

COMMUNITY GROUP GUIDE

The Church at Martinsburg

Secure: Certainties from 1 John

Joy (1 John 1:1-4)

April 13, 2014



MAIN POINT

As John opens his epistle, he's clear, direct, and strong in his approach. John wants his audience to be marked by the person and work of Jesus Christ. The eyewitness accounts are altogether different than what the church was hearing and seeing from opponents of the Gospel. Knowing Jesus secures fellowship with God, with others, and grants joy that never ends!

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What are some of your thoughts or insights from last weeks message? What challenged you, encouraged you, or ministered to you?
2. What thoughts come to mind when you hear the words “eternal life,” “fellowship,” and “security?”
3. How would you define joy? How would the Bible define joy?

READING

Have a volunteer read 1 John 1:1-4.

This letter, written to urge the readers not to be led astray by those who had seceded from the Christian community and to reassure them that they are in the truth, seeks to achieve its purpose by strengthening the readers' commitment to what they already know, that is, the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ which they heard from the beginning. It is in line with this purpose that the author begins his letter with a reminder of the origins of the gospel, the message concerning “the Word of life” (of which he is a first hand witness) which constitutes the basis of the fellowship in which he wants them to continue.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

1. Why does the apostle John begin his letter with an eyewitness testimony? How does his testimony give him greater credibility?
2. What is “the word of life?” What were John and his group proclaiming? What were the significance and the implications of their proclamation? See vs. 2-3.
3. What is Christian fellowship supposed to be like? What effect should it have?
4. What made fellowship with the apostle and his group significant for John’s readers (vs. 3b)? How are you experiencing the fellowship and joy he speaks of?
5. Do you consider “eternal life” (vs. 2) to be something impersonal or an object to gain? How would considering “eternal life” as a Person impact your security, identity, and joy (vs. 4)?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

1. In what specific ways do you doubt God, his word, or his character? What do you believe you need or require to quench your doubt?
2. What are some ways you can combat doubt? (Consider passages such as 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8)
3. What place does fellowship with believers have in your life? What are some things in your life that takes precedence over fellowship and living in community?
4. What are some practical things you can do to help make living in community a more significant priority?

PRAY

As you pray with your group, pray that your group would:

1. Have a greater assurance of their salvation and would not seek for assurance in anything else other than the finished work of Jesus.
2. Experience greater fellowship with their fellow group members and with other believers in the church.
3. Experience deeper joy as they grow in their understanding of the gospel and in their relationship with the Lord.

WEEKLY UPDATE

Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.

- **Easter Weekend:** Our Easter Weekend Celebration is this weekend! At the Martinsburg High School, we'll have an evening service on **Good Friday (4/18)** at **6pm** and our **Easter Sunday (4/20)** service will be at **11am**.
- **Baptism Celebration:** We will be celebrating Easter Sunday with baptisms! If a member of your group is interested being baptized on 4/20, visit baptism.martinsburgchurch.org.

FOLLOW-UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- A challenge to memorize 1 John 1:1-4.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

1 John 1:1-4

It is clear from this passage of Scripture that when the author says, “we proclaim concerning the Word of life,” he has in mind something much more than a spoken message. He proclaims the Word of life, which he has heard, seen, and touched. He proclaims a message that has been embodied in a person – the person of Jesus Christ.

1:1. This “Word of life” is described first of all as **that which was from the beginning**. Modern-day readers of the NT can hardly avoid seeing here an allusion to teaching found in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word.” In the context of the prologue of John’s Gospel “the beginning” means the time before the creation of the world. However, in the context of the opening verses of 1 John, “the beginning” functions to make quite clear that it refers to the Word of life incarnate in Jesus Christ. The result is that when the author describes the Word of life “that which was from the beginning,” he is in fact speaking primarily of the Word of life incarnate in Jesus Christ, not the Word existing with God prior to the foundation of the world.

Which we have heard. – The immediate context of the expression in 1:1 makes it clear that an actual firsthand hearing of the proclamation of Jesus is implied.

Which we have seen with our eyes. – This expression is found only here in the NT and is used to reinforce the claim that the proclamation of the Word of life comes from one who is an actual eyewitness.

Which we have looked at. – The verb used in this expression denotes unambiguously a physical seeing with the human eye. Jesus was physically seen by the apostle.

Our hands have touched. – The expression “to touch with the hands” is found only here in the NT but the verb “to touch” occurs also in Luke 24:39, Heb. 12:18, and Acts 17:27. The verb is used predominantly to denote actual touching (with the hands). In the present context the author is clearly using the verb to mean actual touching with the hands. By doing so he claims that his proclamation rests on the experience of not only seeing, but also of having touched with his own hands the Word of life.

1:2. The expression “eternal life” here, does not denote an impersonal quality of life that comes from the Father prior to his incarnation, and in whom eternal life is found. It was the eternal life, which was with God from the beginning, which, the author says, has appeared to us incarnate in Jesus Christ. Depicting God as Father as the author does here is consistent with the way Jesus’ own relationship to God is repeatedly expressed in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus refers to God as his Father more than a hundred times.

1:3. The author goes on to explain his reason for proclaiming what he has seen and heard: **so that you also may have fellowship with us**. The author’s purpose is to ensure that his readers persist in the fellowship they have with him. To have fellowship with him is the alternative to having fellowship with the Gnostics (false teachers opposing the proclamation of the true gospel). **Fellowship** denotes not only a personal relationship with the author, but also partnership with him in his work of proclamation. To have fellowship with the Gnostics would involve partnership with them in their evil work (see 2 John 11). To encourage his readers to persist in their fellowship with

him and his good work, the author reminds them that **our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

1:4. Just as the purpose of the proclamation is *so that you...may have fellowship with us*, so the purpose of the writing is *to make our joy complete*. The fellowship and the joy are both to be a common possession between the apostle and his readers. in 2 John 4 and 3 John 4 a similar sentiment is expressed: The elder's joy comes from knowing that others walk in the truth.

Verse 4 must be understood also to look beyond this life to the life of heaven. Then consummated fellowship will bring completed joy. "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Ps. 16:11). It is to this ultimate end that he who *was from the beginning...appeared* in time, and that what the apostles heard saw, and touched, they have proclaimed to us. The substance of the apostolic proclamation was the historical manifestation of the eternal; its purpose was and is a fellowship with one another, which is based on fellowship with the Father and the Son and which issues in fullness of joy.