

Jesus and the Johannine Letters



Teacher's Guide

Surveying the Source

1 John; 2 John; 3 John; Rom. 8:32–34; 1 John 4:1–4, 20.

Plotting the Course

The students will:

- ▶ Understand the reality of spiritual light and darkness in everyday life.
- ▶ Be able to identify characteristics of

love in God and others.

- ▶ Participate in an act of love for someone else in the church or community.

Preparing to Lead

“Christ’s church is going to be made up of some who were blind, some who were lepers, some who were demon possessed. . . . In the end all these people will have one common denominator, that they all love other people as much as they love themselves. . . . This type of love cannot be manufactured by us, cannot be faked,

and is utterly worthless when pretended in public. . . . Don’t point to your church affiliation, because church affiliation is not enough. . . . Only those who are like their Master in words, actions, and motivations will at last be saved because they have learned to love without an ‘if’.”¹

Getting Started

A. On pieces of gray paper, write actions, attitudes, and particularly motives that reflect light and darkness. Examples might be found in texts such as 1 John 2:10, 11 and current news. Hide these throughout the classroom for students to find later, or tape one paper under each chair. Place the white and black containers in the middle of the room. Begin with prayer, and read 1 John 2:9–11. Encourage students to think about light and dark comparisons. Have them find the slips of paper. Take turns reading each paper and discussing which container it should be placed in.

B. Make an obstacle course/maze with chairs and other items. (Keep safety in mind.) When members arrive, choose several volunteers. Turn out lights, blindfold, and twirl volunteers. Instruct blindfolded members to proceed through the maze. When completed, have extra class members lead them to the beginning, keeping blindfolds on. With their backs to the maze, put a plate of cookies at the end, turn on the lights, and take off the blindfolds. Tell volunteers to turn around, and go through the maze, “seeing in the light”—receiving their reward! (There should be enough cookies for all.)

Delving Into the Word

A. Read the following quotation to the class: “The mark of Cain is the spirit of

control, of commanding, and ruling over others. The mark of Cain compels; it uses

Materials

one white bag, box, or container for collecting small pieces of paper; one black or very dark bag, box, or container for collecting small pieces of paper; several sheets of gray paper cut into small pieces or shapes; bandanna or piece of material for blindfolding students; cookies or other reward; whiteboard/flipchart/chalkboard and appropriate markers

force, pressure, persecution, and intimidation. . . . Today in the church, in all the churches, there is an epidemic of such violence. No, we don't literally slay our brothers and sisters. . . . We slay them with the tongue. We talk about them, destroy their reputations, spread gossip, and are just as murderous in our sphere of influence as was Cain so long ago. . . . We set out to destroy them precisely because we can't control them."²

Ask the class if and how they agree or disagree with this quote. Have members of the class read 1 John 3:11–15 and 3 John 9, 10. Make two columns on a whiteboard. Compare the attitudes that drove Cain to murder, with those apparently motivating Diotrephes. List them in each column. Apply those motives to self-examination and specific situations class members face today.

Discuss 3 John 11 and other Johannine

texts that offer specific guidance to counteract loveless motives. Next to each evil trait, list a godly motive with scriptural support that Christians should cultivate in their personal lives.

B. Say: “Within the three small Johannine letters, there are 53 references to the concept of love. Unmistakably, love is a theme John wished for his audience to grasp. The largest concentration of those references can be found in 1 John 4:7 to 1 John 5:3. As Christ’s disciples today, how can we comprehend the width and depths of love, not only in and from God, but in and through others and ourselves?” (Solicit answers.)

Distribute a copy of the activity on page 31 to each class member. Examine in small groups or as a whole 1 John 4:7 to 1 John 5:3. The first example has been completed.

Discussing the Ideas

1. What might it mean to love without an “if”?
2. How can you know if you are living in the light rather than in the darkness?
3. What are some of the rewards of living in the light?
4. Have you ever personally experienced slaying by the tongue? If so, are you comfortable sharing it with the class?

5. Is it possible to love someone who is clearly of the devil? If not, why not? If so, how?

6. What is the greatest hindrance in our lives that prevents us from loving another person?

7. Who in your life needs to feel your love in action?

Closing the Activity

Prior to class, collect information from church leadership and/or community representatives on specific ways your class could help needy individuals in a tangible way. Read together 1 John 3:16–18. Discuss ways in which members can “lay down” their lives for others. End with a brainstorming session on specific needs members are aware of in the church and the community. (Examples might be:

yard work for an elderly person; meals to someone having just given birth to a baby; writing thank you notes to people seldom recognized for their service; or washing the car of a physically disabled person.) Choose one project enabling the class to demonstrate their love not only “in word,” but also “in deed.” Stress the importance of making such actions a part of one’s life.

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1. Jim Hohnberger, *It's About People* (Nampa, Ida.: Pacific Press Publishing Association[®], 2003), pp. 120, 121.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 51.

The Essence of Love

Read 1 John 3 through 1 John 5:3.

List, with references, what these texts teach about love in relation to God, others, and ourselves. One example of each has been completed.

God	Others	Ourselves
<p>1 John 3:1—<i>God's love is abundant. His love actually amazes logic.</i></p>	<p>1 John 3:10—<i>A person may be of God or of the devil. Love is one of the two obvious measures for making this determination.</i></p>	<p>1 John 3:14—<i>I am not fully alive or living when I do not love others.</i></p>