



DAILY BIBLE READING NOTES

1 John

TESTING TRUTHS

Term 1, 2014

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This epistle was most likely written to second generation believers towards the end of the first century and is attributed to John the son of Zebedee. John writes to address the false teaching that had sprung up since the truth about Jesus, the Son of God, had been declared and taught. Some believers had begun to doubt whether Jesus really was God. John encourages the believers to live lives confident of eternal life in Christ, and then to live transparently loving lives, as the righteous children of God.

Further reading.

The letters of John. John Stott. TNTC 1988

The message of John. D. Jackman IVP 1988.

Making the most of these notes

There was a time when Christian people would not have dreamt of going a day without reading their Bible and saying their prayers. Even apart from any good work performed or service rendered, a daily devotion was considered to be the most vital activity of everyday life. For this reason, some gave it absolute pride of place. (My grandmother would not even eat her breakfast until she had attentively engaged with God!)

Tales of this sort of regimen often sound a little peculiar (even legalistic!) in the modern ear. And while we would be very slow indeed to criticise them for such a practice – the truth is we are even slower to imitate them!

The contemporary Christian's devotional life tends to be a very different matter, and conducted accordingly. While we may readily acknowledge this sad situation and lament it as our loss, we very often feel unable to do anything about it. We consider the problem to have arisen from a lack of time – a crisis which only we moderns suffer from. Now there is of course some truth to this, although it is also true that we have lost far more than just time.

1. We have lost 'discipline', particularly self-discipline. We have no love of routine. We still of course live with some discipline (life would be unliveable without it!), but we always feel ourselves to have enough – indeed, enough to resent it. For this reason, we are invariably unwilling to impose any more upon ourselves. We see discipline as the stifler of spontaneity, the breeding ground of duty – & unlike our pre-modern forebears, we can find no delight in duty.
2. We have also lost the art of 'meditation'. This is particularly true of the contemporary evangelical scene. We look down on Charismatics who can sing a song through more than twice. If we have to sing the same words more than about three times, it is almost as if they instantly lose their meaning. We don't seem to be able to make meaning last in our hearts & minds more than about 30 seconds. We lack the capacity to ruminate & ponder & reflect – to break something down according to its component parts, to assess it in terms of its inner dynamics & logic, to locate it in relation to other truths, ideas & related concepts, to compare it with the similar, to contrast it with the opposite, to apply it to

our own thinking, attitudes and behaviour, to turn it into prayer & praise & thanks.

3. Finally, we have lost ‘direction’. While once we had a prayer book and lectionary chocked full with programs to follow and material to digest, our movement away from fixed liturgical patterns has left us to our own devices. Modern devotional material tends to focus us hopelessly inward on ourselves & leaves us without examples & models to learn from & emulate. Now many of us feel a bit stuck with what to do & how to do it.

These notes have been designed to help the modern Christian in their devotional life. The joy of hearing God address us in the Bible is still the key to a healthy devotional life. And so these notes are simply that – notes to assist in daily Bible reading. Particularly, they aim to help you to be disciplined, meditative & directed.

What follows then are a series of notes with questions, thoughts for reflection, points to ponder, suggestions for prayer, and the like. Please allow about 10 minutes a day to get through this material. You will note that each week is only broken up into 5 days – that is because it is presumed that for the most part our Bible Reading & Prayer has been incorporated into our regular weekday routine.

At the end of each section are a few bigger questions as well as a suggested Starter that seek to open up fruitful lines of inquiry for discussion in a small group setting. In each case, you may find you have to do some extra work, searching back through the passage for material related to this theme, setting it in relation to other passages of Scripture, considering the alternatives, applying it to your own situation, converting it into prayer & praise.

Bonne lecture! Happy reading!

Week 1 – 1 John 1:1-4 – The Word of Life

Day 1

Read 1 John 1:1-4

Think - John uses the word “We” when he writes...to whom is he referring? What does this add to the weight of his message?

Pray - Ask God to help all who proclaim the message of life in Christ.

Day 2

Read 1 John 1:1-4, then John 1:1-18.

Think - about the context into which John places Jesus.

Pray - that as you age in years, you will also grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus.

Day 3

Read 1 John 1:1-4

Think - John wants all to know that eternal life comes in Christ and is from the Father. What are the things you want to tell others about Jesus? What means the most to you?

Pray - for clarity and courage for all who speak of Christ.

Day 4

Read John 1:1-4

Think - John speaks of fellowship with others, the Father and the Son. Is there a difference between fellowship and friendship?

Pray - for a healthy fellowship in your Church, and wherever Christians live and work together.

Day 5

Read 1 John 1:1-4

Think - Consider what you are planning to do today. How will these things help to bring joy, both to you, and to those around you?

Pray - that God will help you make choices leading to wise and fruitful activity.

For group discussion

Starter

What do you consider could make “your joy complete”? What do you want to accomplish in your lifetime?

1. What have you heard, seen, looked at, and touched that convinces you that eternal life is found in Christ?

How is your experience different from that of John?

What authority do we have when speaking of Christ?

2. John refers to that which was “from the beginning.” What do you think he’s talking about?

Why does he place the Word of life in this historical context?

What other context does he use?

Where do you tend to begin when you speak of the Word of life?

3. Spurgeon said that “some Christians try to go to heaven alone, in solitude....believers are not compared to animals that wander alone...but sheep who go in flocks.”

How important is the gathering of Christians to you?

What do you value?

What do you find difficult?

Are you more likely to experience joy or frustration?

Week 2 – 1 John 1:5-2:14 - Walking in the Light

Day 1

Read 1 John 1:5-7

Think - John contrasts light and dark. Consider where light is to be found and what darkness may indicate.

Pray - that God will shed his light on your life, and that you will be ready to walk in it.

Day 2

Read 1 John 1:5-2:2

Think - John repeats the word “if” - showing us what it means to walk in the light. Trace the word through the passage.

Pray - Thank God for Jesus Christ our advocate the one who speaks on our behalf before our righteous God.

Day 3

Read 1 John 2:3-8

Think - Obedience to God’s commands proves that we really know Him. Apply this test to your life....are you walking as Jesus did?

Pray - for courage to bring your life under this test; and to be prepared to share this truth with others.

Day 4

Read 1 John 2:9-11

Think - John now applies the test of relationship. Think about family, friends, work relationships etc. Our attitudes reveal the state of our hearts before God.

Pray - Ask God to show you where you might do better in relation to others.

Day 5

Read 1 John 2:12-14

Think - We are part of a family. In each season of life, there are challenges. Children are dependant, fathers [and mothers] have the experiences of life, young men [and women] have battles to fight.

Pray - that you will see ways to be an encourager of others in the Christian family.

For group discussion

Starter

If you had to choose three proofs that a person is following Jesus, what would they be?

Read 1 John 1:5-2:14

1. John is said to be the presenter of polarity. Find as many contrasts as you can in this passage.

Paint a picture of one who knows God.... what level of confidence do you have that you are a child of God?

2. Reread 1 John 1:5-2:2

What will we know about ourselves in relation to sin, if we are walking in the light? What are the other positions we might adopt in relation to sin?

Why is sin a problem, and how can we walk in the light?

3. "Obedience to the commands is not spectacular, but it is at the basis of all true Christian service." Leon Morris.

Could this be interpreted as legalism? Whatever happened to the thought that when Jesus sets us free we are free indeed? How do you understand [or stand under] the concept of freedom in Christ?

What do you find difficult in the matter of obedience to God's commands?

What might make you stumble? You may like to begin with "Love God and love one another."

4. Apply the different stages of life ...child, young, father....to the stages of the Christian life. Maturity takes time...how does it help you to understand that we grow as Christians? How does it help your relationships with others?

Do you think we are in any particular stage at any one time, or could we be in them all at the same time?

Week 3 – 1 John 2:15-27 – World and Warning

Day 1

Read 1 John 2:15-27

Think - We are easily distracted from what is central. John cautions believers against the pull of the “world” and false teachers. Are these two areas preventing real spiritual growth in your life?

Pray – for discernment as you choose to follow Jesus.

Day 2

Read 1 John 2:15-17

Think - What are the dangers to growing faith and obedience in the world we live in? Why is the temporal so attractive?

Pray - for eyes fixed on Jesus and the things that last.

Day 3

Read 1 John 2:18-19

Think - False teachers are always present. Some did not believe that Jesus really was God in the flesh, and tried to persuade others.

Pray - that when you hear teachers speak of knowing God, you will stand firm in Christ’s centrality.

Day 4

Read 1 John 2:20-23

Think - What is your protection from false teaching?

Pray - you will take notice of the voice of God.

Day 5

Read 1 John 2:24-28

Think - We move away from God in small steps...sometimes barely discernible. Verse 24 is our safeguard.

Pray - that God will guard your heart and mind.

For group discussion

Starter

What are the greatest tensions in your life? What competes for your attention?

1. “When the bank is faltering, smart people do not invest in it.” Why then is the world, [the system we have organised that offers life without Christ...not the created world] so attractive? Where do you see the world faltering?

Where have you been tempted to place priority on the things of the world?

What have you set aside in order to follow Jesus, and those things that are eternal?

2. How do you feel about the presence of antichrists?

Is this something you think about often, rarely, sometimes, never?

How do you approach those who believe in God but not Christ? Can we find our own way to God?

Can we reason our way to faith?

3. Does the truth change?

Are there new things we need to know about how to be in a right relationship with God?

Where have you experienced opposition to your faith in Christ?

What helps you to stay on track?

Week 4 – 1 John 2:28-3:10 – Children of God

Day 1

Read 1 John 2:28-3:10

Think - Children of God are called to resemble their Father in family likeness.

Pray - that you will be transformed daily.

Day 2

Read 1 John 2:28-29

Think - Belonging to God means that we need to be born again. All human effort fails to give us rebirth from above.

Pray - Thank God for the gift of new birth.

Day 3

Read 1 John 3:1-3

Think - God loves us, but being God's child distances us from the world...we have a new mindset and want to live lives pleasing to God.

Pray - for a real desire to please God in the way you think, react and live.

Day 4

Read 1 John 3:4-6

Think - Continuing to sin, and not to care, is disregard for God. John says if we continue to sin, we have neither seen God nor known Him.

Pray - that you will know who God is in holiness and purity, allowing Him to work in you.

Day 5

Read 1 John 3:7-10

Think - John sets up another contrast and traces the evidence of those who belong to Christ and those who belong to the devil. How do you see the people around you...does it seem this clear?

Pray - for the opportunity to invite those around you to know and experience the love of God in Christ.

For group discussion

Starter

It has been said that many dog owners and their pets have much in common and often take on a “family like” resemblance.

In the human families you know, what family resemblances do you find the most interesting?

1. How practical is it to expect people, who are sinners from birth, with a nature inclined towards pleasing oneself, to be sinless?

What do you think John is saying when he says no one born of God will continue to sin?

Is there a difference between what we know has been declared in the heavens, and what we experience here on earth?

2. What areas of your nature have been radically changed since you have been reborn?

Do you expect to change? Does the thought please you or cause dismay?

Where would you like to see change?

What will the process be?

How might God use your present circumstance to bring about a nature more aligned to His?

3. What do you understand the “seed” of God to be? A new nature? The Holy Spirit? The Word of God?

Week 5 – 1 John 3:11-24 – Love One Another

Day 1

Read 1 John 3:11-24

Think - Love one another...the call to those who belong to God. The Bible is full of examples of those who hate and those who love...culminating in the love of Christ for the undeserving. This command should set Christians apart.

Pray - for the ability to love with the love of God.

Day 2

Read 1 John 3:11-15

Think - John again describes a number of contrasts...evil/righteous, love/hate, death/life.

Cain was evil, hating, murderous, even belonging to the evil one. He was unable to see his brother please God without hating.

Pray - that you will know what to bring to God, and that you will rejoice in the blessing of others.

Day 3

Read 1 John 3:16

Think - Jesus has shown us what to do. How can you lay down your life for a brother? Would you want to?

Pray - for the discipline and desire to serve others at personal cost and inconvenience.

Day 4

Read 1 John 3:17-20

Think - How easy it is to promise to do something, or to make a longer term commitment and then to leave it undone? Those who really love follow through with actions and in truth.

Pray - for a steady service from a truthful heart for yourself and then, that all who commit to serve will actually do so.

Day 5

Read 1 John 3:21-24

Think - Look closely at the command...believe and love. Is that what you were expecting? Is it as simple as it sounds?

Pray - that all believers will honour God by obeying his command to believe and love...that the church will be a positive witness in the world.

For Group Discussion

Starter

Do we love our way into service, or do we serve our way into love?
How are both of these statements true in your experience?

1. Read the hymn together:

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word,
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord,
Familiar, condescending, patient, free.
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings;
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea.
Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile,
And though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee.
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Words: Henry F. Lyte, 1847/Music: William H. Monk, 1861

A heart resting in God....a life in God's presence. How conscious are you of living life in God's presence and under his command to love? Often, seldom, always?

2. Love of God draws the hate of the world. What do you know of this deep divide between those who believe and those who don't? How can you live in this kind of tension?

3. Real love has legs and hands and feet.

Commandment to love...is that a contradiction in terms?

How is the commandment to love “perennially new?” when it is so old and so often rehearsed.

Where are you finding it hard to love?

Does the example of Jesus help you or shame you?

What other examples of sacrificial love have been an encouragement to you? What do you understand to be the motivation for such sacrifice?

Week 6 – 1 John 4: 1-6 – Test the Spirits

Day 1

Read 1 John 4:1-6

Think - Christians are called to be discerning with God's help...to know and share the truth.

Pray - for all who teach and share the gospel...that they will both know and communicate the truth.

Day 2

Read 1 John 4:1-3

Think - Many who speak with authority, and quite convincingly, add to or detract from the truth of Christ...God in the flesh.

Pray - that you will listen carefully to those who speak of knowing God.

Day 3

Read 1 John 4:4

Think - When the task seems daunting, remember who you are in God.

Pray - for those who don't know what to say, or who feel unable to communicate their belief clearly.

Day 4

Read 1 John 4:4-5

Think - The world does not want to hear from God. Where have you been tempted to leave something out in sharing the gospel...perhaps Judgment? Eternal destination? Some other aspect of the whole gospel?

Pray - for a faithful heart in the face of dismissal or rejection. Pray for those persecuted for a belief in Christ.

Day 5

Read 1 John 4:1-6

Think - In a world which values tolerance and multifaith practices...it may seem very narrow to hold to the deity of Christ in the centre of salvation.

Pray - for a ready heart to hear from God alone, both for you who believe and for those who falter or fall away.

For Group Discussion

Starter

When have you questioned something you have believed or understood since childhood? A belief? A tradition? A practice of family life? A habit? Have your views changed? Can you identify a catalyst?

Read the passage.

1. John's concern is that the believers will be influenced by false teachers who don't believe the truth about Christ. Many of the eyewitnesses were no longer present and some Christians were not sure anymore.

How much does the response you receive from giving a message determine the content?

Where do you sense that the Christian message is out of step with the world ?

What effect does that have on you and what you believe, or what you will say you believe?

2. Dear friends, dear children..... John cares for those to whom he writes.

What concern do you have for those in the body and what they believe?

What does it matter?

What responsibility do you take?

How could you practically express this concern?

3. Does the idea of testing the spirits seem out of your league? Beyond your ability? Beyond your comfort zone?

What encouragement can you receive from this passage?

What practical help is available?

Do you have any experience in this area to share with your group?

What caution might need to be given regarding involvement in testing the spirits?

Week 7 – 1 John 4:7-21 – God’s Love, and Ours

Day 1

Read 1 John 4:7-21

Think - Count the number of times John writes the word “love.” God is love. Believers are both loved and called to be loving.

Pray - that God’s love will be seen in your life.

Day 2

Read 1 John 4:7-12

Think - God’s love for us is to flow on to others as we respond in gratitude to the life given to us in Christ.

Pray - that the gospel will be understood as a message of love.

Day 3

Read 1 John 4:13-16

Think - Sometimes God seems far away, and unapproachable. He loves us and we can rely on Him. Where might that thought help you today?

Pray - that the knowledge of the love of God will hold believers in confidence of His help.

Day 4

Read 1 John 4:17-18

Think - John continues to make his point. Perfect love drives out fear and so we have the privilege of standing before a holy and righteous God, confident of His love. Will there be an opportunity to speak God’s love into a fearful life or situation this day?

Pray - that those who, as yet, are under God’s judgment will come to a saving knowledge of His love in Christ.

Day 5

Read 1 John 4:19-21

Think - Is it easier to love the unseen? God? The person up close? The person unnamed and far away? How does your life stand up under this test?

Pray - for persistent and gracious love towards those in the body of Christ, and those as yet outside the body.

For Group Discussion

Starter

What is love? Can you write a definition?

Read the passage.

1. Who do you love most easily? Why is it so easy ?

When have you experienced unending love, extravagant love or undeserved love?

How did you respond?

2. Where did love falter in your life today?

Where did it just seem too hard, unreasonable, undeserved or able to be delayed?

Is it reasonable to expect ordinary, sinful and fallible people to meet the standard of love?

3. How is it that the love displayed in someone's life will be an effective witness to the love of God?

Can you think of anyone whose witness of love has helped you towards a maturing relationship with God?

Week 8 – 1 John 5:1-12 – Faith in the Son of God

Day 1

Read 1 John 5:1-2

Think - We choose our friends, and are naturally drawn to some more easily than others. In God's family our belief in Jesus makes us God's children...we have no choice who our brothers and sisters will be. How might that truth influence your words and actions today...be mindful as you respond to others today.

Pray - for a real and present understanding of our shared position as children of God.

Day 2

Read 1 John 5:3-5

Think - about what John means by the "world" that threatens to overcome us.

Pray - that Christians will both recognise and resist the temptations of the day.

Day 3

Read 1 John 5:3

Think - John says that God's commands are not burdensome...how can this be, when the standard is so high?

Pray - for a humble heart that readily asks for help.

Day 4

Read 1 John 5:6-12

Think - Some thought that the Spirit only came upon Christ at baptism and left before he died, meaning that he was human but not always God at the same time. John is assuring his readers that Christ is God who suffered and died in our place.

Pray - Thank God for His gift of love in Christ.

Day 5

Read 1 John 5:12

Think - What is the life we have in Christ?

Pray - that His life will flow through you to others today.

For Group Discussion

Starter

As you reflect, what did you most enjoy about being a child?
What did you find most difficult or challenging? Ideally what should be the joys? What should be the responsibilities?

1. “Victims of the passing things”....a phrase used to describe those who don’t know Christ. To what extent do you find the “things of the world” working against victory in Christ who overcame the world?

In your family context?

Socially?

In your work environment?

2. How did you come to understand that Jesus is God?

Who/What was helpful?

Who/What did you find difficult?

What is your experience of a “testimony in your heart”....verse 10? What do you understand by this phrase?

3. When you think about Jesus dying for the sin of the world, for each person in the world...are you more inclined to move on quickly, or are you able to dwell on that thought? Can you explain why this is so? How confident are you that God died for you in Christ and that you really are His child?

What, if anything, might cause you to doubt? How do you deal with doubts?

4. What are you struggling with at present? Use these issues as a basis for shared prayer.

Week 9 – 1 John 5:13-21 – Confidence in Christ

Day 1

Read 1 John 5:13

Think - “Believing in the name of the Son of God” leads to assurance because you know that you have life in Christ.

Pray - that you will remain quietly assured of your life in Christ through good and bad times.

Day 2

Read 1 John 5:14-15

Think - How do you feel about approaching God? Are you more likely to come tiptoeing into his presence or stepping boldly?

Pray - for confidence to ask God for what you, and others, need.

Day 3

Read 1 John 5:16-17

Think - John makes some potentially confusing comments about how to pray for a sinner. What is the sin that leads to death? Something in particular or a general state?

Who are you praying for?

Pray - for someone who doesn't yet know Christ by name for the next week.

Day 4

Read 1 John 5:18-21

Think - What are the three things that we “know”?

Pray - that knowledge will lead to confident Christian living.

Day 5

Read 1 John 5:21

Think - If an idol is anything that replaces God at the centre of our lives....what could threaten to distract you today?

Pray - for a steadfast heart true to God and determined to follow Him.

For Group Discussion

Starter

What are some markers of spiritual health? If you were setting a check list, what would you include as the habits of the healthy Christian?

Read 1 John 5:13-21.

1. Have you ever given up praying for someone, considering them too far away from God to ever come willingly to Him?

Praying according to God's will.....Read Mark 11:24, John 14:14, John 15:7, Mark 11:25, 1 John 3:22, James 4:3.

What do you learn about prayer from these readings?

What helps you to continue in prayer for the lost?

2. John repeats his exhortation to live under God's control and to deal with sin in our lives.

How conscious are you of the battle that goes on as we move from one control to another.

Where do you battle the most?

Where do you sense some progress?

Does the visible presence of sin in another's life disturb or comfort you?

How do you respond?

3. What difference does the knowledge of having eternal life make to the way you live, the choices you make, the way you spend your time or money?

Do you find being a Christian complicates or simplifies your life?

4. How have the reading and consideration of John's thoughts in 1 John helped you?