

September 6/7, 2025

## **The Joy of Authentic Christian Community**

*Face to Face Series*

**1 John 1:1-4**

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Technology is not good; technology is not bad. It's just technology. What matters is how it is used. I think we could all agree that technology has changed our lives in very positive ways. Every day we live life and take for granted a lot of the things that have improved our lives that have to do with technology. There's probably quite a few of us in the room who wouldn't actually even be alive if it wasn't for the changes in medical technology. But it's also indisputable these days, based on the research that has come in, that technology has changed us as humans in dramatic and unfortunate ways. Over the last several years, there's been a ton of research that's come in, and it's really beyond dispute that it has been a leading factor in emotional instability, in our emotional health, our mental health, our physical health. It's a primary driver in addictions and suicide. One of the things I think is most concerning is the dramatic drop in our empathy level as a culture, not a little drop, but a massive drop! Just to put it in simpler language, what has happened to our culture is that we just don't care about one another anymore.

I think if you take all these ideas and pull them together, I think it is well captured in the title of Sherry Turkle's fascinating book on technology that we today, as a culture, are a people who live alone together. But that's not how God intended it to be. We are people made in the image of God, made for relationship, face-to-face, real, authentic relationship...not "text to text," not "zoom to zoom," but real life, face-to-face relationship, with all of the mess, all of the frustration, all of the stuff that comes with that. That's what we want to talk about over the next few months as we work our way through John's letters: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. So if you have a Bible with you this morning, I invite you to turn with us to 1st John.

A little bit of the background: So the author is John, the apostle. So it's John, as in Peter, James, and John. It's John who is also the author of the Gospel of John, and it's John who then would be the first cousin of Jesus. John wrote this late in his life. He was probably somewhere close to ninety years of age. It's one of the latest epistles, and he writes because of a concern for a group of Christians, because of the presence of false teachers. Primarily, the false teachers are teaching things about Jesus that aren't true, creating a great deal of confusion. And John is writing to try to help them sort this out. A lot of Paul's letters, for example, we would say they flow in a linear fashion. They just flow with an argument from chapter to chapter to chapter. John's letters aren't that way, probably better described like a spiral where John talks about something; he moves on; then he comes back to it and adds another layer; then he talks about something more. So if over the weeks you find yourself thinking, "Wait a minute, we talked about this already," we did. He's just adding depth and layers to the conversation.

Most of the New Testament letters follow a familiar template from the first century. Usually the writer identifies himself; he identifies the intended audience, and then there's some sort of a greeting like, "Grace and peace to you," or whatever. None of that exists in John's letter; he's right to it right from the beginning. You have a clear sense of urgency, where he knows this is a real

problem, and there's this urgent need to get to it. From verse 1 to verse 4, which is the section we're going to look at this morning, it is one long run-on sentence in the Greek. It's kind of like it's just spilling out of John. So if you imagine a child who witnesses something exciting...runs in the house...pretty wide-eyed, just talking a hundred miles an hour, and the parent finally says, "Whoa! You've got to slow down. Take a deep breath. I can't understand what you're saying." That's the idea of the opening of John. I really wish I could say to him, "John, wait a minute. Take a deep breath. Slow down, because it's hard to understand what you're saying." Clearly there's a sense of urgency, so it makes it hard to organize and to some degree, hard to understand. So we're going to do our best to see if we can sort this out this morning. Verse 1:

**What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—** (\*NASB, 1 John 1:1)

Now, if you were with us a few years ago when we went through the Gospel of John, the intro sounds somewhat familiar. If you remember, John opens his Gospel, identifying Jesus with a title: *Jesus was the Word*. So he says, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

He goes on to say, "*The Word created everything that is.*" That title just carries the idea that Jesus was the revelation of God to us in His incarnation. So if I was to just rephrase the opening of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God. Jesus is God. Jesus is the Genesis 1:1 Creator of the Universe." That's how John opens his Gospel. But then he goes on in verse 14 and says something that is very stunning, when you think about it: **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.** The God who is eternal...the God head...the Son of God who is a member of the Trinity...the God who created everything that is, actually, at a point in time, took on human flesh...put on actual sandals and walked on this earth as a human. So when you get to John's letter, and he says **In the beginning**. I don't think he's saying *In the beginning*, like in Genesis 1:1, or the Gospel of John 1:1. It's not the beginning before there was anything, but the beginning of the incarnation. So John is taking what he described in the first chapter of his Gospel and he's filling it out for this conversation. So **In the beginning**, from the beginning of His incarnation, he's going to identify several things.

**...what we have heard.** So John lived with Jesus. He walked with Jesus. He talked with Jesus. They were together constantly for over three years. So John is saying, "Hey, I was there. I heard it. I heard it in public. I heard it in private. I heard it."

**Second: ...what we have seen with our eyes.** So John is saying, "I was an eyewitness; I saw it. I saw the miracles. I saw the things that happened. I saw the crucifixion. I saw the burial. I saw the resurrection." He's not passing along hearsay, not something that somebody told him. He's saying, "I was there. I saw it for myself."

**...What we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at.** Seen with our eyes and looked at in English, sounds like it's the same thing, but it's actually a different Greek word. **Looked at** is the word from which we get our word *theater*. It means more the idea of scrutinizing, of

critiquing, of paying really close attention to it. So he's like, "We didn't just casually glance. We looked at it...we observed it...we critiqued it. We know what's true.

And lastly, what we have **...touched with our hands**. This is especially relevant as it relates to the resurrection. The resurrection wasn't some weird, mystical, spiritual thing. He's like, "I was there. I heard Him. I talked to Him. I touched Him." The Greek word is a word used to describe a blind person touching something to figure out what it is.

All of this then relates to the false teaching that was happening. Decades later, there were some people who claimed to be enlightened—more progressive, had some sort of a revelation—and they have a completely new idea of who Jesus is. And so what John is saying, "Wait a minute! I was there. I'm an eyewitness. I walked with Him. I talked with Him. I lived with Him. I heard Him, I saw Him. I scrutinized Him, I touched Him after the resurrection." So in essence, what John is saying is, "Who do you think is more likely to get it right? Somebody decades later who has never even met Jesus, or someone who was there and observed it all firsthand?"

Now I think that's helpful to consider for today. There's no shortage of people today who are seeking to reinvent Jesus, creating a Jesus that's more in alignment with the culture, a new and improved Jesus based on some sort of a revelation, some sort of a more progressive thought. For some reason, what everyone has missed for 2000 years, these people have figured out. But who do you think is more likely to have it correct? Someone 2000 years later who had some sort of a revelation, or someone who walked with Him and talked with Him and lived with Him and touched Him and saw all this stuff firsthand?

One of the other things to consider is: It does seem to me to be a rather remarkable coincidence that this reinvented Jesus that flows out of some progressive new way of thinking, just happens to be in perfect alignment with the morality of current culture. That's either an amazing coincidence, or isn't it possible people just adjust their theology to fit their morality? So John ends verse 1 by saying he's talking about the *Word of Life*

**...concerning the Word of Life**. Now there's quite a bit of conversation as to whether or not **Word** should be capitalized or not. Capitalized would mean it's the title he was using in his Gospel, kind of a unique title. I think it's more likely that it's not a capital. It's small **word**...small *w*...because if you read the text, what's ongoing is not a discussion about the **Word**. What's ongoing is a discussion about *life*. So what he's saying is what Paul said when he said Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Jesus came to reveal the message of life. But starting, then, in verse 2, he has some concern as to whether or not we're clear on what that means. Almost all the English translations have some way of indicating verse 2 is like a parenthetical thought. In other words, it's an aside...just in case you're clear what I just said there...and then he's going to go back to the train of thought. So, verse 2:

**—and the life was manifested, (It was unveiled, made known.) And we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—**

So he's trying to clarify in verse 2 what he means when he says **life**. This is the message of life. He doesn't mean just being alive. What he's talking about is the life that has defined God forever...

**eternal life.** Eternal life is not simply a reference to a duration of life. It's a reference to the life that has always existed in God. Before there was anything, there was God, and God existed in relationship with Himself. God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, what we refer to as the *Trinity*: One God, Three persons. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Spirit. The Spirit loves the Father. They love one another. They enjoy one another. They celebrate one another. This is defined life forever. Everything that's alive today ultimately originates back to the life of God. This beautiful, meaningful relationship that has defined God forever, has often been referred to by theologians as *the dance of God*. Since before there was anything, it was just this beautiful dance between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. But we learn in Genesis chapter one that when God created us as humans, we are uniquely made in the image of God. We are uniquely made with the capacity to enter into that life and join the dance. Literally, every human is made to experience this beautiful, intimate relationship with God. It's what our souls long for. It's what we're made for. People constantly try to fill that longing with all kinds of crazy things in our world. But the reality is, there's nothing that's ever going to satisfy that longing until you experience the life you were created to experience. So that's eternal life. So what John is saying in verse two is *Jesus came to make that life known*. Through His death, burial and resurrection, He would make it possible, and through His life and His relationship with His apostles, He would unveil and reveal this life that defines God. So that's what he's saying in verse two. Verse 3:

**...what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

So here's what he's saying in verse 3. I told you that verses 1 through 4 are just a long run-on sentence in the Greek. The main verb is in verse 3, and it's the word **proclaim**. But the emphasis is not so much on the act of proclaiming, but rather the substance of that proclamation, in other words, what was being proclaimed, and it has to do with **fellowship**. This is a very simple Greek word, *koinonia*. The difficulty with the word fellowship is it's become so watered down, it's hard to really use it without immediately thinking of things that aren't really what we're talking about. So most churches have a *fellowship hall*. "We're going to have a *fellowship dinner*." "Come tonight and we'll have 30 minutes *of fellowship*." "Join the Life Group and we'll have *fellowship* for two hours, one day a week." None of that has anything to do with what this word *koinonia* means. The word literally means *to share in common with*, but it has to do with a deep sharing in common with.

So think of it this way. We may say, as Nebraskans, "We're all Husker fans." Okay, we share that in common, but that's a very shallow *in common with*. A lot of people relate politically to different ideas and views. It's like, "Okay, you share the same view, but that's a very shallow *share in common with*. The word actually referred to something much deeper. For example, it was used to refer to business partners. The basic idea is, "We're in this together. We genuinely have skin in the game. If the business flourishes, we flourish together. If the business goes down, we go down together." It's a very deep level of connection.

It's also a word used to describe marriage. Same thing: If my marriage is flourishing, it means we're both flourishing. If my marriage is going down the tubes, we're both going down the tubes. That's just the way it is. We're *sharing in common* at a very deep level. So what he's saying in verse

3 is that they, as the apostles, had a front row seat to this life that Jesus was unveiling. They heard it, they saw it, they experienced it, they touched it. They entered into this life that has defined the relationship between the Father and Son forever, and through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, they were invited to enter in and experience this relationship.

One of the bad habits we have as American Christians, is we just want to make all this very individualistic, just me and God, all alone, just the two of us. But that's just simply not true. What he just said in verse 3 is the apostles were invited to enter in and experience this life-giving relationship with God, but it is something they did together. They shared in common the relationship with God, which then caused them to share in common this relationship with one another. That's what he means by *koinonia* in verse 3.

Now just stop and think about this for a moment. Think about the reality that through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, I have been invited by God to enter into His presence and join the dance...to experience the life that my soul longs for...to find my life...to find my love...to find my joy in the substance of that relationship. But there are others who have also found that life in their relationship with God. I'm not doing this all by myself. When I get there, I begin to look around and I realize, "Hey, I'm not the only one here." And as I look around, what I see is a great diversity of people, and we're sharing in common this deep *koinonia* with God. So I see old people. I see young people. I see college students. I see teenagers. I see rich people. I see poor people. I see males. I see females. I see every skin color. I see people from Mexico. I see people from India. I see people from Africa. I even see people from Nebraska. And in this experience where we're experiencing deep community, deep *koinonia* with God, I'm not doing this alone. We're experiencing deep *koinonia* with one another together. And what I realize is, what I'm getting a glimpse of, just the slightest taste of, is the world as God intended it to be. This is the way it was supposed to be. This was God's vision for the world. I'm also getting a taste of the world as it one day will be again when God ushers in the new heaven and new earth. So what I begin to understand is that true, authentic Christian community is a bit of a taste, just the slightest glimpse of the world as it was intended to be and the world as it one day will be. But we get to experience moments of that now, today! That's what he's saying in verse 3.

Community...*koinonia*...is not something you just turn on and off like a light switch. It's not at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon. It's a way of life. It's part of the DNA. It's who we are as the people of God. The result of that is a deep sense of joy, which is what he says in verse 4:

**These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.**

This could be translated *joy be made full*, that no matter what life throws my way, in my best moments, in my worst moments, and everything in between, there is still a deep sense of joy that goes beyond the circumstances of life that flows out of this deep sense of the *koinonia* I experience with God, and the *koinonia* we experience with God together. But I'd have to say still, that seems very abstract. It's not the easiest thing to get your head around. So let me give you one more attempt to see if I can clarify this.

For me, personally, the deepest, richest, most meaningful *koinonia* in my life, humanly speaking, is my relationship with Patti. So I'm going to use marriage as an example. But don't misunderstand

me. There's a lot of people here today that are single. I'm not saying you have to be married to experience this. I'm just saying I want to use my own life as an example, and I happen to be a married man, so just go with it. So the deepest, richest koinonia I experience is with Patti. We've been married 44 years. There's really nobody that even comes close in my life to that level of connection and intimacy. It's not about possessing a marriage license. It's about the deep relationship we experience together. But it doesn't mean we're always together. As a matter of fact, most days I spend more waking hours away from Patti than with Patti. But when I'm here in town, at my office or whatever I'm doing, I'm still married. I'm not just married when I'm home. It isn't something I just turn on and off certain times of the day. It's who I am. It's in my DNA. It, in so many ways, defines me as a person. It defines my values. It defines my priorities. It defines what I do in public. It defines what I do in private. It defines my life in so many ways, whether she's present or not, because I'm still married to Patti.

Now just project that onto God. My relationship with God is a deeply soul-satisfying love affair, and this defines who I am as a person. It defines my morality; it defines my priorities; it defines my values; it defines how I live; It defines how I spend my money; It defines everything about me. It isn't just something that happens now and then. This is who I am. But I'm also aware of the fact that in experiencing that deep koinonia with God, I also experience it together with Patti. We both experience that deep love relationship with God, but in the process, then, we experience it together. So there's a level of depth and richness in the relationship that would not be possible without Christ. So it's something we experience together.

That applies to every relationship you have with someone who's a Christian, with someone who has been transformed by the power of Jesus. You not only experience this deep, soul satisfying koinonia with God, but in the process, you are connecting in a supernatural way with others who are also experiencing that deep love affair with God. So we experience it with God together. That's who we are as the people of God. It's not one day a week at a Life Group. It's not just when I show up at church. With the deepest relationships, with my friends, with my family, with the people in your Life Group, do you realize that when you show up with these people, something supernatural is happening? A Life Group is not like ten people meeting at the local pub. There is a supernatural dimension to it where we experience this koinonia in our relationship with God, but we do so together, which supernaturally connects us in a way that the world cannot know apart from Christ. I would suggest this is what the world wants. At the end of the day, this is what everybody's looking for. They're wanting to figure out, "How do we do this, where we bring everybody together to flourish, to find the life my soul is longing for?" But the world does not know how to do it, because it's not possible apart from that relationship with Jesus, because it's only Jesus that makes us right before God, that invites us through His death, burial and resurrection into this koinonia with the life that has defined God forever. And in the process, we supernaturally connect with others who are doing the same and experience a level of community that is supernatural and deeply soul-satisfying. That, then, creates the joy that defines my life through the best of times, through the worst of times, and everything in between. I get a taste of the world as it should have been. I get a glimpse of the world as it one day will be. So even in the midst of the most difficult times, deep down there is a sense of joy experienced through this koinonia, through this relationship. These are all the different themes that John wants to talk about in his letter related to the false teachers. I hope you will join us as we see what John has to say.

*Father, we're thankful this morning for the life that You have made possible for us by sending Your Son to unveil, to manifest, to reveal the life that is made possible through His death, burial, and resurrection. Lord, give us ears to hear and hearts to receive what You want to say to us. In Jesus name, Amen.*

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## Study Questions *(to complete on your own)*

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- 1) Read 1 John 1:1 – 4 in a couple different translations of Scripture. Make note of words or phrases that are repeated. Look up unfamiliar words (e.g., manifest or fellowship) in a dictionary or thesaurus and identify a definition that best fits the way the word was used in the passage.
- 2) Read John 1:1-5 and John 17:3. What are some details in these verses that give you a better understanding of who or what is meant by the Word of Life (v.1) and eternal life (v. 2)?
- 3) In one or two sentences, summarize the main idea of 1 John 1:1 – 4.

## Discussion Questions *(with your group)*

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- 1) Notice in the text that John emphasizes the senses (seen, heard, touch) in this passage. **Why do you think John presents himself in this way? How does it uniquely qualify him to testify concerning the Word of Life and eternal life?**

**Share of a time when you experienced God through your senses either by way of seeing, hearing or touching. What is the testimony that God brought about in your life from this experience? How have you proclaimed this testimony to others? If you haven't shared it, what hinders you from doing so?**

- 2) **What do the words community and fellowship mean to you? Do you see them as the same thing or different in any way?**
  
- 3) **The word translated fellowship is the Greek word koinonia, which means fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation. Would you describe your life as a life of koinonia with God and with others as 1 John 1:3 suggests? Why or why not?**
  
- 4) **Do you notice complete joy in your life when you are in fellowship with God and with others? If not, what might be some barriers keeping you from experiencing joy in community?**

There are a whole host of reasons for us to pursue relationship. **Knowing that complete joy is an outcome of authentic fellowship with God and others, is experiencing joy the main thing that motivates you to participate in relationship? What are some reasons for pursuing relationship that may fall short resulting in surface-level relationships or even isolation?**

## **Personal Spiritual Exercises**

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Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so that we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you to strengthen your souls with exercises that challenge and stretch you in new ways. Choose one and commit to repeating it until you gain strength in that area.

- 1) **Scripture Reading: to listen and soak in the Word as an experience of the words washing over you.** Read or listen to the entire letter of 1 John at least twice/week. As you take it in, resist the impulse to study and parse the details. The point is not to gain “head knowledge” but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.

- 2) **Memorization: to internalize God's Word.** A key passage for this series is **1 John 4:7-14**. Commit to memorize it yourself and encourage others in your group to do it with you.
- 3) **Walk & Pray: to actively engage with the scripture passage.** Write out the passage of the sermon each week on a note card and take it with you on a daily walk.
- 4) **Journal Reflection: to practice remembering what God has done.** Make time in your schedule to put down in writing the feelings and thoughts that are stirring as you interact with the Word of God.
- 5) **Self-control Exercise: to help you come to stillness from a busy or hurried pace of life.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Sit upright but comfortably in a chair with your palms open and upward on your lap. Focus on a word or short phrase about the character of God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When your thoughts wander to the things on your to-do list or other people's needs, redirect them back to the character of God. When the 10 minutes is up, close in a short prayer of gratitude.

## Prayer

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Praying together in a group is different than praying alone with God. It's a conversation that can help you grow closer to each other as you are in God's presence. One way to pray follows this often-used pattern in scripture – acknowledge who God is, recognize the need we have for Him, and ask to partner with Him on behalf of others. When possible, use the passage of scripture from this week's sermon as your starting point, then form a prayer that follows this pattern:

God, our Father, this week we learned that you are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .

As I looked into your Word, I understood how I need you to \_\_\_\_\_. Help me to be faithful to \_\_\_\_\_ in the week ahead.

Other people are on my heart, and I trust that you have put them there for a reason. I ask for your will to be accomplished in their life as they \_\_\_\_\_. Help me to know how to respond well to the needs of \_\_\_\_\_, even as my first step is in praying for them right now.

Each group engages in prayer differently. Some groups go around and allow anyone to pray that desires to do so. Other groups have several people pray or maybe 1 person closes the group in prayer. Still other groups split into smaller groups of 2-3 people and those people pray for each other. How you choose to engage in prayer is dependent on your group and your choice to ENGAGE! **We learn to pray by praying and by listening and praying with others!**