

ILLUMINATE

A P A T H F O R W A R D

A STUDY IN FIRST JOHN

ILLUMINATE

WEEK 1 | A FIRM FOUNDATION

1 JOHN 1:1-4

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

Harmful Lies

Senior Pastor Bruce Boria

Have you ever had someone spread lies about you? It can be extremely distressing. You feel personally violated. Without warning, an untruth can sour relationships that were cordial. As the lies spread, you worry about what others are saying. You worry about your reputation. You worry how this may affect your livelihood, your family, your social network. This experience leaves you exhausted, depressed, paranoid, and isolated.

The New Testament letter of First John was written to a church where false teachers were spreading harmful lies. These false teachers were making false claims about themselves, and misrepresenting Jesus and his message. Their intent was to lead many away from the truth proclaimed by Jesus, and now by the apostles. It appears that the conflict caught the attention of the apostle John because he stepped in to offer his counsel. In this letter, John warns them twice: "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray." (1 John 2:26); and again, "*Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray.*" (1 John 3:7). John warns them that these false prophets were misinformed and misdirected.

Confronting untruths can be debilitating. Many years ago, I received wise counsel from a very well-known public person, who experienced being maligned in the public arena. He offered these steps: First, acknowledge the pain. If you don't, the root of bitterness will grow within you and destroy you. Second, bring this anxiety before the Lord in prayer. Third, pause and do some soul-searching. Ask yourself, "Is there a kernel of truth in these accusations? If yes, repent! Don't excuse wrongful behavior. If no, remind yourself that you are not defined by the lies others tell. Their sin will be uncovered, and the truth, and your character, will be vindicated. Fix your eyes on Jesus: "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3)

- Have you ever been the victim of hurtful lies? How have you handled it?
- Read James 3. What additional wisdom do you receive from this passage?

HARMFUL LIES

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WEEK 1 | DAY 2

The Beginning

Senior Pastor Bruce Boria

First John opens rather abruptly. It feels as though while we were out getting a snack, we return to discover that the movie started and we are in the middle of the dialogue –“that which was from the beginning”.

The unusual opening also recalls the opening verses in the Fourth Gospel, John: “In the beginning was the word”. It also brings our minds back to Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God . . .” Both Genesis and The Book of John are intent on introducing something new. However, in the Letter of First John, it is not about introducing something new. It is about affirming what should have already been understood.

It won't be long before the “that” is revealed to be a person. “That which was from the beginning” is none other than the “Word of Life”. Interestingly, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to as ‘the word’ and ‘the life’ (John 1:1; John 1:4). The title, Word of Life, refers to the One who became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

The “Word of Life” is then described as heard, seen, touched. John, and his fellow apostles, had a first-hand, eyewitness experience with Jesus and now he is adamant about reminding us. He is determined to underscore the reality that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.

John isn't the only one who was intent on making this point. There is a wonderful passage in the Book of Hebrews that offers us this commentary on Jesus: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” (Hebrews 1:1-3, NIV84)

Jesus, God and man, reveals the Father's will, offers his body as an atonement for our sin, and now is once again displaying the glory he shared with the Father before the world began. Interesting.

- Read through First John and take note of how many times John emphasizes Jesus' divinity and humanity.
- Why does John think this is important to mention?

THE BEGINNING

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WEEK 1 | DAY 3

Setting the Record Straight

Senior Pastor Bruce Boria

In the span of four verses in chapter one, we discover the word 'proclaim' three times. I believe John is stressing certain truths because of the false teachers in the church who were seeking to undermine the truth about Jesus. (cf. 1 John 2:26)

It appears that some in this Christian community were seeking to bring division. They were filling the minds of these early disciples with contrarian views. They were making statements which questioned the incarnation of Jesus. John, who witnessed first-hand the ministry and person of Jesus, wants to set the record straight.

1 John 4:1-3, — 1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

It is important for them to know a few things about Jesus. First, Jesus came from the Father. Jesus is divine. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. If this were not the case, Jesus would have inherited our fallen nature. This would mean that Jesus himself would need redemption; he could not be the Savior who takes away the sins of the world. Second, Jesus, as God's son, was imbued with divine attributes. In him was life, demonstrated by his resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we are still in our sins (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19). Third, John and his companions were witnesses of this truth. Therefore, they want to assuage any doubt: Jesus was the promised Messiah.

In reading the Gospels, we know that the apostles' spiritual awakening was a process. Now, John hopes to share the convictions he now holds dearly. Jesus the Messiah has come (The life appeared). Jesus the Messiah has made known the will of the Father. Jesus the Messiah has opened the way to the kingdom of God. Remember, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). John wants them to know that the person and teaching of Jesus are not founded on speculation, but on historical events (we have seen it and testify to it).

- Why do you think it is difficult for many to think that God clothed himself in flesh?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.
- Why is Jesus' origin so crucial to our faith?

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

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WEEK 1 | DAY 4

Fellowship

Senior Pastor Bruce Boria

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." -1 John 1:3

My mom would tell me that from the time I was able to talk my favorite word was "why". She was convinced I would grow up to be a lawyer. When I became a pastor, she was so happy that I was using my gifts helping people answer their "why" questions about Jesus. Truthfully, I just think she wanted me to get a taste of being on the receiving end of "why?".

It seems to me that John is a man concerned with the "why". John, and his fellow apostles, had their questions about Jesus and his mission. Jesus spent much time with them trying to answer their questions and to provide them with proof. Once they were convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah, everything changed for them. They were now compelled to share what they had seen and heard. They wanted others to experience the joy they shared with the Father, and the Son.

John hopes to see these believers coalesce around an informed faith, an obedient life, and a heart that reflects God's. If the church is to thrive, regardless of the challenges it may face, then we must confront the lies. The wisdom of First John will illuminate the path forward. In the end, we'll possess a faith resilient and overflowing with confidence.

"Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." -John 14:23-27.

- What do you learn from this text about how the Father, Son and Spirit work together?
- Where is peace, fellowship, to be found?

FELLOWSHIP

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WEEK 1 | DAY 5

Purpose

Senior Pastor Bruce Boria

"We write this to make our joy complete." -1 John 1:4

As we embark on our study of First John, we would do well to consider the occasion and purpose of this letter. **The occasion of this letter** is summarized very well in the chart below. The false teachers who had the ear of many in the church community were spreading a very different theology, morality, and civility than that which Jesus presented. As you read through John's letter you will uncover John's refutations.

	Explanation	Response of 1 John
A New Theology	They compromised the uniqueness of the person and work of Jesus Christ.	Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God whose death provides forgiveness of sin.
A New Morality	They minimized the importance of sin; they claimed to have fellowship with God despite their unrighteous behavior.	Christianity has ethical implications; fellowship with God requires righteousness.
A New Spirituality	Their teachings resulted in spiritual arrogance; consequently, they did not show love to others.	God is love; thus, love for fellow Christians is a mark of true Christianity. ¹

The purpose of First John it is best understood by reviewing some key verses:

"We write this to make our joy complete." (1 John 1:4)

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1)

"I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray." (1 John 2:26)

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13)

In its occasion and purpose First John is all about illuminating the path that leads to joy, purity, fidelity, and a confident assurance of one's relationship with Jesus.[1]

PURPOSE

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WORKS CITED

Week 1 | Bruce Boria | Light

[1] Akin, D. L. (2001). 1, 2, 3 John (Vol. 38, p. 31). Broadman & Holman Publishers.