

# Lesson 3 | March 17, 2024

## Live as Children of God

**Study Text:** 1 John 3:1–18

**Central Truth:** Becoming a child of God results in a transformed life.

**Key Verse: 1 John 3:10**

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (KJV). So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God (NLT).

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will understand that the Father’s love motivates Him to call them His children.
- Students will learn to recognize those who belong to Christ as those who choose to live in repentance and righteousness.
- Students will be challenged to reveal God’s character by loving one another.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Today we will explore what God’s children “look like.” Children naturally share many physical traits with their biological parents, while other similarities are shaped by the time they spend together. Purposefully or not, parents pass along many dispositions to their children—like food preferences, political views, or spending habits—causing children to reflect their parents in countless ways.

**Opening Activity—It Runs in the Family**

*Ask: Have you ever been able to immediately identify the parents of a child you just met? Maybe you noticed a similarity in the way they looked, in the sound of their voice, or in the way they responded to humor. Tell us about some traits that tend to run in your family.*

**Say:** Physical traits can run in biological families, but we can also pick up mannerisms and values from people we spend a great deal of time with. Spiritually speaking, when we become children of God, His attributes become part of us through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. As we spend time in God’s Word, we display His character in our response to temptations, challenges, disappointments, and even victories. Most importantly, God’s love inspires the way we engage with each other. Our love for one another is evidence we are children of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.).

In 1 John 3, the apostle clearly reveals the Father’s love and challenges us to guard against teachings that cause us to live in unrighteous ways. The Holy Spirit living in us

enables us to stand against temptation, live in the righteousness of Christ, and show our love for God by loving one another.

## **Part 1—God’s Love Frees from Satan’s Power He Calls Us His Children**

1 John 3:1–3

**Say:** First John 3:1–3 proclaims a message of assurance. John lovingly reminded his readers they were the children of God. This wasn’t a far-off, distant hope; it was their current reality. The apostle wanted them to remember how much the Father loved them and look forward to one day seeing Jesus as He is. While it hasn’t yet been fully revealed what we will be like when Jesus appears, we know we will be like Him. This blessed assurance of who we are and the hope of who we will become should motivate us to keep ourselves pure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus warned His followers that if the world hated Him, it will hate us too (John 15:18–19). John added, “The people who belong to this world don’t recognize that we are God’s children because they don’t know him” (1 John 3:1, NLT). Later in verse 13, he stated it even more clearly when he challenged us not to be surprised when the world hates us. This should encourage us not to seek our acceptance from people of the world, because we belong to God. As His children, we can find our security, identity, and acceptance in our relationship with Him. God loves us dearly. He is for us.

When we believe in Jesus and acknowledge Him as our Lord, we begin the process of becoming like Him. Our lives will reflect the character of Jesus in increasing ways as we grow to know Him more. The apostle Paul tells us, “May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God” (Philippians 1:11, NLT). This process of growth and transformation will continue until we see Jesus face-to-face.

As long as we live in these mortal bodies, we will face temptations and deal with the consequences of sin. But the moment we pass from this life into the next, we will be made complete in His presence. We will no longer struggle with sin or endure the effects of sin, for our earthly bodies will take on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53–57).

### ***Discuss***

? Why do we need to be reminded of God’s great love for us?

? How would you describe the assurance for God’s children found in 1 John 3:1–3?

? According to 1 John 3:3, “All who have this eager expectation [of being like Christ] will keep themselves pure” (NLT). How does this assurance and hope motivate you to live a pure life?

### **Resource Packet Item 1: Exploring God’s Unfailing Love**

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to read the passages in the upcoming week, underlining or highlighting the portions that speak to them most clearly of God’s

love. Ask them to prayerfully reflect on the ways they've experienced God's love and look for ways to share the good news of His love with others.

## If We Keep on Sinning

1 John 3:4–6

**Say:** No one has ever lived a sinless life—except Jesus. That's why He is the only One who could pay the price for the sins of the world. Thankfully, when we believe in Jesus, repent of our sins, and experience His forgiveness, we are restored into a right relationship with God. But even as followers of Jesus, we still sin occasionally. It's important to understand the difference between *committing a sin* and *choosing to continue in sin*. The moment we commit a sin, we should repent, demonstrating that we belong to Christ. However, if we deliberately continue to sin and do not repent, our behavior shows that we don't really know Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The writer of Hebrews tells us clearly, “If we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies” (Hebrews 10:26–27, NLT). Jesus paid the full price for our sins. When He forgives us, we have the choice and responsibility to live righteously. Hebrews 12 tells us how to walk away from sin and live the way God intends for His children:

Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. (verses 1–3, NLT)

To keep our eyes on Jesus, we must live in close relationship with Him, allowing God's Spirit and His Word to guide us into the kind of life designed for us as His children.

### **Discuss**

- ? What is the difference between committing a sin and continuing in sin?
- ? How do you strip off every weight of sin and keep your eyes on Jesus?

## Part 2—Children of God Demonstrate Righteousness

### Christ Is Righteous

1 John 3:7–8

**Say:** John wanted his readers to clearly understand that people's ongoing behavior reveals whether they belong to Christ or the devil. Evidently, there were false teachers

spreading the idea that people could continue in sin and still be in right relationship with God. This simply isn't true. If we live in Christ, He lives in us and our lives display His righteousness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Since the Fall in Genesis 3, humans have been tempted to question God's Word: "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" (verse 1, NLT). One of the enemy's favorite tactics is casting doubt on God's Word, twisting and warping it to fit his agenda. Just like the original readers of 1 John, we need to be alert to any false teaching that says we can continue to live in sin and still belong to Christ.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Did God Really Say . . . ?**

Distribute the worksheet and have the class read Genesis 3:1–13. Encourage students to answer the questions at home or in small groups if class time permits.

John emphasized again and again that our behavior matters. While we can't earn our salvation by our works—it is by faith we have been saved—our righteous behavior reveals that God's Spirit dwells in us. It is His grace and righteousness that empowers us to live free from the enslavement of sin. The apostle Paul talked about this in Romans 6:

Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living." (verses 16–18, NLT)

Christ's righteousness frees us from the entanglements of sin and enables us to live holy lives.

### ***Discuss***

- ? What happened when Eve and Adam doubted the truth of God's command?
- ? How can we guard against false teaching that causes us to question the validity or relevance of God's Word?

## **Born into God's Family**

1 John 3:9–10

**Say:** When we acknowledge Jesus is the Son of God and repent of our sins, we are born again. We can be assured of God's forgiveness. However, we still have areas of weakness and specific temptations to overcome. Thankfully, His Holy Spirit lives in us and helps us stand against temptation, making us victorious over sin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We learn a great deal about being born again from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1–21). Nicodemus was a Jewish leader who witnessed the miracles of Jesus,

and unlike many other Pharisees, he believed the miracles were from God. Jesus told him, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God” (verse 3, NLT). Jesus helped Nicodemus understand the difference between physical birth and spiritual birth. Then Jesus told Nicodemus (and us) that God loved the world so much He sent His Son so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life. Jesus came to give us life. He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. The Holy Spirit lovingly convicts us of sin, reminds us what God’s Word says, and leads us to righteousness. We depend on the Holy Spirit’s help to live in a way that pleases God.

Again John clearly states in 1 John 3:10, “Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God” (NLT). Apparently, there was a great deal of controversy among his original audience about the issues of living righteously and loving others. The apostle wanted believers to recognize who was truly born into the family of God.

### ***Discuss***

? How many times in 1 John 3:6–10 did John say that those who are born of God will not continue to sin? Why do you think he so strongly emphasized this point?

? How does it encourage you to know that living righteously is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit?

## **Part 3—God’s People Love One Another Love Proves We Have Passed from Death to Life**

1 John 3:11–15

**Say:** People who choose to continue in sin are often uncomfortable around people who live in the righteousness of Christ. The light of believers’ lives exposes the darkness of their sinful ways. Their discomfort can be displayed in a variety of ways: disregard, jealousy, belittling, scorn, dislike, or even hatred. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John shares an example from Adam and Eve’s family. Their son Cain—whom John says “belonged to the evil one” (1 John 3:12, NLT)—killed his brother, Abel, because of Abel’s righteous behavior (Genesis 4:3–10). John then mentions Jesus’ warning in John 15:18—“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first” (NLT). Within 1 John 3:11–15, John contrasts life and death, children of God and children of the devil, and love and hate. He challenges us with this clear statement: “If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life” (verse 14, NLT).

How is this proof made evident? Many Scriptures help us clearly understand the way God’s children should walk in the fullness of the Spirit and reflect the life of Christ. The apostle Paul provided two very contrasting lists in Galatians 5—the works of the flesh (sin) and the fruit of the Spirit (righteousness). Anyone can say they love God, but a person’s behavior is the true litmus test. Those whose lives display the works of the flesh prove they belong to sin:

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19–21, NLT)

After giving us this list, Paul described what it looks like when the Holy Spirit is leading our lives.

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. (Galatians 5:22–25, NLT)

These two lists describe opposite ways of interacting with one another—the works of the flesh fosters hate and death, while the fruit of the Spirit brings love and life. (We will dive much deeper into the fruit of the Spirit in our next unit.)

### ***Discuss***

- ? How can someone's righteous life make a sinful person uncomfortable? How have you seen this play out in families, workplaces, and communities?
- ? What is the correlation between darkness, hate, and death? What is the correlation between light, love, and life?
- ? How does love prove we have passed from death to life?

## **Love Defined**

1 John 3:16–18

**Say:** To understand the true definition of love, we must look closely at Jesus' example. The world has many misconceptions about what love is. Some think love is a feeling—something they can fall in and out of. Others love conditionally based on their view of someone's worth. But genuine, Christlike love is so much more than something you feel or something you earn. It's a decision to make sacrifices and do good for another person, no matter the cost—and the cost is often quite high. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' commandment in John 15:12 was, "Love each other in the same way I have loved you" (NLT). Consider all the ways Jesus demonstrated His love for us:

- He willingly left heaven and came to earth as a helpless infant.
- He valued people who were considered less important in His culture, including children, women, sinners, and Gentiles.
- He healed the sick, fed the hungry, calmed storms, forgave sinners, raised the dead, embraced outcasts, and touched the untouchables.

- He willingly endured undeserved ridicule and lay down His life so we could be forgiven of our sins.
- He didn't leave us alone. Instead, He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

The way Jesus loves us is the opposite of the self-gratifying love of the world around us. He truly wants what is best for us! Loving like Jesus means we always act in the best interest of those we love. It is a self-sacrificing love.

### **Resource Packet Item 3: The Biblical Definition of Love**

Distribute the worksheet and read through the passages, developing a biblical definition of *love* and contrasting it with the world's definition. You may choose to ask students to use the sheet for further study and personal reflection.

#### ***Discuss***

- ? What does so-called "love" look like when it is motivated by selfishness?
- ? How would you define the love of Christ as described in 1 John 3:16–18? What does it look like for a believer to love this way?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Becoming a child of God results in a transformed life. This transformation is seen in our decision to live righteously. This doesn't mean we're perfect; it means we recognize our sin and are quick to repent and adjust our lives to better reflect Christ. This righteousness is seen most clearly in our love for each other. And this love is always focused on what is best for others.

## **Living It Out Ministry in Action**

- Read 1 Corinthians 13. Insert your name everywhere you see the word *love*. Ask yourself if you are truly demonstrating the love of Christ to those around you.
- Think about how you can help meet a fellow believer's needs. Then take the necessary steps to follow through.
- Tell someone about Jesus' unconditional, extravagant love.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

Being the People of God.  
Leviticus 26:9–13

Tuesday:

God's People Forever.  
2 Samuel 7:18–24

Wednesday:

Promises to God's People.  
Jeremiah 31:31–40

Thursday:

The Right to Become God's

Children. John 1:6–12

Friday:

Confirmed as God's Children.

Romans 8:16–21

Saturday:

Children of God by Faith.

Galatians 3:24–29