

ILLUMINATE

WEEK 3 | WALK THE TALK

1 JOHN 2:3-14

WEEK 3 | DAY 1

To Know, or Truly Know

Pastor Brett Olson

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. - 1 John 2:3-5a

A 2018 study published in Smithsonian Magazine found that the average person is able to remember between 1,000 and 10,000 faces. Participants were shown faces of family, friends, former teachers, pastors, classmates, along with a host of celebrities all with the question, "Do you know this person?" They did not necessarily need to know the names of each individual, simply if they felt confident that they would be able to recognize the person if they saw them.

All of this led me to begin thinking about our knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is something that humanity has been striving towards from the very beginning of time. But, there is a difference between head knowledge, knowing of someone or something, the same way I know about celebrities, athletes, or politicians, and heart knowledge truly knowing someone. I would venture that we would all like to know God more at a heart level than a head level, but how can we do that? Well, the apostle John gives us one way to help us be sure that we truly know Him (V.3). We know Him if we keep His commands. We know Him if we obey what He says.

Pastor Adrian Rogers put it very simply, "Study the Bible to know about God. Obey the Bible to really know God." This is not to say that careful study of Scripture is unimportant, but if the head knowledge that we study is not accompanied by the heart knowledge that results in obedience than we are not following God in the way that He desires.

To both know God, and to love Him are expressed in obedience. John uses the phrases "to know" and "to love" more than 40 times each in this short letter, and both of these actions lead to obedience. For John, and for us, there is a difference between saying and doing. Someone can state their love without action or obedience and they are merely empty words. A person can state that they love God, and that they know Him as Savior, but the fruit of their life does not testify to that obedience. V.4 further proves this. John states that if a person claims to know God, but their knowledge of God does not result in a desire to obey what He commands, they do not truly know Him. John asserts that those who claim to know God and yet disobey the commands He has given are liars, they are deceivers, they are counterfeits, and at first glance, such strong language can be alarming. However, John is not saying that true believers will never fail to obey God's commands, but that those who know God will not be known for their disobedience. Obedience shows the strength and the quality of our love for God.

- Who are some people in your life you would say truly know you? What sets them apart from people in your life who may just know of you?
- What is the difference between knowing about God (head knowledge) and really knowing Him (heart knowledge)? Which of these best describes your relationship with Him? Why?
- John writes that obedience is the key to truly knowing God. Do you find that to be oppressive, freeing, or somewhere in between?
- How can God be loving if He commands obedience?

TO KNOW, OR TRULY KNOW

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WEEK 3 | DAY 2

Abiding and Walking with Christ

Pastor Brett Olson

Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6

What has it looked like for you to follow in someone's footsteps? Maybe it was a parent or mentor. Maybe it was filling a role in a job for a well-respected colleague. Whatever that has looked like for you, walking in someone else's footsteps can be extremely challenging in a multitude of ways. In this passage, John seems to be making the point that whoever has chosen to trust in Jesus as LORD and Savior must follow in His footsteps. We must live as Jesus lived. Talk about big shoes to fill! The Bible often talks about the need to be conformed into the image of Christ. We are saved once and for all by Jesus' death on the cross, and granted the opportunity for new life in His resurrection from the grave, but there is a need for continual transformation that happens over time (a process we call sanctification). Once we accept Jesus, we are not automatically transformed into a perfect person, but the hope is that the longer that we walk with Him, we will become more and more like Him.

There are a few words that we find in the NIV translation of this verse that need a bit more teasing out. The word the NIV translates as "to live," is actually two different Greek words. The first, *meno*, is a word that is commonly found in the Gospel of John and speaks of abiding or remaining. Jesus reminds His disciples that this process of abiding with Him is essential for the life of the believer. To abide speaks of a connection that promotes security and growth. To abide implies a personal and intimate connection that is steadfast and faithful, not swayed by circumstance or popular opinion. To abide in Christ means to partner with Him to accomplish His work in the world. This second word, which the NIV translates as live as Jesus lived continues a similar meaning. It is the Greek word *peripateó*, which literally means "to walk." Whoever wants to abide with Jesus must walk as Jesus walked. In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer says, "To walk with Jesus is to walk with a slow, unhurried pace. Hurry is the death of prayer and only impedes and spoils our work. It never advances it." If we strive to walk as Jesus walked, we must slow down, unclutter our minds and thoughts from the busyness that surrounds us and be attentive to the needs around us, and to that still small voice that prompts, guides, and directs our steps.

- Is there someone in your life (past or present) that you would like to follow in their footsteps? What is it about them that makes you want to follow after them?
- John speaks of abiding with Christ. If abiding is a connection that promotes security and growth, how are you doing at abiding with Jesus? How can you improve in this area?
- John also calls us to walk as Jesus did. What does that look like for you? What are some things you can do or avoid doing that would allow you to walk with Him better?

ABIDING AND WALKING WITH CHRIST

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WEEK 3 | DAY 3

A New Old Command

Pastor Brett Olson

"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining." 1 John 2:7-8

Have you been in a circumstance where someone seems to be saying two totally different things one after another? That is easy to feel here. First, John tells us that he is not writing a new command, but an old one. Then, immediately after he says that he is writing us a new command. Confusing, right? So, which is it? Is John writing us an old command, or a new one? And what is this command in the first place?

John defines this old command as the message they have heard since the beginning, the Gospel message—the truth about Jesus, God's Son—which leads directly to the command. The old command, in one sense is to believe this Gospel message, to believe this message of Jesus.

The new command John calls his readers to in V.8 is one that we will see expressed through the rest of this letter, and one that requires us to go back to John's Gospel. As Jesus is preparing His disciples for His death at the Last Supper, He says to them, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn. 13:35). Jesus has given us this new command: a command to love one another.

In his sermon on this passage, pastor John Piper says this, "The Gospel contains not only the commandment to trust Jesus, but also the commandment, in the power of that trust, to be changed into a loving person." This love command is not optional, it is not secondary, it is a true and natural outgrowth of our love for God. If we want to know God, we must love one another in the same way Jesus loves us. Jesus, in the same way He does with so many things, gives this old command new meaning. This command, which John expresses that he sees amongst Jesus' followers, has the power to push back the darkness of the world and cause the light of Christ to shine through.

- How is Jesus' command to love one another both old and new? Explain.
- How is Jesus the perfect example of love for one another?
- Think about the different groups of people you encounter (family, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, strangers, etc.). How can you love them more like Jesus?

A NEW OLD COMMAND

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WEEK 3 | DAY 4

Loving in the Light

Pastor Brett Olson

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 11 But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them. Think about the last time you tried walking in complete and total darkness. How did that go? You may still have the bumps and bruises to prove it. But, when you enter a dark room or space with a flashlight, everything else comes into focus and you are able to avoid those hazards that may cause you to stumble. - 1 John 2:9-11

This is the second time that John has returned to this theme of darkness and light in this letter, and this time, he uses it to affirm this love command that we read about yesterday. This is the third time in this section that John has used the phrase, "Anyone who claims," or, "Whoever claims." This would imply that John is specifically addressing claims by those who say they are followers of Jesus, but do not live their lives in the way He intended. They say they can love God without obeying His commands. They claim they can abide in Christ without walking as He did, and here, they claim they can live in the light while hating a brother or sister. All of these claims, "to love," "to abide," and "to be in the light" suggest some form of intimacy with God, and yet their actions profess the opposite. They continue to hate their fellow believers.

John contrasts this with those who are truly walking in the light. In the light, there is nothing that will make them stumble. When we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and love them as Jesus did, we walk in the light and avoid the pitfalls and snares of walking in darkness. Loving like Jesus did can be hard, it can be stretching, it can be a challenge, but ultimately it keeps us in the light.

So, you may be asking: how do I ensure that I am walking in the light? We walk in the light when we keep Christ's commands. As we have discovered this week, in this study of 1 John, and throughout life, this sounds simple enough, but it can be harder to maintain in practice. We may have the best of intentions, but before long those shadows of darkness begin to creep their way back into our lives. But, herein lies the process of sanctification that we discussed earlier this week. God isn't expecting sinless perfection, only Jesus could accomplish that. But, what He is expecting is an obedience to Him that admits when we fall short and recognizes our need for saving.

- How hard is it for you to love others (specifically fellow believers) the way that Jesus did?
- Does loving others like Christ imply complete and total acceptance? Explain.
- Write out a prayer to God expressing where you are right now. Are you walking in the light? Are you walking in darkness? How can you rely more on Him to help you walk more in the light?

LOVING IN THE LIGHT

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WEEK 3 | DAY 5

Faithful Accross Generations

Pastor Brett Olson

"12 I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. 14 I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." - 1 John 2:12-14

Throughout this section of his letter, John is addressing the claims made by those who say they are following Jesus, but whose actions do not line up with that proclamation. Now, as he closes this section, it can be easy for us all to assume that we are walking in darkness. But, here John affirms that this is not the case, that while there are those who walk in darkness, there is a group of believers who are walking in the light, and he uses this section to encourage them.

You may notice that John divides these people who walk in the light into three distinct groups: children, fathers, and young men, and he addresses each group twice. As John Stott points out in his commentary, these groups are not indications of physical ages, but, stages of spiritual development. Stott says: "The dear children are those newborn in Christ. The young men are more developed Christians strong and victorious in spiritual warfare. The fathers possess the depth and stability of ripe Christian experience."

John addresses all three of these groups. To those who are spiritual children, he proclaims that their sins have been forgiven and that they have come to know the Father. These are the earliest experiences of a Christian. They trust in God and receive His forgiveness, and they begin to recognize God as Father with whom they can have an intimate relationship.

To those who are spiritual young men, John uses rich battle imagery. But, notice the tense that he uses to describe their spiritual battles. These young men have overcome the evil one. Their conflict is no conflict at all, it has already been won. He emphasizes their strength and notes that their strength is found not in their own accomplishments but because God's word lives within them.

And to the spiritual fathers, John writes that they have a deep and genuine fellowship with God. Christians at all stages have come to know God, but the knowledge we have of God matures throughout the years. Those who are mature in God recognize Him as the never-changing, eternal, everlasting God in whom we can find our refuge, our strength, and our hope.

So, wherever you find yourself on your faith journey, you can know and trust that God is speaking to you, and, if you follow after Him in obedience, He will continue to show us more and more of Himself that will never disappoint or fail us.

- Which stage would you put yourself in your own spiritual development (child, young man/woman, father/mother)? Why would you place yourself there?
- What would need to change or grow in you to move yourself to the next phase of spiritual development?

FAITHFUL ACROSS GENERATIONS

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