

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have called each of us to our home, our families, our places of work and our places of worship. May we honour You by respecting all with whom we share these blessings, and may we fulfil Your command to 'love one another'. Hear this our prayer, Lord God, and establish Your Kingdom in our midst for all to see. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Fire services

This week we will pray for fire services. In some nations, there are few fire services except in cities, but all over the world, people risk their lives in fire to save others; pray for them.

On-going prayers

- *Ask God to stir up leaders of industry to clean up their industries*
- *Give thanks to God for your health, and His power to heal*
- *Pray about the serious threat to world peace posed by N. Korea*

Meditation

Through the liberty of salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord,
We are set free to be the people we were made to be.

Through Him, we can forgive, over and over again;
So that nothing from our past can continue to hurt us.

Through Him, we are given true supernatural strength;
To achieve what might otherwise appear to be impossible.

Through Him, we can speak words of eternal truth;
So that others might find joy and peace and deliverance.

Through Him, we can discern the good from the evil,
To judge things rightly for ourselves and for our times.

Through Him, we are confident in the present and the future,
For we are secure in His hands, despite the troubles of the world.

Through Him, our death holds no more terror or fear,
For He has been ahead of us, to prepare us our way.

And this is our testimony of faith.

Bible Study - 1 John 1:1-4

¹ *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life –*

² *The Life was revealed, we have seen and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us –*

³ *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his*

Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ *We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

Review

These words are deeply moving. They are an original testimony to the living Jesus, spoken in words that make us feel that we, like the first recipients of this letter, can receive that testimony and make it our own. The Jesus who was seen and heard and felt in the flesh, hundreds of years ago in Judea, is the same Saviour we know who has reconciled us both with God the Father and also with each other. He has changed our lives utterly, and together with all those with whom we share in fellowship in the name of Jesus, our joy may be 'complete'!

The opening of John's first letter is a remarkable piece of literature. The first two verses read like a confident personal statement, saying of the life and ministry of Jesus, 'we saw it!' The letter continues with two further verses that speak powerfully of the fellowship that bound the writer together with those who first read his letter, and bound them all with God the Father and 'with His Son Jesus Christ' (1:3). We can learn a great deal from these opening words, but above all, they have the authority of one who was a firsthand witness to the Gospel events. Just as Paul frequently began his letters with a clear statement of his apostolic authority, so John does the same but in a different way, speaking of the fact that he saw, heard and touched 'the Life'. The early Christian churches used some basic guidelines to decide what literature could be included in the New Testament, and one of these was that there had to be irrefutable evidence that it came from someone who knew Jesus and had seen and heard Him. John had been one of Jesus' closest friends, he was called the 'beloved disciple', and he had been with the Lord throughout His ministry, even witnessing the crucifixion (John 19:26). His claim could hardly be disputed!

There is a small amount of evidence that after the Resurrection, John travelled around parts of the Roman Empire (possibly to Egypt and North Africa and perhaps Crete) and built up a circuit of churches that owed their origins to him and his band of evangelists, just as Paul worked through Asia and into Greece with his circle of friends. This letter (as with 2 John and 3 John) was probably written as a circular letter to these churches; and from the earliest days of the church, it was accepted that John had indeed written it, and the following two letters were thought to come from his circle, by his authority. Like all the letters in the New Testament, the 'originals' do not exist, and we only possess scraps of early copies from around the second and third centuries, and complete copies from the fourth century onwards. Unfortunately, there is evidence that other 'letters' were written by people who falsely claimed the authority of the apostles, so it is very important for us to know that these three letters were regarded as authentic from the earliest of days and in the earliest of records.

It is clear from the beginning that this letter is concerned with testimony to Jesus Christ, and the witness of faith that says He is the 'Son of God'. In John's Gospel we find very similar words, with the same general theme and 'feel' as this letter; for example, we read this towards the end of the Gospel, 'But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in His name'. In addition, expressions like 'the Word of Life' (1:1) also remind us of the beginning of John's Gospel, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God ... and in Him was life' (John 1:1,4). 1 John seems to be bound together with John's Gospel by word and themes that speak of Jesus in a deeply meaningful way, and with an almost palpable sense of love and affection.

Reading the whole of this passage, we are left in no doubt that John wanted God's people to share his unshakeable love of Jesus, the man who had changed his life and who lived to

change the lives of all who put their trust in Him. For John, perhaps more than any of the other Gospel writers, it was also inconceivable that God's people would be anything other than one fellowship, united in their Lord. Furthermore, their joy was 'complete' not because they had a happy life, were free from troubles or enjoyed their life together as a community; the fellowship of believers had complete joy because Jesus was with them (1:4), and through Him they knew they had received 'eternal life' (1:2) with God the Father. Of course, John had much more to say about faith, but this is where he began his letter. Consequently, the letter asks us whether our own experience of Jesus is as close and meaningful to us, as it clearly was to John.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What is the difference between the opening of John's letter and a typical letter of Paul. Look up Colossians to make the comparison.
2. In your group, summarise the elements of faith that are contained here in this text.
3. How important was 'fellowship' with John, and what did he mean? Is this anything like our concept of 'fellowship'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have written about why I believe this letter was written by John, because recent scholarship has led people to be sceptical. Many ordinary Christians I have come across have heard one or other preacher say that 1 John was not written by John, and having heard this, they cease to give the letter any credibility. This is very sad. We can never be certain about how the letters came to be kept within the New Testament, but it is presumptive to think that our methods to determine what was written by John are more accurate than those used by the sincere people who lived closer to the time. They agonised over these issues in public debate for decades, and I prefer to live with their conclusions and remain sceptical of our methods today!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *To what extent do you sense the presence of Jesus? Does the beginning of 1 John connect with your experience of Jesus? Ask yourself this, because what we believe can reveal how and why we get on with any particular group of Christians, and John felt that what we believe should unite us in Jesus. Think and pray about these things.*
- *Pray for the fellowship of God's people, and pray that we may be united in Jesus and the promise of eternal life.*

Final Prayer

Eternal and every loving God, You have been the help and refuge of Your people for generations. May we live in Your presence, love all that is good and true, and serve you in every part of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN