

Lesson 1 | March 3, 2024

Walk in Fellowship with God

Study Text 1 John 1:1 through 2:2

Central Truth: Christians are called into fellowship with God and other believers.

Key Verse: 1 John 1:7

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (KJV).

If we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the importance of the apostle John's firsthand experience of the Incarnation.
- Students will recognize the joy of walking in the light of God's presence.
- Students will practice confession to uphold fellowship with God.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: We are beginning a study of 1, 2, and 3 John. These New Testament books were letters written by the apostle John in a caring, pastoral tone to encourage believers to remain faithful to the truth. As someone who had the opportunity of walking with the incarnate Christ, John specifically described God as life, light, and love. He also provided valuable insights for Christian living.

Opening Activity—It's Really Dark!

Ask: Have you ever experienced complete darkness? Maybe your home lost power, or you were camping under a starless sky, or you were in a hotel room and couldn't find the light switch. What was it like trying to find your way or locate what you were looking for with no light?

Say: Most of us know how hard it can be to navigate in darkness. We can't see the obstacles right in front of us or find the path we need to take. We experience fear, or at the very least, uncertainty. In those moments, we are grateful for even a glimmer of light to help us on our way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 John 1:5 the apostle John says, "God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all" (NLT). This one verse provides insight into one of the many benefits of walking with God. His light illuminates the way and guides His followers to discover the life He offers. His light dispels fear and uncertainty. His followers experience a deep sense of peace as they walk in the light of His presence. As we look closely at 1 John 1:1 through 2:2, we uncover priceless truths about walking in fellowship with God and with one another.

Part 1—Fellowship with the Father and Son

John's Firsthand Experience

1 John 1:1–2

Say: The apostle John had the rare privilege of walking alongside Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. John was an eyewitness to His life, miracles, and teachings. Along with Peter and James, John had a close relationship with Jesus. John was present at the transfiguration of Jesus, witnessed a 12-year-old girl (and others) being raised from death to life, saw the Crucifixion, talked with the risen Lord, witnessed the ascension of Christ, and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room. He began this letter by reminding us why he can speak with authority—he experienced firsthand what he shared with his readers in these letters. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The first few verses of 1 John are a reflection of the first chapter in the Gospel of John, where he provided clear descriptions of the many events he witnessed as he walked alongside Jesus. Considering John's Gospel adds significant value to the study of his epistles. Jesus is the One who existed from the beginning, the Word of Life, and the One who is life itself. He declared the apostles had heard, seen, looked on, and touched the Christ. They experienced the very Word of Life—and we can experience Him as well.

John emphasized the eternal reality of Jesus existing with the Father from the beginning, even before creation. Then Jesus took on human flesh, and people could see Him, hear Him, and touch Him. The Father made himself known to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and through Christ, He made a way for us to have fellowship with Him. In John 17, the apostle recorded the prayer Jesus prayed for all believers—where Jesus talked about the relationship He had with the Father before the world was made. He asked the Father that we would experience the same kind of fellowship with Him.

Discuss

? As we consider the Gospels, what did John see, hear, and experience as he walked with Jesus? What is the value of hearing from someone who had an up-close, in-person relationship with Jesus?

? John described Jesus as eternal, as the Word of Life, and as life itself. Which one of these descriptions encourages you the most today and why?

? Read John 17:20–26. How is Jesus' prayer reflected in 1 John 1:1–3?

Resource Packet Item 1: Similarities in John's Writings

Distribute the worksheet, and divide your class into small groups. Assign a different concept to each group. After a few minutes, ask them to share their findings. This page could also be sent home with students for additional study in the coming week.

An Invitation to Fellowship

1 John 1:3

Say: You can almost hear John’s excitement in his words: “We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard” (1:3, NLT). He then explained one of his purposes for writing this letter—he clearly desired his readers to experience the same fellowship with one another and with the Father and Son that he and the other apostles had experienced. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As he began writing his first letter, the apostle wanted to remind his readers of Jesus’ teaching and establish his authority on this topic by mentioning the time he spent with Jesus. Having lived alongside Jesus, John understood the richness of relationship between the Father and the Son in a tangible way.

The Gospel of John recorded the words of Jesus as He described himself as the true grapevine and the Father as the gardener. John helped us to understand how to experience life and fruitfulness as we stay firmly connected through relationship with Jesus (John 15). In this same portion of Scripture John recorded Jesus’ invitation to live in Him and abide in His love (verses 5–11).

Jesus also challenged His followers to love one another (verse 17). The fellowship we enjoy with other believers is based on the love we’ve been shown by the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). This love is self-sacrificing and fruitful, not fickle and superficial. It is founded on Jesus and His sacrifice for us, not on our personal preferences or similarities we enjoy with others. We can experience this deep, spiritual connection with individuals of different ages, ethnicities, education, socioeconomic levels, political views, and cultural preferences only through God’s love.

Discuss

? Read John 15:5–17. How did Jesus describe the relationship He offers in these verses? What do you think Jesus is inviting us to experience when He says, “Remain in my love” (verse 9, NLT)?

? How did Jesus describe the fellowship we should offer to one another in John 15:12–13?

Part 2—Fellowship in the Light Your Joy May Be Full

1 John 1:4

Say: John desired for us to know the same joy he experienced in relationship with the Father and the Son. John’s record of Jesus’ teaching in John 15 also describes the joy of this unique fellowship. Listen again to the words of Jesus: “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you” (John 15:9–12, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We might mistakenly think happiness and joy are the same emotion. However, happiness is typically contingent on abundance and easy circumstances. The type of joy we experience in a close relationship with God is not based on our ever-changing circumstances. Knowing our sins are forgiven by the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross opens the way for us to encounter God in a deep, personal way.

John understood this close relationship based on joy. “We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy” (1 John 1:4, NLT). Unending joy comes as we grow more confident of God’s love for us. We grow to trust His love and believe He is working all things, even the most difficult things, for our good. This brings a joy that rises above our current circumstances. And each day as we read and meditate on His Word, His truth revives us and gives us joy (see Psalm 19:7–11).

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the joy of living in fellowship with the Father and the Son?
- ? How does understanding the love of God impact our joy?

Walk in the Light

1 John 1:5–7

Say: The most powerful truth of the gospel is contained in 1 John 1:5–7: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (NLT). What an amazing gift we have been given—the opportunity to walk in the light of God’s love through the cleansing of our sins! Since He is the Light, we cannot continue to walk in darkness and claim to have a relationship with Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Within these three verses in the first chapter of 1 John, the apostle contrasted light and darkness. Light represents what is good and holy. Darkness represents sin and evil. Here John told us, “God is light”—the very source of all that is right and pure. In Him there is absolutely no darkness or evil, not even a hint. So those who are walking in darkness (or sin) are not walking with the Lord (verse 6).

Throughout the Gospel of John, the apostle recorded many times when Jesus referred to himself as light. John 8:12 may be the most descriptive and clear passage of all: “Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life’” (NLT).

Because Jesus is the source of life and light, when we are in relationship with Him, we are no longer blinded by the deceitfulness of sin. Instead, we have the light of His truth to lead us to the life He offers. The writer of Psalm 119:105 reveals this truth, describing God’s Word as a lamp to guide our feet and a light for our path.

Walking in the light of God’s Word brings life to us individually and also provides the basis of genuine, life-giving fellowship with one another. Sin not only separates us from

God; it also separates us from one another. But as we walk together in the light of God's truth, we can enjoy relationships that encourage and sustain us in our pursuit of God.

Resource Packet Item 2: The Light

Divide the class into small groups and distribute the worksheet. Allow time for students to read the verses and discuss their insights. Encourage each group to share their discoveries with the class. Then discuss the final question together.

Discuss

? How do the verses in 1 John 1:5–7 challenge the false idea that we can continue in sin and remain in fellowship with God?

? Psalm 119:105 (NLT) says, "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." How does the light of God's Word illuminate the right paths for our lives?

? How does sin destroy our relationships? How does walking in the light of God's truth create healthy relationships?

Part 3—Fellowship through Cleansing Confession

1 John 1:8–10

Say: The first step in experiencing fellowship with the Father is to acknowledge we are sinners. Salvation happens the moment we believe Jesus is God's Son who died for us, and we confess and repent of our sins. This is an extravagant, undeserved gift. We cannot earn it or do anything to deserve it. However, confession does not end when we start following Jesus. Every established relationship with God must include continual confession. When we confess our sins to God, John assures us that God is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all wickedness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The truth is, we continue to sin even after we are born again. Some examples:

- We allow fear to take the place of faith.
- We get angry and say hurtful words.
- We gossip about a coworker or fellow church member.
- We make unfair judgments about a situation we don't understand fully.
- We are apathetic to the suffering of a friend.

The list of sins could go on and on. When we don't regularly confess our sins, we hinder God's ongoing work in our lives. One of the best ways to stay in a close relationship with the Father is to read His Word and allow the light of His truth to shine a spotlight on our motives, words, and behaviors. Only then can we easily recognize our sinful behavior and realize our need for confession. John clearly states, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us . . . we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8,10, KJV).

We need to be quick to respond to the conviction we feel. As we make confession a regular part of our prayer life, we experience unbroken fellowship with our Creator. Any time we confess our sins to God, He will cleanse us (verse 9), lead us to right thinking, and help us to grow more like Christ.

Discuss

? What do we miss if we mistakenly think that confession is just for the moment of salvation?

? How can we live with a repentant heart, one that is quick to confess our sins and ask God for His cleansing?

Resource Packet Item 3: Confession

Distribute the worksheet, and assign each verse to one or more students. Then ask them to share their insights about confession and repentance.

Our Advocate

1 John 2:1–2

Say: We see the apostle’s affection for the recipients of this letter when he addressed them as “my dear children” (1 John 2:1, NLT) and encouraged them not to sin. He also lovingly reminded his readers (including us) that Jesus is our Advocate, our Defender, and our Redeemer. His sacrifice has paid the full price for our sins. He stands before the Father pleading our case. No sin is beyond His forgiveness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

First John 2:1 tells us, “We have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father” (NLT). Let’s look at Romans 8:31–34, which describes Jesus’ role as our advocate. “What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us” (NLT). The verses that follow assure us that with Christ as our advocate, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Jesus promised before His ascension that He would send another Advocate, the Holy Spirit (John 14:15–17). The Holy Spirit comforts us, leads us into truth, and convicts us of sin. Paul also told us the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and makes intercession for us “in harmony with God’s own will” (Romans 8:26–27, NLT). When we understand the Holy Spirit’s role as our Advocate, we can be confident in His leading. Any time we experience His conviction, we can know He is leading us to confess our sins and experience the joy of renewed closeness with the Father.

Discuss

? Read Romans 8:31–39 aloud. How is your faith strengthened by these verses?

- ? How does understanding the Holy Spirit's role as our Advocate help us respond appropriately to His comfort, leading, and conviction?
- ? How is the extravagant love of God demonstrated through Jesus' atoning work?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: John knew without any doubt that Jesus—the eternal, living Word—came to cleanse us from our sin and provide a way for us to have true fellowship with the Father and with one another. Every one of us has sinned, and that sin separates us from God and others. Fellowship with the Father begins when we acknowledge Jesus as God's Son, believe He died in our place, and confess our sins. He is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and enter into relationship with us. Not only does Jesus offer us relationship with Him, but the light of His truth also guides us and allows us to have genuine fellowship with other believers.

Living It Out Ministry in Action

- Commit to telling one person about your relationship with the Father and the Son, and invite them to experience the same relationship you enjoy.
- Invite someone from your church family whom you don't know well into your home for coffee or a meal. Make them feel welcome and encourage them to tell you about their faith journey.
- Read the Gospel of John this week and take note of the experiences the apostle had with Jesus. Consider the type of relationship they enjoyed with one another. Then apply those principles to discover the richness you can experience in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Fellowship with God Broken.
Genesis 3:8–13, 21–24

Tuesday:

Hospitality and Fellowship Demonstrated.
2 Kings 4:8–13

Wednesday:

Fellowship Betrayed.
Psalm 55:12–14

Thursday:

Fellowship among Believers.
Acts 2:41–47

Friday:

Limitations of Fellowship.
2 Corinthians 6:14–18

Saturday:

The Right Hand of Fellowship.
Galatians 2:1–10