

“This is How We Know: The Word of Life” (1 John Pt. 1)
(1 John 1:1-4)

- **The Book of 1 John**

- Here’s the million—no, *Trillion Dollar* question: *Who is God? And how do we know Him?* Maybe you just take that for granted, but when you stop and think about it, that is a *massive question*—the biggest of all questions! A.W. Tozer said, **“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”** What we think about God says so much about us, and determines so much about us. Is God an all-powerful tyrant, waiting for us to fail? Is God a cold, detached force in the universe, a “watchmaker” who creates the machine, then steps away? Is God a divine Santa Clause who’s only purpose is to make us happy? Is God a figment of our imagination, a psychological projection, a wish-fulfilment for a heavenly parental figure? I mean, the answer to this question is *life-altering*: it *transforms lives, shapes civilizations, impacts eternity*. So, *how do we know?* Is it by empirical observation, philosophical inquiry? Scientific data, nature, personal experience? Religions and sacred texts? *How do we know?*
- The author of 1 John opens his book like this: **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.” (1 John 1:1-4)** *How do we know?* John’s answer is simple: *Jesus. Jesus is how we know God!* Over the next 4 weeks, we’re taking a journey through this powerful book of the New Testament. First, *let’s pause and pray.*
- So, who is this John who’s making such bold claims about God, life, truth and eternity? Earliest church tradition says it’s none other than John the Apostle, one of the 12 in Jesus’ inner-inner circle. Along with the Gospel of John, he wrote this trio of letters (1, 2, 3 John) to churches in Asia Minor towards the end of the 1st Century. Jesus gave John and his brother the nickname, “sons of thunder,” but he was also called, “the disciple Jesus loved.” John was an insider, an eye-witness, an intimate friend of Jesus. He was there for *all of it*—the miracles, the transfiguration, the Last Supper (leaning on Jesus), Gethsemane, the Cross, the Empty Tomb!
- Wouldn’t you love to hear what *this guy* has to say about knowing God and following Jesus? We’re in luck, because along with the Gospel, we have his 3 letters to the early church. 1 John is a powerful, poetic sermon for a group of people who needed encouragement to stay faithful to the truth they had received. You can hear it in the way John writes: half a dozen times he uses the phrase, **“This is how we know…”** *This is how we know...that we have come to know Jesus, that we belong to the truth, that we are in him and He in us.* Instead of building a logical argument point by point, John writes with expanding layers of repetition. Other than “God” can you guess what the most repeated word in 1 John is? *Love*. Over 40 times in just 5 chapters. 1 John is where we get this amazing truth, **“God is Love.”** (How ironic that the guy called “son of thunder,” who once asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, wrote this book about God’s love!) After Love, the most repeated words are: *Sin, Know, Life, and Truth.*
- Why did John write this message? Well, it had been 40—60 years since Jesus walked the earth. John began following Jesus as a young man, now he was old. Over the decades, false teachings, counterfeit versions of Jesus, began to emerge. There were fakers who wanted to hijack the idea of Jesus for their own agendas. (It still happens today right?)
- These churches were experiencing the pain of division and confusion over false representations of Jesus: ideas that didn’t come from Scripture, and didn’t line up with the authoritative, eye-witness testimony of the Apostles, but instead suited the prevailing Greco-Roman worldview. We call it “Gnosticism.” While this was a complex and diverse movement in the ancient world, in general, Gnosticism denied the inherent goodness of God’s physical creation, promoting the idea that through special “knowledge” (the Greek word is *Gnosis*) the human spirit could be liberated

from the body. In various ways, it denied either the true humanity or the full divinity of Jesus—Jesus only *appeared* to be human. In contrast to the true Gospel of redemption, Gnosticism led some to a harsh self-hatred and escapism; for others, it gave them license to *do whatever they wanted* with their bodies—because of the spirit is all that matters, what the body does has no consequence. You can imagine how destructive this would be to communities who were trying to follow the real Jesus. John writes to reassure them of the truth that was proclaimed about Jesus *from the beginning and all the implications that has for how we live.*

- **The Word of Life**

- Now that we've got our bearings, let's work through the introduction to 1 John verse by verse. Knowing the false teachings they were facing, it makes so much sense that John leads with: ***"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."*** (1 John 1:1-2)
 - The Gospels accounts of the resurrection emphasize that Jesus wasn't just a *hologram*, a divine being pretending to take human shape—Jesus had a glorious, resurrected, real body—they *heard Him, saw Him, touched Him*—Thomas actually *touched His scars*. Jesus ate in front of them and said, *"It's really me! Does a ghost have flesh and blood?"*
 - The beginning of 1 John sounds a lot like the beginning of his Gospel: ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."*** (John 1:1-4)
 - This truth is non-negotiable for Christians: ***Jesus is fully God and fully human.*** Jesus caused us to completely rethink how we understood God: God is 1, and God is 3—3 eternal persons in 1 eternal being. *What is God?* God is 1 being. *Who is God?* God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Jesus, the 2nd Person of the Trinity added human nature to Himself to become one of us—we call this the incarnation—when God took on flesh. Is it a paradox, is it a mystery, is it mind-blowing? Sure! But it's the Gospel—and we're talking about God here, do you expect it to fit in your human brain? N.T. Wrights said when we try to talk about God, *it's like trying to stare at the sun*. You can see it, and you can see everything by it—but how long can you hold your gaze when you try to look right at it?
 - All of this sounds really lofty and enigmatic, but it's also very practical and it has everything to do with how we live: God is not just an idea, a proposition to be weighed. God is a Person to be known, to be trusted. We either accept Him in faith, or we reject Him. Because Christ became one of us, came to our level, *we can know God for who He truly is*. How do you know God, and the meaning of life? Look at Jesus, and you've seen Him. We can *know God* and have a *relationship with Him*—this is the point of salvation, and it's what the next verse is about.
- ***"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."*** (1:3)
 - I like how the Message Translation puts this: ***"The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too."*** (MSG)
 - Christ walked intimately with a group of people, raised them up, empowered them, made them His witnesses, brought them into union with God, so that they would share the life they'd been given and bring others to share it as well—from person to person to person to person, a billion times over, until the whole world would know.
 - We talked about this word "fellowship" a few weeks ago—it's a Greek word "Koinonia" that means *to participate in, to commune with*. Through Christ, we are united with each other and with God—we get to *participate in, have communion with* the relationship that is at the heart of the whole Universe: the eternal life of God, the eternal loving relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- In John's Gospel, Jesus prayed this for His followers at the Last Supper: **"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."** (John 17:20-23) Jesus described our relationship with Him as a vine and branches: He is the vine, we are the branches, apart from Him we wither and die, but connected to Him we bear much fruit. We are called to an intimate relationship with God Himself, made possible through the Son of God: He became like us so we could become like Him; He became one of us so that we could become one with God. What does this lead to? *Joy!*
- **"We write this to make our joy complete." (1:4)**
 - Everyone who receives Him gets to share in His joy! Complete joy. Full joy. Think of situations where joy is complete, where it reaches its fullness: it's almost always something you experience *with others*. The birth of the child after long months of waiting and long hours of labor. The victory of your team in the championship game. The wedding day, the wedding night. These joys of life are just hints of the *fullness of joy that we were made for as we share in the life of God! That your joy may be full*. That's the experience of fellowship with others and with God.
- **Attachment Theory and the Trinity**
 - In the 1930's, John Bowlby pioneered one of the most influential models in understanding human psychology and relationships, known as *attachment theory*. This is where we began to understand that human babies need *physical touch and love* as much as they need *food*—you can think of the tragic examples of infants in understaffed orphanages, the mystery that these babies could be well fed, but fail to thrive and ultimately perish because they didn't get enough human touch. Or in horrific cases of childhood neglect, where healthy attachments are never made. Through the years, neuroscience has validated this with greater understanding of our brains, showing that connections we make (or fail to make) literally leave a physical imprint in our bodies, in our brains—you can see it at the chemical, neurological level. It's profound and inescapable. Attachment theory has uncovered scientifically what we have known theologically for millennia: people are wired physically, emotionally, spiritually for *connection*, for *relationship*, for *love*. And this is exactly what you would expect to find in a world designed by a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a God who is love. You and I long at the deepest level to know and be known, to love and be loved, because that's who made us.
 - Because Jesus is fully human and fully God, *we can know* the truth and walk in it: the truth is that we were made from love, we were made for love, we were made to love. Who is God? The message of the Gospel is that the ultimate source, the ground of all being, is the infinite Love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which Jesus has revealed to us and brings us into.
 - If you want, you can choose to believe that the only thing that's real is what we can scientifically measure. You can reduce reality to the tiny little scope of what the 5 human senses can perceive—that's something you can put your faith in. But you can also choose to believe the proclamation of the One who came from heaven to earth, the one who died and rose again, the Word of Life who reveals to us a reality too wonderful for words—that God is love, and we can enjoy eternal life in Him. C.S. Lewis once said, **"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world."** This unquenchable longing we have for *connection*, for *truth*, for *God*—it has an answer. It's *the Word of Life*, it's *Jesus*. *This is how we know*. Will you enjoy fellowship with Him? Will you share Him with others? Let's pray.