

# 1, 2, & 3 John & Jude Bible Reading Schedule

## 2 Weeks

### WEEK 1

Many believers appreciate the Gospel of John as the most important record of Jesus' life. I can affirm that and tell you that his letters continue John's profound spiritual understanding of living the Christian life.

Fellowship, forgiveness, love, overcoming sin, and the assurance of eternal life will fill our time in God's Word this week. 1<sup>st</sup> John is a natural extension of the Gospel of John. John's Gospel shows that it was Jesus' mission to reveal the Father and to bring believers into union with the Father and the Son through the Spirit. John's first letter emphasizes how Christians can experience God in daily life, as demonstrated by their relationships with the other members of the church community. We must exhibit our love for God by loving one another. If we truly love God, it will be evident in our love for others.

#### DAY 1 – 1 John 1 to 5

The value of reading the whole letter in one setting seems important enough to dedicate our first day of readings in the New Year to the whole book. I realize that I didn't know these chapters as well as other New Testament Scriptures, so I was sure I wanted to read these five chapters to begin with. What are your first impressions? Something new jumped out to me from 1 John. It was the central theme of fellowship. We begin our relationship with Christ with the invitation to a life of fellowship with God and his followers. Instruction and truth help us maintain true fellowship. Love plays the most important role because love is a verb and the glue to fellowship. The goal for us essentially is to live a life of fellowship. In the middle of the letter, I see something that John wrote which highlights what I am saying, "So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father. And in this fellowship, we enjoy the eternal life he promised us." (2:24-25) How has God's Word spoken to you this day?

#### DAY 2 – 1 John 1

I imagine a few of you recognize these words from this past Sunday. The main reason I chose 1 John was because of my study in this 1<sup>st</sup> chapter. I think of 1 John as a simpler approach to the Christian life compared to the Apostle Paul. But I have changed my mind. Paul is heavy on theology with practical Christian living stemming from the meaning of theology. John isn't completely different but he weaves them together throughout his letter making it more challenging to interpret but nonetheless so valuable. I hope you enjoy this first week in the New Year as we take in John's instructions for Christian living. After the invitation to experience fellowship with God and each other, John addresses the important topic of sin and broken fellowship. The focus on confession of sin is undeniable. He has said it with seriousness as well as a strong challenge to be honest with God and honest with people who know you. Fellowship is

the greatest concern because sin disrupts fellowship with God and with people, fellow Christians. Later, John will develop his presentation about how fellowship with God and with fellow believers go hand in hand. You get a glimpse of his concern in these verses. My conclusion, based on my sermon study, is that many believers have an inaccurate view of confession. Either we do not practice confession of sin or we have too weak a view of what it means to confess. You can understand confession because it is linked to forgiveness and cleansing. Cleansing is soul-transforming because it deals with the unrighteousness we have practiced. Listen to this wise Proverb, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Proverbs 28:13 Too often we practice confession in a way that doesn't lead to real cleansing because there is no repentance with it. How concerned are we about our fellowship with God and with believers? How might our sins be getting in the way? The sincerity and earnestness of our confession will reveal our passion for fellowship with the Living God and with our community of faith.

#### DAY 3 – 1 John 2

Verses 12 to 14 are some of my favorite verses in this chapter because they reflect a hopeful, affirming message for believers at various stages in spiritual maturity. John has written some very challenging statements throughout his letter to this community of faith, but here we understand his heart for fellow followers of Christ. How do these verses encourage you? After these uplifting words, John gives a warning about the influence of the world. The world lusts after created things and takes pride in human achievements and worldly possessions. The world is sure to weaken our faith if we embrace its values. (VV15-17) His next warning is about the coming of the antichrists sent by the devil himself. There's no doubt that the devil is the tempter and his influence is filled with lies. Previously, John warned us about our vulnerability to sin. Paul points to the influence of our flesh in his writings, which operates from the selfish engine of our desires and lusts. Walking in the darkness will blanket our souls and separate us from the life-giving help of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther, from the 16th century, taught that there are three main avenues of temptation and deception; the world, the devil, and the flesh. This might not cover every nuance of sin but such a summary has helped me stay aware of how I can fall into sin. These thoughts about sin have spilled over from chapter one into my notes for today. Obviously, I have thought about chapter 1 more so because of the sermon on Sunday. Why are the warnings that John gives especially important and relevant to us today?

#### DAY 4 – 1 John 3

One of my favorite verses is actually 3:1, NIV = "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" Our most treasured identity is being a part of the family of God. How does this first paragraph uplift you (verses 1-3)? Verse 6 tends to be the most challenging one in this chapter from my perspective. "Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin." That seems to contradict verses 8 & 10 from the first chapter. But it reminds me of Paul's words to the Galatians, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh." (5:16, NIV) Also, Jesus taught his disciples that they should abide in him because apart from him they could do nothing. The message I am receiving from 3:6 in 1 John is the hopeful and encouraging truth that when we are linked to Christ, he will help us live victoriously. We don't want to sin and when we are filled with the Spirit, we won't. If only I could abide in the Lord 24/7, right? Verses 16 & 17 turn up the heat even more as we are

challenged to share God's resources and demonstrate that our faith is genuine because our actions are sacrificial. We obviously do this because of our love for God and our love for fellow Christians by unselfishly giving time, effort, prayer, possessions, and even our lives to support those in need. Isn't John's letter so profound and deeply challenging? I was easily inspired by the first paragraph in this chapter. I resonate with the possibility of walking in the light of God's power and presence so I will not sin. I am deeply challenged and even convicted by the principle of sacrificial generosity in verses 16 to 18. There's quite a bit to contemplate, wouldn't you say?

#### DAY 5 – 1 John 4

After giving instruction on how to distinguish spiritual truth and the reality of false prophets, John addresses love more completely than in any other section in God's Word. I know that 1 Corinthians 13 is especially powerful and illuminating regarding the meaning of love. But John gives love a more direct connection to the heart of God. God's strongest and more overarching characteristic is love. In fact, "God is love." Love is mentioned 21 times from verses 7 to 21. This is truly one of the most inspiring passages in the Bible. I think it is because John makes sure we know the source of love as well as what this love motivated God to do. "He (God) loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." (V10) His love sets everything in motion. It is the forerunner to us loving him and then each other. Verse 18 has often captured my attention because fear still creeps into my life from time to time. I like the way the NLT translates this verse: "Such love has no fear because perfect love expels fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love." The punishment that John is most likely referring to is fear of judgment day. That will be a terrifying day for those who don't know God. But we have received a love that is beyond this world. As we grow more mature and complete in God's love our confidence in him fills us with courage and assurance and expels fear. Amen! Judgment Day will be a day of celebration for us who have been loved by God with an everlasting love. What aspect of John's teaching on love caught your attention?

## WEEK 2

Are you like me and can't remember reading 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> John? Well, let's do it. Plus, I think you will find Jude to be an interesting and practical letter that is relevant for today. 3<sup>rd</sup> John brings up some very personal issues with people in the church and reminds us that life in the 1<sup>st</sup> century wasn't that much different than our experience with people today. May God speak to you through his word.

### DAY 6 – 1 John 5

We did not finish the John's first letter last week. Chapter 5 is very much a favorite of mine. I often quote verses 11 & 12 on the simplicity of the Christian faith. You either have Jesus or you don't and with that life, or one does not have the life. I have repeated this statement time and again, "He who has the Son has life, and he who does not have the Son does not have life." This is the guarantee of our faith, eternal life through Jesus which begins when we place our faith in him and will continue forever. Amen! But my favorite "go-to" verse is about prayer. I appreciate the promise of verses 14 & 15: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." (NIV) The Scripture can help direct our prayers so we know what to pray. The NLT says to pray for anything that pleases him. Added to this marvelous promise are other principles of prayer which say to pray in faith (Matt. 21:22, James 1:6), with patience (Luke 18:1-8), in obedience (1 Peter 3:12), and in submission to God's infinite wisdom (Luke 22:42; Romans 8:28, 1 Peter 4:19). And, isn't the last verse interesting, "Keep yourselves from idols." (V21) It reminds of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment in the Ten Commandments, "Have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3) I am sure there are touch points for you in this chapter. I think there is a lot to contemplate in John's conclusion. What gets your attention?

### DAY 7 – 2 John, 3 John & Jude

That's right, I want you to read these three short letters in one setting. I believe this is one of the best ways to study God's Word. Read over it continuously and then go back and look at it more conscientiously. I will know if you have taken my challenge because your reading today will end on a high note. I think the benediction in Jude is one of the best in the Bible. I have memorized it in the NIV, "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." These words are packed with stirring principles and timeless truth. When I am abiding in the Lord, I will not stumble. I can take great comfort in the gift of righteousness that I possess through Christ because God will see me blameless upon my entry into heaven. The greatness of God can too easily be diminished in my thinking because of my attachments to the things of this world. But his glory shines forever and his authority is established eternally. The sufficiency of our God is unmatched. The beauty of this blessing is combined with the truth that will never change. I liked reading all three letters and ending on such an inspirational note. How do you feel after your reading for today?

### DAY 8 – 2 John

You have just read the shortest book in the New Testament. This letter uniquely fits on one sheet of papyrus. John repeats the importance of continuing in the truth, loving each other, and watching out for false teachers. Most often our response to people is one of hospitality, right?! Verses 10 & 11 give us very specific instructions concerning hospitality and inclusion of false teachers. Listen to these strong words again, "Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work." (V11) Here is an example of not accepting them into the fellowship. We love to be as inclusive as much as possible but in this case, a rebuke with a cold shoulder is the direction John gives this 1<sup>st</sup> century church. The situation is very serious as some are being led astray as they listen to the message that diminishes the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ (V7). This is called heresy and must be confronted. We are called to protect the Gospel. John says this kind of teaching is inspired by the antichrist, the small letter "a." He is saying that the devil, who is the deceiver, is behind this false teaching. I might encourage you to read Romans 1:16-17 and even memorize it. The Gospel is the heart and soul of Christian teaching. What does the Gospel mean to you?

#### DAY 9 – 3 John

It is so interesting to me that the NLT refers to these visiting believers as "traveling teachers." It seems to me that John's last letter warned about false teachers and now the church, under a leader named Diotrephes, refused to have anything to do with these visiting believers who were treated as strangers. I am not sure there is an overlap but John is now telling them that these are genuine believers and you do well to receive them and show them hospitality like Gaius is doing. In fact, it appears that John actually sent them to this church community. This is an especially personal letter to Gaius as John mentions others by name. Diotrephes is a bad example, compared to Demetrius is a good example. Again, this letter is quite short and probably fit on one papyrus sheet. We might have the idea that things in the early church were ideal since they lived so close to the time of Jesus. But the message of Christ was spreading rapidly which could lead to misunderstanding and false teaching. John had two great concerns; the truth and love. We can easily understand how significant truth and love are to the Body of Christ. Jesus came full of grace and truth, it says in John's Gospel, chapter one. The foundation of the faith is built on truth but the home, the fellowship of believers, must be filled with love which has always been paramount to our Lord. How do you respond to this personal letter from John to Gaius?

#### DAY 10 – Jude

Not only do I love the benediction at the close of this letter, but I receive helpful instruction and inspiration from this often-neglected book. You might notice that this letter most likely was shared with several church communities. It was a word for the Body of Christ with concern for the persistence of false teachers, the wavering faith of some, and the need for courage to stand strong against these wayward teachers. Please notice Jude's connection to James which gives us the impression that Jude was also a brother of Jesus like James who wrote the book of James. That is fascinating, right? Jude uses examples in the Bible to warn these false teachers as well as challenge believers to have nothing to do with them. What aspect of Jude's warnings gets your attention? Why? In my journey as a pastor, there have been times when certain individuals knowingly or unknowingly caused division. "These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you." (V19) This posture grieves the Holy Spirit and will be punished by God. It is a devastating sin to cause division. Verses 20 to 23 are the most inspiring to me

and give all of us direction for how to treat each other. There's nothing more satisfying to me than when God uses me to help "those whose faith is wavering." As dramatic as these words are in verse 23, I am still motivated by them: "Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment." These last two statements give me further motivation and direction to reach out to struggling believers because so much is at stake. I will return to Jude more often. I must admit, I can't remember the last time I read Jude. But Jude was led by the Holy Spirit when he wrote this letter. How has God used this letter to speak to you?