

IT'S THE REAL DEAL
That You May Know - I John Series - WEEK 1
Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to be with you once again in this virtual format that we are experiencing in this time of the pandemic. I think we are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and hopefully within just a few weeks we can start the process of regathering again on our campus. It sounds like it is going to be a process from everything we are hearing from government authorities, and which kind of change from week to week. But hopefully by the end of May we will begin the process of re-engaging with some form of meetings, and then throughout the next month or two will be expanding that until hopefully we can get back to some kind of normalcy.

This has been working however, so thank you so much for staying engaged with us through these morning services that we do each Sunday morning. Some of you may be watching the services later on in the week as well. Also thank you for staying engaged in your Life Communities, through social media, and all the other avenues that we have been using. It is a wonderful thing to be alive during a time of such technology that we can stay at least somewhat connected even though we are supposed to be apart during this time.

Today we start a new series and I am very, very excited about it. This is one of my favorite books of the Bible. Of course I say that about every book of the Bible that we begin a series on, but we are going to be in the book of I John today. And we are going to be in that for several weeks. I don't know if we will get through the entire book of I John or not, but we will continue going through it until such time as we are able to gather back together here on the campus.

So we are going to be in I John Chapter 1, so grab your Bibles if you will, and open to it. As we get ready to start this series over the next several weeks, I just want to kind of set the groundwork for why this is such an important passage, and why Pastor Ben and I believe that this is important for us to go through during this time. You know we live in an age of scepticism, and I will admit to you up front that I have a very big strand of cynical scepticism in my own makeup. If you know me well at all that doesn't come as any surprise to you.

My wife has a fondness for quoting something that she has read recently or sometimes it is off the Internet which only feeds my cynicism. So she will say something along the line of, *'Well, you know they said,'* or *'they are saying,'* and as soon as she says that I immediately stop and I begin this routine that drives her crazy, and which I will admit is probably very obnoxious. But what I do is I say, *'Honey, WHO are they? Before I can listen to what 'they say,' I have to know who the 'they' are.'* If she tells me it is something she has read off Facebook, well, that starts off a whole different ranting on my part, because I know that social media is a place that is rife with bad information.

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And you know it is kind of part of my training as an academic, and in the world of academia that I have one foot in, and that is you question the origination of absolute statements, facts or statistics. So when someone makes these declarations I automatically want to know what the foundation is. What is the evidence? Is it empirical - is it based on research, is it anecdotal - is it based on experiences, has there been some way that it has been tested? I kind of go overboard on it, because that is part of the nature of academic work. And it is obnoxious, so my wife is very, very patient for putting up with it from me.

But today everyone with a social media account seems to often consider themselves an expert on just about everything. And sorting through it can kind of be frustrating, but it is important that we do sort through it. We do need to make sure that what we are hearing, as well as what we believe, to be true. It is the very essence of intellectual curiosity and intellectual pursuit. We better know that what we believe is trustworthy. That is important to stack things of value on. Most of us are experts on some things, but none of us are experts on everything. And it is the arrogant person who considers themselves an expert on everything.

Maybe you are wondering why I am talking about this; why I am talking about scepticism and cynicism and experts and so forth. And the reason is because that is the essence of the message of I John. So to help us understand we need to know that the Apostle John is the John who was called, '*the one who loved Jesus*' and '*the one who Jesus loved.*' This is the guy that was sitting right next to Jesus at the Last Supper. This is the man that Jesus asked to take care of His mother for Him at the cross. This is the John that walked with Jesus. He was the son of Zebedee, and he is the John who wrote the gospel of John.

And now this John has written this series of three letters. Remember this about Scripture - while not all Scripture is written specifically to us, all Scripture is written for us. And so John has a distinct audience that he is directing these letters to. And that was to the early church, the new believers, the first generation of Christianity. We understand that, and because it is Holy Spirit inspired it was written for us now 2,000 years later. There are things that John was addressing to the church there in the earliest days of Christianity that are every bit as relevant to us today as they were in those days. So in that way this Scripture is relevant for us.

And during these earliest days of the gospel, in the earliest days of the church, it was extremely vital for the spiritual leaders to address things that were endangering this new period of God's history, this period of the gospel, this fledgling organization, this

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family called the New Testament church. And so many things are addressed through these letters that the apostles wrote.

Now why was it significant, why was it important that the vast majority of the New Testament was written by the apostles? It was because the apostles had first-hand knowledge. They were personally disciplined by the Lord. They watched these things happen with their own eyes. They experienced them in real time. These were not traditions that had been passed down. These were not stories that had been shared. But the recordings of the apostles in these letters were to validate what they had seen for future generations. It was a first-hand account. It was the biography of Christ in His ministry, and it was the testament of the disciples as they were laying the framework and the foundation of Biblical doctrine for churches throughout the ages to refer to as they worked out the gospel and the implication of their faith and trust in Christ.

So this was really important. On top of this in this time there were tons of false religions. They were still dealing in the earliest days with the vestiges of the Pharisees and the Judaistic tradition that had all of these laws, and the bondage and the legalism that came with those. So that was constantly being reinserted into the early teachings of the church, and the apostles had to keep telling them to back off. That is what we see in Ephesians, Galatians and other places, where they would say, '*We live by grace through faith. We don't live according to the law.*'

And Paul gave this huge edict in the book of Hebrews where he is talking to the Hebrew Christians and where he told them to understand that they were freed from the law. So in this passage what we are seeing is John addressing other issues that were cropping up. Now John would eventually navigate toward the area of Asia Minor around Ephesus because of what had taken place when Herod came in and wiped out Jerusalem. The temple was torn down and everything was wiped out which was God's way of spreading the gospel.

And in spreading the gospel it disseminated the message in a good way but also in a dangerous way, because in other parts of the world there were other philosophies and other religions. Some of them were very, very pagan. Some of them worshipped a plethora of gods. Some of them were very definitely polytheistic, which means several gods. So there were the gods of Rome as well as the gods of Greece, and there was paganism involved. There was also a high intellectualism that came up particularly from Greece that influenced a lot of Roman tradition. It wanted to influence Christianity as well with this higher thinking.

One branch of that was Gnosticism and John is addressing what appeared to be some emergence of Gnostic thinking that was taking place in the early church. So as we

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read this passage here in just a moment, remember that part of John's responsibility to the early church was to warn them about a flawed doctrine that could infect the purity of the gospel. And as he is addressing this he has to do it in very clear terms because he is not only speaking to that generation but he is speaking to our generation as well.

Now John doesn't introduce himself personally in his letters. Bible scholars have come to the conclusion, and there are a lot of different reasons why it is easy to come to the conclusion, that John was the author of these three very short books, in addition to the Gospel of John. But as we read this we need to understand that John saw himself as one who was uniquely qualified to be able to address some of the dangerous philosophies and doctrines that could eke their way into the church, and into the gospel.

And folks, that is happening today. I would urge you by the way while we have a lot of time during this time of quarantine to Google or look up in You Tube the documentary 'American Gospel.' It is just one way in which we see how even in evangelical churches there is a tendency to drift away from sound theology and sound doctrine into emotionalism and flawed philosophy, and the 'name it and claim it' type theology that is very dangerous. So I would suggest you take a look at the 'American Gospel.' I believe there is also a subsequent documentary that has come out later.

But today even in our culture we know that we have placed high values on things like tolerance and pluralism. But within theology we need to be very, very careful that our tolerance and our desire to be seen as open minded and reasonable does not lead us to theologically compromises which can ultimately have consequences of eternal nature and eternal consequence.

You know I would suggest this, if pastors are not actively warning those who look to them for leadership, teaching and direction from the Word of God, if they are not actively warning against false teaching and dangerous philosophies then they are simply not doing their full job. Part of the job that Pastor Ben and I, and the other pastors of Life Fellowship have, is not only to teach the gospel, but also to warn others of a false gospel. Not only are we to teach the truth, but we are to warn you against the lies; and sometimes that can make you uncomfortable.

Sometimes that sounds very narrow and exclusionary, and do you know why? It is because the gospel is narrow and exclusionary. Jesus Himself said, "***I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me.***" It doesn't get any narrower than that, folks. And that is part of the job of the pastor. So if you hear me, or Pastor Ben, or one of the other pastors, or even another pastor from a different church that you may be watching online, and you hear someone call out false teaching, understand that is part of our responsibility to warn others of that. John was teaching these things as an

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apostle who had first-hand experience with the teachings of Christ. He had watched Jesus, he had walked with Jesus, he had slept beside Jesus and He had eaten next to Jesus. And because of this John had the authority to make declarations.

And in studying this over the course of the next several weeks, we are going to point out some things that are false, some things that are flawed, some ways in which we may deceive ourselves, or ways we can drift away from the truth. And we need to understand that all of us need to be constantly looking for these weeds that get into our theology that are not consistent with the truth of the Word of God.

Many of you know that I like to garden. In fact I put a video of my garden on our church's social media Facebook page last week. And I talked about some things happening at church, but I also took a tour of my garden because I just love to garden. But you know in my love of gardening I hate weeds and pests. If I tolerate the weeds and the pests I won't have a garden, and I won't have anything to eat later on, or anything to share with others, because the weeds and the pests will crowd out that which I planted, cultivated and hope to harvest. And whether it is the cute little bunny rabbit that comes in and nibbles my beans, or my carrots right down to the nub, or whether it is the pennywort weed or the crab grass that comes and chokes the plants out, it is all devastating to why I planted the garden.

So I get serious about it. I pull the weeds out by the roots and I throw them away. I put a big fence around my garden so that I can keep the little cute bunny rabbits out. In fact last year I was sitting on my deck and I looked out at the garden and I could see something rustling around in the plants. And I knew there had been a rabbit going into my garden from time to time through a hole in the fence. And as I watched I saw a great big hawk - I won't go into graphic details here, because I know some of our kids are watching with us today - but let's just say the hawk was enjoying a nice little snack of bunny. When I went out there later on to see what damage had been done I was going through my bed of lettuce and there were five or six little tiny baby bunnies enjoying the lettuce. Now I have to tell you that I relocated them; I didn't hurt them, but I relocated them. Why? It is because even a little bunny can tear up a lettuce patch.

And I want you to understand this - even a little false doctrine will tear up a church, will tear up a testimony, and will tear up sound theology. So John was saying that he was going after the weeds and he was going after the bunnies. He was going after the false teaching and the false philosophy. So as we read this passage understand as we lay the foundation for this book of I John, this is what John was all about. So look if you would with me in I John Chapter 1, and we are just going to read four verses today as we launch into our study of this book.

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The Scripture says: *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”*

So here we go. John is writing this letter to the early church. He is putting it down, and he is saying that as they get ready to deal with some of these topics this is what he wants them to know. He speaks with authority because this is the real deal. In fact the whole theme of the book is, *‘that you may know.’* There are some things that John says that provides clarity with a voice of authority that we can have as our surety as we live out our Christian faith.

One of them is found in I John Chapter 5 where he says: *“These things are written that you may KNOW that you have eternal life.”* Of all the things we can know there is nothing more important than knowing that we have a relationship with our creator, knowing where we are going to go when we die, and knowing that we have eternal life. And John in very clear terms says that these things you can know, that you have eternal life. There are evidences and reasons to believe. So that is the course of the whole book that John has written, *‘that we may know.’* And today John starts off by saying, *‘This is the real deal. This is really real.’*

I want us to see this as we look through these first four verses. Let’s read verse 1 again. *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.”* So we have this first sentence which is three verses long. And in the first third of the sentence John says that the gospel of Christ is the real deal.

Now maybe you are wondering how I draw that conclusion. It is because John is saying, *‘Look, you have chosen in many cases to believe things in the past that you had no witnesses to. They were traditions, or they were systems, but I am telling you of something concerning the word of life that I saw with my own eyes, I heard with my own ears and I experienced with my own hands. You are not getting this second-hand. You are not getting this down the road generations, but you are hearing from one who walked and talked with the Savior, the Messiah, the one who died and was resurrected. These hands touched Him. These eyes saw Him. These ears heard Him. You can take it to the bank that my testimony is first-hand. This is not hearsay. This is not gossip. This is not*

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rumor. This is first-hand testimony. It will stand up in court. I saw it with my own eyes as did the other apostles.'

Now understand that this is one of the apologetics for why we trust the Bible, why we trust the story of redemption. Throughout history there has always been an underlying principle of when you are making a case that you use eyewitnesses. This has always been done in courts of law. You can go back to the Hammurabi Code. You can go back to the Law of Moses. You can go as far back in civilization as is possible, and then up to this day and you will always find an emphasis on who actually saw it, and how did they experience it.

We know that we have five senses, and there are only five ways that we can experience something in terms of a physical sense. And that is through our eyes, our ears, our tongue, our nose and through our touch. We know that is how we perceive reality. And John said that he wanted them to understand that these are the things that from the very beginning he has heard, he has seen, he has looked upon, he has touched and they are concerning the word of life.

Now I want you to note a couple of different things here. First of all John said: ***“That which was from the beginning.”*** What was from the beginning? It was the gospel. And who is the gospel in human form? It is Jesus Christ. In other words he is saying, *‘This is the beginning, and it is the conclusion of God’s story.’* We studied during the month of April that His story began at creation. Next happened the fall, then there was redemption, and finally we will have restoration. And in this story we understand that at the very beginning there was the Godhead. At the very beginning there were the three in one - the trinity and unity - all three one. At that time Jesus was present. And as Jesus was present in creation, He has revealed Himself to us as the fulfilment of God’s promise in the book of Genesis.

So this is an important aspect of it through this witness that we have. I also want to note this - one of the ways that we know that this was written by the same John that wrote the book of John is there are so many parallels in it. Notice it says, ***“That which was from the beginning.”*** And if we look at the book of John Chapter 1 and verse 1 it says: ***“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, the same was in the beginning with God.”***

So in other words John is starting off this book, this letter with the gospel account as well when he says we always go back to the beginning, we always go back to the foundation, we always go back to the starting point. And that is exactly what he said. And then John tells us that at that starting point we find God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - this is His story. It began at creation and it continues to restoration

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and we better listen carefully because this is the story of the Word of Life. The Word of Life is simply another word for Jesus, and Jesus was also called the bread of life. He had many terms, such as the lamb of God, and if we were to go through the Bible we would find name after name, all of which apply to Christ, because Christ is beyond description. There isn't one term that we use to describe Him that is sufficient to fully describe Him.

In this case we are speaking of Jesus as the Word, and by the way again remember John Chapter 1 referred to Jesus that way when he said, "***In the beginning was the Word,***" and the Word is always a representation of Jesus. So He is the living Word of God, and we see that throughout the book of John. So what John is saying in verse 1 is for us to remember that the gospel of Christ that began at creation and continues on today is the real deal.

Now let's look in verse 2 where John says this: "***The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.***" One of the principles of studying the Scripture, of hermeneutics, is looking for what God repeats. And often He will use key words. There are two key words that we find in this passage that I will point out to you. The first one is the word 'manifest.' The word manifest is pretty simple and when you look at the Greek origin of it, it means 'to be made obvious,' or 'to be revealed' as in 'to be presented for review.' So when you see the word manifest understand this, there is an intentionality to it. In other words part of God is viewed through the general creation. Every time we see mountains, clouds, thunderstorms, flowers and even little baby bunnies, we see a general revelation of our creator, of what God has done, and how powerful He is, how ordered He is, how He has designed everything for us. That is a general revelation.

But there is a specific revelation as well. We find it in Scripture and it is the story of Christ, and it is the intentional outlay of the gospel. And this specific revelation is done through the word of Christ, through the person of Jesus Christ. And so John said God has made it really obvious. He has made it obvious that there is a creation, and that someone had to create. There is a design, therefore there is a designer.

And not only that, but He has given us specific revelation. He has made manifest, He has revealed specifically to us that there is life everlasting available to those who believe. So when we see this, "***the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you,***" we realize that John is not repeating something that someone else told him. He saw this himself, he saw it from the beginning and he is sharing it with us as a first-hand witness. He is telling us that the Father Himself through His Son Jesus made eternal life possible and clear to you and to me. Through the miracle

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of the resurrection, to the authority of the gospel, we can have eternal life. So the gospel of Christ is really real and eternal life is the real deal.

You know the reassignment of eternal life that Christ provides for us, that we were dead in our sins and our trespasses is what Scripture says, but then because of the resurrection of Christ if we believe, the Holy Spirit gives us new life, eternal life, and that which was dead is now made alive again. That act, that reassignment of eternal life - because we weren't intended to die originally, but sin injected that into us - that reassignment of eternal life is the destruction of Satan's diabolical plan which has always been eternal separation from God, and for us to have eternal death, because life apart from God is not life, it is death. And so that is Satan's diabolical plan - it always has been - to separate us from God.

Do you understand the resurrection then stomped out the consequences of sin, stomped out the condemnation and the brokenness so that we could have eternal life. And it is the core of what we should be teaching and how we should be living. So what John is saying is, *'We need to get ready to deal with these issues and point out false doctrines and human nature. I want you to know that for sure the gospel of Christ is the real deal. Eternal life is the real deal.'*

Now look in verse 3 as he goes on to say: ***"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."*** So the first word I wanted you to note was the word manifest, and I hope you circled that. Now circle the word fellowship. You are going to see fellowship a lot in this first chapter and throughout the book of I John. And this concept of fellowship is the real deal. Our fellowship is the real deal; it is the consequence of eternal life, it is the consequence of the gospel that we get to enjoy real fellowship.

Eternal life is why we can have fellowship. We can have fellowship with each other because we have fellowship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So in other words our ability to function as a family, as a church, as a body, as a collection of believers is made possible because of the gospel, because it is that shared experience that comes with the rejuvenation of eternal life in our lives. The destruction of the sin nature and the reclamation of our soul for the sake of the gospel is because of what Christ did.

So fellowship is the real deal. And I will talk about that a little bit more in a moment, but I want us to look at the fourth thing found in verse 4. ***"And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."*** That word 'complete' is sometimes translated in other places as perfect or full, but the idea is that it is total, so that we can

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have a complete, total, sustainable, eternal fulfilling joy. And that is a great promise, isn't it? It is a great promise because joy is the end result. It is a full joy, he said: "***So that our joy may be complete.***" He doesn't want it to be temporary, or partial, or fleeting, or unfounded. But the joy that we can experience in our relationship with Christ is a total complete joy, and that is what John is going to emphasize.

You know so many things that we aspire to, so many things that we work to attain, we find out later that they produce a partial joy, that they produce a temporary feeling of accomplishment, or happiness, or fulfillment. And then something comes along and interrupts it. But nothing can interrupt true spiritual joy. It is complete and it is eternal.

I love gardening but my joy in my garden is interrupted all the time. Sometimes it is by a bunny, sometimes it is by mold or mildew that gets on the plants, sometimes it is by weeds, or by the heat of the summer. And all the joy comes at a great price and ultimately sometimes it is just a big flop. If your joy is found in money you could have all this money in the bank, but all it would take is a big recession and that money can be gone. Maybe your joy has been in a job that you have worked hard at, or in a business you wanted to build, or in a relationship that you thought was precious; all those things in a quick turn can disappear.

And those joys are not full joy; it is not a complete joy, it is a temporary state of happiness. I don't mean to diminish it, because I enjoy relationships, I enjoy living in a nice house, I enjoy living in the United States, I enjoy a lot of things that I know full well are temporary. But there is one joy that is complete; there is one joy that is whole and cannot be challenged, cannot be taken away and cannot be destroyed. And that is the joy that comes with knowing Christ as my Savior. And regardless of the circumstances that may come into my life, whether it is crop failure, or my house burning down, or losing my job, or the economy falling apart, or my health going bad, whatever that may take away those lesser joys, the most complete joy I have is the joy that is in Christ.

I have been very privileged to have walked with different people who have during the course of their life experienced tragedies. I talked this week with someone that I love very much and they were talking about some of the difficulty they had had with a job, with their house, and with their health, but they said, '*You know in the end I see God working. And in the end God has given me more than I deserve. He lets me know that I can rest assured that in spite of my fixation on wanting to control things, God is in control and He will always give me what I need, and when I need it.*' That, folks, is full joy.

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You know so far 2020 has not been a good year. I mean 2020 has been difficult, and yet in the midst of it we who know Christ as our Savior can have a joy that is full, is complete and is not built on all these other circumstances or possessions. Our joy is not in what we possess but rather in what possesses us. And these are important things that John is telling us.

So what do we do with this as we get ready to launch into this over the next few weeks? Well, I think there are four quick principles I would challenge you to consider. Number one - know what you believe and do not be shaken. See John was giving this message to the early church that was being infiltrated with Gnostics. Later on there were people in the church causing troubles that John has to address. He would tell the church not to pay attention to these troublemakers who were hard necked, strong willed and off base, and they should just be ignored.

In other places John is encouraging them to keep looking to Christ, to keep confessing their sins, and to look for fellowship. He is dealing with all of these things as well as laying the groundwork of sound theology that says in the midst of confusion they need to know what they believe and why they believe it, because that will give them security.

You know we have a responsibility to know what we believe and why we believe it. For too many years I have seen a level of Christianity that is superficial, and we follow it out of tradition. *'Well my mom and dad took me to Sunday school and church when I was a kid so I learned the Bible stories and I went to youth camp.'* But at some point their faith gets tested and Satan has an opportunity to say, *'See this isn't everything it is supposed to be. You are not happy right now, so your joy must be fake. This isn't really real.'*

And at that time people who don't know what they believe, or why they believe it will get to a point where they will say, *'I'm walking away from it.'* I want to pause here and say this to all of the teenagers, because a lot of you teenagers are particularly vulnerable to this. You are in a state of transition where you are moving out of the control sphere of your parents, your church, and your Christian school teachers, and now you are getting ready to go out on your own. Some of you are getting ready to go to college for the first time, others of you may have had to come back from college prematurely because of the pandemic. And now you are at a stage where for the first time in your life you are going to be able to decide whether or not you really believe this stuff, and whether or not you are going forward.

And parents we need to be teaching our kids to believe what they believe not because you and I believe it, but because it is worthy of belief, because it is true. And

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young people don't believe in the gospel, in Christ, in the Bible simply because your parents did, or your youth pastor did, or your friends did, or your Christian school taught it, because what will happen is there will be someone who comes along who may be more persuasive than they were. And they may be more articulate so that they can give you arguments that sound pretty convincing at the time. And it is during those stages that Satan sets up shop and plants the seeds of the weeds that will crowd out the truth in your life. So it is vital for you to know what you believe and why you believe it.

And here is the good news, here is the good thing about it - every question you throw at the Word of God, every doubt you have, every cynical thing that crosses your path about the gospel has an answer in Scripture if you will search for it and do your homework. And is there any topic more important than where we will spend eternity on which you should be doing some study?

It never bothers me when a young person says to me, *'Well, how do I know this Bible is true?'* Or *'How do I know that Jesus ever existed?'* Or *'How do I know there is such a thing as an afterlife?'* I love those kinds of questions because I know that God is planting His seed deeper in their lives. And if they will study and search, and if they will believe in faith, they are going to be stronger at the end of that because we all have questions, even pastors.

So young people know what you believe and why you believe it because the college professor that challenges you about whether the Bible is true or not is not going to be satisfied with your answer that goes like this: *'Well, in my church that is what they taught me.'* He won't care about that because he wants to know what you believe and why you believe it. So know those things. If you need resources, talk to one of us here at the church. Give Pastor Justin a call, or talk to Ben or me, or any of the leaders in the church, and we will be glad to get you information that will help you to know what you believe, and why you believe it, and not to be shaken.

Number two - share the story of the gospel with those around you. John's letter embodied his obedience to the Great Commission. He was all about telling others. He said, *'Listen, this is my testimony. This is what I saw, this is what I heard, this is what I learned, and this is what I experienced.'* Anytime you see something amazing, you hear of some great truth, what is your inclination? You have to tell others about it. If you have a great experience somewhere you are going to tell people about it.

I went to Alaska a few years ago and it was the beautiful place I had ever been so I couldn't wait to come back and tell people, *'Man, is you never go anywhere else in your lifetime you have to go to Alaska because it is amazing.'* We give testimony to the things that are important to us, and the gospel ought to be important to us. Someone asked me

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this week, *'Well, how do I go about sharing the truth, how do I share about heaven and hell?'* It is not complicated; all you have to do is tell your own story. Just tell your own story about the difference God has made in your life. Tell them why you can be calm during a pandemic. Tell them why you can have faith when you lose your job. Tell them why you can go through bad news with a smile on your face. And in that story the Holy Spirit will take His Word and the work that He does and draw people to Himself. So share the story of the gospel with those around you.

The third thing is this - plug deeply into your relationship with God and His family. This is the essence of fellowship. Fellowship means 'walking with,' or 'along side of.' *Koinonia* is the Greek term for fellowship. And that's part of the privilege that we have as believers. I don't like to put it this way, but you are part of an exclusive club, because what you are part of is God's family. And in that, we understand about things like joy, faith, hope, mercy, forgiveness, patience and longsuffering. We understand those terms. And sometimes our language is a little bit unique because it is the language of family. We know the inside story. We know the great cost of our salvation. We have experienced things through God that others who don't know Him may find puzzling. And we need to embrace and enjoy that.

Let me give you this challenge. In just a few weeks what it looks like is going to happen is that we are going to be able to start with very small services, probably 50 or below. In a church our size we would have to have 30 or 40 services to be able to have everyone be able to attend. And we have so many volunteers for services it just gets complicated. But at some point you are going to be invited to reengage with your Life Community, with ministry groups, with Bible studies and with corporate worship. When that time comes, jump in. That is part of family life. That is part of what it is all about. That is part of what we need to be doing. So plug deeply into it.

If you have been watching us these last few weeks on Facebook, or You Tube and you don't really have a church home, come on down. We want to invite you to come. If you don't live in our community, find a body of believers in your community that you can go to and enjoy that fellowship. You know it is hard for me to understand how some people can go years without talking to their family, because I just can't imagine that. I don't know why anyone would want to do that. I love being with my family. I love hearing from them, talking to them, and spending time with them. I crave it when we don't have it, and I look for an excuse to make it happen. And I believe that is the way we should feel about our spiritual family as well.

I want you to know that we miss you guys! We miss seeing you, we miss your corny jokes, we miss being able to slap you on the back, shake your hand, or hug you. I

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don't know when we are going to be able to do that again, but we do long to see you again. So plug back into the fellowship as soon as you can. I John Chapter 1 and verse 3 talks about that importance.

And then finally - find joy in the right things, the full joy that comes with loving the right things. Avoid spending time, energy and resources in the pursuit of empty joys. No matter how much money you get you are always going to want a little more. No matter how big your house is you are going to have problems with it. No matter how important your job is it is going to come with corresponding downsides. But the joy that comes with following Christ, knowing Him, is an eternal joy, and it is an important joy.

So there you have it. It is really real, it is the real deal, and these things have been written to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the Apostle John that we may know. I hope this week you will open your Bibles and begin studying I John. At least look through the rest of this book because next week we are going to be looking at the road to perdition and how that happens.

And I hope that today if you don't know Christ you will experience that joy, that completeness that comes with a relationship with Him. If you would like to know how to have a relationship with Christ, drop us a note at media@lifecharlotte.com, or give us a call, because we would love to connect with you and to tell you about the difference that Christ makes. Until then, let's make sure that we are living the real life because it is the real deal.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.