and the Son. God didn't therefore create us in order to be loved, as if he was needy or lonely, rather he created us in his love, as an expression of the overflow of his love. As a result, we are to love like him, for we are created in his image. We are to seek to love, not because we find others loveable, but rather because God has poured his love into our hearts by his Holy Spirit (Romans 5.5). This love is robust, because its motivation to love isn't found in the attractiveness or desirability of the person who is loved, rather its source comes from who God is, in and of himself as love. If we have God's Spirit in us, he helps us to love like this.

PRAY: Heavenly Father your love is astonishing and powerful, please help me by your Spirit to love a little bit more like you do. Amen

Day 3

God is love II

READ: 1 John 4.7-8

9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

REFLECT: 'Love is a verb' sings John Mayer. I'm not sure exactly what he means by that. Perhaps he is trying to distinguish between love as a feeling and love as action. God's love in the Bible is not primarily a feeling he has, his love is manifested as a verb - that is his love is seen in action.

- What do these verses say about how God's love was revealed to you?
- What was the purpose of God loving you in sending his Son?
- What is at the heart of God's love?

The words 'atoning sacrifice' translate one word in the original language. We have a word for it in English - propitiation. It is probably not a word you use very often, if at all. The word is a relational word because it deals with personal anger through costly sacrifice. God being a relational God who has given us everything, is offended and rightly angry when those he made reject him and harm other people he loves. God's anger then is a function of his love. If someone were to treat my child unjustly, as a dad who seeks to love his child, you would consider it normal and right that I was angry. In fact if I wasn't angry you might question whether I really did love my child. God, in order for us to be on good terms with him, needed his righteous anger dealt with. This is what Jesus' costly death on your behalf does, it turns away God's anger from you. Jesus paid the price necessary, dealing with your guilt and debt therefore removing God's anger towards you. He who had no sin, became sin for you. As a result you have peace with God for God, as the offended party, was the one who took the initiative to bring you back into a good relationship with him.

PRAY: Heavenly Father thank-you that in my sin and in your anger you did not leave me to face the consequence of your wrath, rather in your love, and through great cost to you, you have made it possible for me to have peace with you. Thank-you.

Day 4

God is love III

READ: 1 John 4.11-12

10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us.

REFLECT: God's character of love which sought to restore your relationship comes with an obligation.

- What is it that Christians must do?
- If we love each other, what happens?

God's love for you ought to constrain you to love like he does. This is a big ask. This is a love that takes the initiative, is costly and sacrificial. In what ways are you seeking with God's help to love your brothers and sisters in Christ in this way - what cost, what sacrifice, what initiative is God moving you to take?

PRAY: Heavenly Father your love ought to constrain me to love my brothers and sisters like you do. Please help me to know what that might mean in practice in the days and weeks ahead. Amen

Day 5

God remaining in you and you remaining in him

READ: 1 John 4.12-16

12 If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world's Savior. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. 16 And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

REFLECT: It is God's undeserved love to you that should motivate you to love others. Even though we have not seen God, we know he abides in us when we love, as his love is being made perfect in us. This then is grounds for our assurance.

- God abides in us when we love each other in the body of Christ, yet if we are in doubt about this John links this to the work of the Spirit within us. What is the confession which points to the reality of the Spirit in you?

The work of the Spirit within is not only evident in the love Christians have for each other but also in their confession that Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world to be our saviour. God's sending of his Son is an expression of his love and to deny Jesus as God's sent one for us is to not know of God's love.

PRAY: Heavenly Father thank-you that you have have brought me to come to know and believe in the love you have for me. Lord when, in your good purposes, I suffer, please help me to keep turning to your love for me displayed in Jesus that I might know that in my hardship you haven't abandoned me. Amen

WEEK of 7th-11th December

Day 1

Perfect love drives out fear

READ: 1 John 3.7-10

God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. 17 In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister.

REFLECT: 'No fear' - a slogan seen on a T-shirt or a sticker of a car. Yet for sinners in the presence of a holy God this slogan would be just blind brazen bravado. However fear is something that can be chased from the Christian's life.

- What does John say about fear in this passage?
- How is fear related to love?
- How is fear, love and God related in this passage?

Perfect love drives out fear. Where is the only place to find perfect love? Is it not in God himself who has displayed his love for you without reserve in his Son? This love helps drive out the fear of punishment. Now perhaps it is right to be afraid as you think about your sin. But the Holy Spirit turns you from your sin to the Lord Jesus. Remember that when God looks at you he sees his perfect Son (because you abide in him), and so there is no need to fear. The perfect love of God stands in your place, taking your sin and so enabling you to love as he loved.

PRAY: Dear Father, it is a marvellous to know that your love chases out the worst fear of all, meeting you in judgement. Please help me to grasp the height, depth and breadth of your love, that any fear of judgement may vanish and be replaced by praise towards you. Amen

Day 2

To love God - faith and obedience

READ: 1 John 5.1-5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of him. 2 This is how we know that we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands. 3 For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden, 4 because everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. 5 Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

REFLECT:

- How does someone become a child of God according to these verses?

A person is born of God by believing that Jesus is the Christ. In other words one is born again by faith in Jesus as God's promised king who now rules. This was the very thing that the false teachers were denying, they didn't believe in and therefore trust in Jesus as God's king. Did you notice that this new status that you have through faith is not on account of who you are in regards to your race, gender or colour or what you have done, your works. Anyone can believe and become a child of God. Loving others and obeying God's commandments flow from you first being born of God, not the other way around.

- What are some of the implications of being born of God in this passage?

If you are born of God the first implication is that you will love others who are born of God. You will seek to obey God's commandments, which show you how to love other children of God (and all people in general). God's commands are not burdensome for there is joy in loving others and living for God. The second implication of being born of God is victory. A Christian is no longer 'of' this world and isn't beholden to the world's desires.

PRAY: Dear Father, your commandment to love is not burdensome. It was your good pleasure to love me. Help me to see that there is joy in loving others and obeying you. Amen

Day 3

Faith in Christ - The testimony of God in history

READ: 1 John 5.1-12

6 Jesus Christ—he is the one who came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and these three are in agreement. 9 If we accept human testimony, God's testimony is greater, because it is God's testimony that he has given about his Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself. The one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

REFLECT: In the last reflection we thought about faith. You are born of God by trusting (having faith) in Jesus as God's Son. This faith isn't without foundation for it is based in truth, and therefore founded in God, and founded in what God has done in history.

- What evidence does John give concerning Jesus?
- How does this bring assurance?

Faith or belief is not without evidence. John turns to evidence which gives you assurance. How do you know that Jesus is the Son of God? First, he came by water, blood and the Spirit. At Jesus' death his body was pierced, and "blood and water" flowed from his side (John 19:34). This mark in his pierced side is what Jesus showed his disciples to prove that it was really him and that he was physically risen from death (John 20:20). Thomas asked to see this evidence and Jesus showed the scar/wound as proof. (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

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So men (e.g. the apostles, as well as women like Mary Magdelene) saw Jesus raised, and we accept their testimony. To this is added the Spirit as a witness. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost led Peter to explain to the Jews gathered that Jesus, who had died, had now risen and been made Lord and Christ by God. The outpouring of the Spirit was proof of this. Jesus is now Lord, the last days had begun and it is time for all people to repent and believe. So two possible responses to God's testimony about his Son Jesus are left: belief or unbelief. Those who do not believe say, in effect, that God's testimony is false. Those who accept God's testimony about his Son Jesus have received eternal life. God has given us eternal life in his Son, so that those who believe have life and those who do not believe do not have life.

PRAY: Dear Father, thank-you for the testimony you have left us of the death and resurrection of your Son. Thank-you that our trust in Jesus is anchored in what you did in history in accordance with the promises made in your scriptures. Help me to live with Jesus as my Lord today. Amen

Day 4

The reason John wrote

READ: 1 John 5.13-15

13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.

REFLECT: Knowing why people have written is very important. The apostle John is most probably the author of this letter, yet standing behind John is the ultimate author, God himself.

- What does God want us to know through John's letter?

John states that the purpose of his writing is so that his readers might know that they *have* eternal life. His purpose is to give assurance to Christians who might be having some doubts regarding their salvation. It shows you that God wants you to be sure of your salvation. Not 60% or 70% sure, by completely sure. To know you are saved brings with it great joy, relief when faced with your sin and thankfulness to God for what he has done for you.

- Having come this far in reading 1 John what would you say are the main signs that reveal that someone is a true child of God?

This is my (Xavier's) working hypothesis: "You can know you are a true child of God, and therefore have eternal life, because:

- 1) You believe that Jesus is the risen son of God (The Christ)
- 2) You recognise your sin, turning from it seeking to obey God's commands
- 3) You love fellow Christians"

- Do you think this stacks up from your reading of 1 John?

Part of having assurance means that you can have confidence when you pray to God that he hears your prayers. If you ask for anything according to God's will you can be sure that God will work in those areas.

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God wants you to trust in his risen Son as Lord. He wants you to turn from sin and seek to obey his commands and his commands revolve around love, especially loving your brothers and sisters in Christ. If you ask God to help you in these things, you can be sure that he hears your prayers and answers them for they are in line with his will for you.

PRAY: Dear Father, thank you that you want me to be sure that you have given me eternal life. I believe that Jesus is risen and now rules, I want to turn away from my sin and obey you, and I seek to love my brothers and sisters in Christ. All this is from your work in my life, help me to believe what you have done when doubts come my way. Please help me to trust in Jesus, to turn from sin and to obey you in loving my brothers and sisters at St Peter's. Amen

Day 5

Sin that leads to death

READ: 1 John 5.13-15

If anyone sees a fellow believer committing a sin that doesn't lead to death, he should ask, and God will give life to him—to those who commit sin that doesn't lead to death. There is sin that leads to death. I am not saying he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin that doesn't lead to death. 18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true one. We are in the true one—that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

REFLECT: When you reject certain things in life there can be consequences. If you reject the loving advice of your doctor, you may suffer unnecessarily. The same is true in regards to spiritual realities.

- John speaks about sins that don't lead to death and a sin that does lead to death. What do you think is the sin that leads to death?

John acknowledges that the children of God can and do sin. This is not consistent with who they are, for one day all Christians will be without sin. So Christians will struggle to kill off sin in their lives and we can pray for each other in this. However he also indicates that there is a sin that leads to death, a sin that leads to eternal destruction - hell. What is this sin? In the context of the letter it must revolve around rejecting Jesus as the Christ, God's son. To reject Jesus is to reject life for he alone brings life. To continue in this sin reveals that this person has not been born of God. The result of this is that they will not obey God's commands which are all about love and love in particular for other Christians. Those who don't identify with other Christians reveal that they don't know God and don't display the family trait which is brotherly sisterly love.

John ends his letter with another command to flee idolatry. It may seem out of place as there has been no explicit discussion of this topic before in this letter. However, the whole letter has been about the true identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in the face of the world's denial of this. If you let the world tell you who Jesus is, what he is like, or what he did, then you are opening yourself up to a false version of Jesus and to idolatry, for Jesus is God. If people, like the Jewish false teachers, continue to deny that God sent Jesus into the world as the Christ, then they are being idolatrous. This also shows you that the first thing a person 'who is not yet Christian' needs to grapple with is the question: "Who is Jesus?"

PRAY: Why not pray for one person you know who doesn't know Jesus yet. Dear Father, I would like to bring before you _____ Please work in his/her life to bring them to consider Jesus and that you would open their heart to what you have done for them in Jesus. Amen

