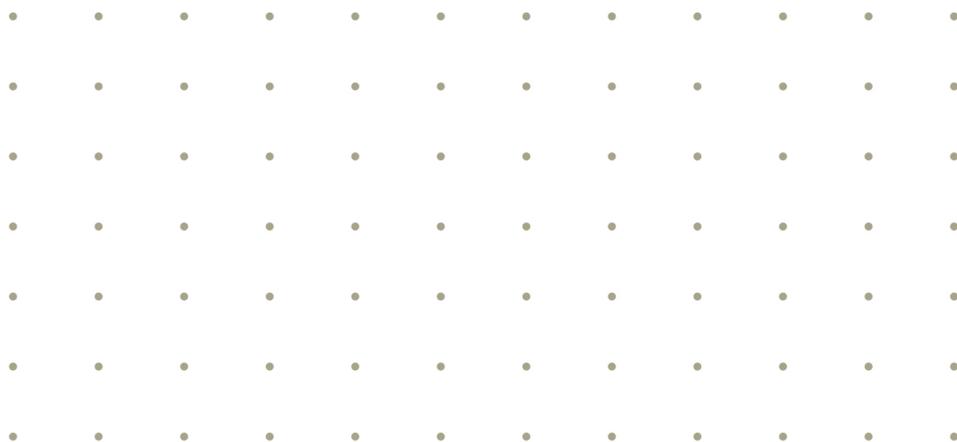




1–3 JOHN

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Michael LeFebvre



J. I. Packer

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

Dane C. Ortlund

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“This series is a tremendous resource for those wanting to study and teach the Bible with an understanding of how the gospel is woven throughout Scripture. Here are gospel-minded pastors and scholars doing gospel business from all the Scriptures. This is a biblical and theological feast preparing God’s people to apply the entire Bible to all of life with heart and mind wholly committed to Christ’s priorities.”

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Numbers	Song of Solomon	Mark	1–2 Thessalonians
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Luke	1–2 Timothy and Titus
Joshua	Jeremiah	John	Hebrews
Judges	Lamentations, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah	Acts	James
Ruth and Esther	Ezekiel	Romans	1–2 Peter and Jude
1–2 Samuel	Daniel	1 Corinthians	1–3 John
1–2 Kings	Hosea	2 Corinthians	Revelation
1–2 Chronicles	Joel, Amos, and Obadiah	Galatians	
Ezra and Nehemiah			
Job			

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1-3 JOHN

A 12-WEEK STUDY



Michael LeFebvre

Knowing the Bible: 1–3 John, A 12-Week Study

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of one or more books of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at esv.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

Paul is sometimes called the “apostle of faith.” Peter has been called the “apostle of hope.” And John has received the attribution of the “apostle of love.” All of the apostles taught Christian “faith, hope, and love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Nevertheless, John’s epistles are particularly emphatic regarding the Christian calling to love. Out of 221 instances of the word “love” in the New Testament, 42 (or nearly 20 percent) occur in the brief epistles of John. Even though John’s epistles are among the shortest books of the Bible, his first letter alone contains more mentions of “love” (36 times) than does any other book in the Bible, save one: only the book of Psalms contains more references to “love.” For good reason, these epistles have contributed to John’s reputation as the “apostle of love.”

But it is not his own message that John writes: “This is the message we have heard from him,” that is, from Jesus (1 John 1:5). It is Jesus who has showed us that God is holy, without sin, and abounding in love. Therefore we who have been made children of God through Christ’s atoning¹ work ought to cease from sin and grow in love for one another. John writes these three letters to instruct and motivate us in sanctification² and love. The motivational character of John’s letters is particularly striking. He writes with an emotive, picturesque, rhetorically amplified style designed to stir our hearts as well as instruct our minds.

The three epistles of John form a single “package,” probably designed to be taken together. First John is the main document of the three; it is essentially a written sermon and lacks the normal salutation (compare Rom. 1:1–7) and farewell

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

instructions (compare Rom. 16:1–27) of a typical epistle. However, the short letter we know as 2 John contains the elements of a salutation. And 3 John contains the personal instructions often included at the end of an epistle. All three epistles thus probably formed a single packet delivered together: a cover letter to the congregation (2 John), a cover letter to the pastor (3 John), and the main written sermon (1 John). In this study, we will examine the written sermon (1 John) first and then consider the shorter epistles in their likely roles as cover letters. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2425–2446; online at esv.org.)

Placing 1–3 John in the Larger Story

Initially, the Scriptures used by the church were those of the Old Testament. Since Jesus came to fulfill all that was promised in the Law and the Prophets (Luke 24:44–45), the church grew in Christian faith through instruction in the Old Testament Scriptures as the apostles³ testified to their fulfillment in Jesus (Acts 2:14–36; 4:23–31; 7:1–53; 8:26–35; 13:16–41). However, Jewish leaders outside the church (Acts 4:18) as well as some teachers inside the church (Acts 15:5; 1 John 2:18–19) promoted false teachings about the meaning of the Scriptures and the ministry of Jesus. It was urgent to document the apostles' testimony for the wider church and for future generations. Paul (Acts 20:31), Peter (2 Peter 1:15), John, and others of the apostles (1 John 1:3–4) participated in this crucial project of documenting the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus, resulting in the New Testament, which accompanies the Old Testament to form the complete canon of Christian Scripture.

John, who calls himself “the elder” (2 John 1; 3 John 1), was likely the longest-surviving apostle. His epistles are among the final of the apostolic writings provided to secure the church in the “message we have heard from him” (1 John 1:5) in the face of false teachers (1 John 2:18–26).

Key Verses

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. . . . The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15–17)

Date and Historical Background

After Christ's ascension, John continued to minister in Jerusalem alongside the other apostles (Acts 8:1). Early church fathers indicate that he left Jerusalem just prior to the Roman destruction of the city in AD 70. John reportedly

spent his later years in Ephesus, until his exile to the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). Most scholars believe that John wrote his eponymous epistles while laboring in Ephesus. If this is correct, he likely wrote these letters to other churches in the vicinity of Ephesus (see Rev. 2:8–3:22). Alternatively, if John wrote these letters toward the end of his years in Jerusalem, he may have addressed them to the church in Ephesus itself while already anticipating a move there (2 John 12; 3 John 10, 13).

Outline

1 John: The Written Sermon

- I. Introduction (1:1–2:14)
 - A. John's authority (1:1–4)
 - B. John's message (1:5–10)
 - C. John's reason for writing (2:1–14)
- II. Main Exhortation: Love the Father, Not the World (2:15–17)
- III. Lessons on Christian Faithfulness (2:18–5:12)
 - A. Beware of antichrists (2:18–27)
 - B. Abide in Christ (2:28–3:10)
 - C. Love one another in truth, taught by God's Spirit (3:11–4:6)
 - D. Love one another as God has loved us (4:7–21)
 - E. Victory and life come through Christ (5:1–12)
- IV. Conclusion: Know That You Have Eternal Life (5:13–21)

2 John: Cover Letter to the Congregation

- V. Salutation to the Congregation (vv. 1–3)
- VI. Synopsis of the "Written Sermon" (vv. 4–11)
 - A. Walk in the truth (vv. 4–6)
 - B. Abstain from error (vv. 7–11)
- VII. Farewell (vv. 12–13)

3 John: Cover Letter to the Pastor

- VIII. Salutation to Gaius (v. 1)
- IX. Personal Instructions (vv. 2–12)

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

- A. Instructions for Gaius (vv. 2–8)
- B. Instructions regarding Diotrephes (vv. 9–10)
- C. Instructions regarding Demetrius (vv. 11–12)
- X. Farewell (vv. 13–15)

As You Get Started

The apostle John is mentioned 30 times in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, and Galatians. John also features as a character in his own Gospel and throughout the book of Revelation, which is also traditionally attributed to him. What do you know about John, his life, and his personality, from previous study of the New Testament?

Apart from Paul, John was probably the most prolific writer among the apostles. He left us a Gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. Which of these have you read or heard sermons about? What general themes or impressions do you associate with John’s writings?

Of the 12 disciples, John was one of the three (along with his brother James and Peter) who were closest to Jesus and spent the most intimate time with him (see Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). John was also the disciple sitting closest to Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:23–25), the only one of the Twelve who was present at the crucifixion, and the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of and for his mother, Mary (John 19:26–27). If you could ask John one or two questions about

his experience with Jesus, what would you ask him? What do you hope to learn from him in these three epistles?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Give thanks to God that he inspired the apostle John to leave us these precious instructions concerning Christ, whom he knew and whom he helps us to know as well. Pray for God's Spirit to open your heart to grow in your love for Christ as you learn about him from John's letters.

Definitions

¹ **Atonement** – The reconciliation of a person with God, often associated with the offering of a sacrifice. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ made atonement for the sins of believers. His death satisfied God's just wrath against sinful humanity, just as OT sacrifices symbolized substitutionary death as payment for sin.

² **Sanctification** – The process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. This process begins immediately after regeneration and continues throughout a Christian's life.

³ **Apostle** – Means "one who is sent" and refers to one who is an official representative of another. In the NT, refers specifically to those whom Jesus chose to represent him.



THE BOOKS OF 1–3 JOHN are full of practical wisdom for the Christian life. John wanted his readers to understand that as they grew in their understanding of their identity as children of God, they ought to grow in love for one another and in obedience to God's commands.

Over the course of 12 weeks, this study helps us see what it looks like to truly love and follow Jesus in a world that “is passing away along with its desires”—a transformed life that comes through knowing the love of God in Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE *KNOWING THE BIBLE* SERIES

Over the course of 12 weeks, these studies explore books of the Bible and:

- Ask thoughtful questions to spur discussion
- Show how each passage unveils the gospel
- Tie the text in with the whole story of Scripture
- Illuminate the doctrines taught in each passage
- Invite you to discover practical implications
- Help you better understand and apply God's Word

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GRAEME L. GOLDSWORTHY

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BIBLE STUDY

