



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Week 1: God Is Life

Sometime before discussing and reflecting on these questions, take a moment to read through the whole First Epistle for John. It will only take 15 minutes or so and will create a broader context for the series.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. The Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John are both anonymous documents and although probably not written by the same author, may well have been written from within the same faith community (at different times). Read John 1:1-18 and then 1 John 1:1-7. What similarities in theme and style do you see? What differences? Why do you think the author of First John begins their document this way?
3. The First Epistle (letter) of John was most likely written in the early 2nd century (CE) around seven or eight decades after Jesus' death. The letter does not have a specific addressee, nor any identification of whom it is from. How might these factors influence the way we interpret the document?
4. Read 1 John 4:1-3. What does the term "antichrist" mean to you and what notions or images does it conjure up? What do you think the author means by "antichrist"? Why do you think it was so important for the author that Jesus was flesh and blood—a real human like us?
5. Why do you think a movement of thinking was emerging at this time that denied the humanity of Jesus? In what ways might we subtly deny the humanity of Jesus ourselves, and separate reality into divine and material realms? Reflect on this in term of how we actually live our lives and how we experience reality rather than what abstract beliefs we hold.
6. The First Epistle of John calls Jesus the "Word of Life" (1 John 1:1) and speaks of Jesus living and bringing "eternal life" (1 John 1:2). This phrase can be interpreted as "divine life," "life itself," "life everlasting," or "life without beginning or end." In the Gospel of John Jesus says, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (John 10:10b). What kind of "full life" do you think Jesus is talking about here? What is the significance of Jesus being human with regard to living this kind of life?
7. If you are discussing these questions as a group, break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to share ways in which you feel you need to experience more "divine life." After sharing, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time to quietly open your heart and welcome the Word of Life.

Practice for the week: Sacred Reading of Scripture – 1 John 1:1-7

This is a way of praying with scripture that has been used for centuries by followers of Jesus and is often called "Lectio Divina" which is Latin for sacred or divine reading. A regular practice of Lectio Divina cultivates the ability to listen deeply to scripture and allow God's presence to open our lives. It helps us listen for the still small voice of God speaking to us personally here and now, and to grow in awareness of God's presence with us, in us, and around us. We interact with the text of scripture, but unlike Bible

study, we do not analyze or dissect it. We listen in quiet, and allow the words to settle into us as we quiet our thinking to receive them deeply into our hearts.

There are many ways to engage with Lectio Divina, but four steps are commonly used: read, meditate, respond, and rest. The scripture is printed below, and you might prefer to listen to it rather than read it (there are some great apps and websites for that such as www.biblegateway.com).

Read: Read the passage of scripture. This is best done slowly and intentionally with an awareness of God's presence speaking through the text. Simply listen for God's voice in this moment. Don't search or seek out the meaning on your own, but rather wait, and listen for something to emerge. When a word or phrase seems to settle on you, take it in and just sit with it in the silence.

Meditate: Read the text again for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, ask how this is applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

Respond: The third reading is for the purpose of responding back to God, expressing honestly whatever is happening in your heart and spirit as a result of listening. There may be joy, tears, awe, reverence, even confusion - give any emotion or thought that arises freely to God at this time. And listen for how God might want you to turn, move or act because of what you've heard.

Rest: Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence and simply seek to love and be loved by God. Anytime distracting thoughts arise, just return to the word that stood out in the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this "sacred word" to symbolize all your love for God, and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and to allow the light and love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.

1 John 1:1-7 (NIV)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in God there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Week 2: God Is Light

1. What resonated with you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or helpful? Was there anything with which you disagreed?
2. Light is symbolic of many things. When you hear "God is Light," what thoughts and feelings does that trigger in you?
3. Read 1 John 1:5–2:2.
 - This passage talks a lot about "sin," a term that carries baggage for some of us. How do you view sin? Is this how you have always viewed it?
 - What does the passage tell us about the nature of sin? And the remedy for sin?
 - What do you think it means for God to be "faithful and just" in the context of forgiving sins?
 - The speaker on Sunday suggested that we project a punishment view of justice onto Scripture: that God wants or needs someone to pay for sin—even though Scripture views justice more in terms of restored relationships. What do you think to this suggestion? In what ways is this view helpful? In what ways is it unhelpful?
4. Read 1 John 2:3-14. What does the author say are the signs of someone who knows God (rather than merely knows *about* God)? The writer expresses a great deal of confidence in the community members in his poetic utterance (v.12-14). How would you feel if such statements were made of you?
5. Read 1 John 2:15-17. "The world" is used in a pejorative sense here to signify earthly systems that are contrary to God's will. How does the writer characterize "the world," and what do you think he means by that? What makes these things antithetical to God's will?
6. Read 1 John 2:28–3:10.
 - How might an expectation of Jesus' imminent return impact how people live?
 - What do you understand by the phrase "children of God"?
 - What is hopeful about "God's seed" being within us? What is challenging about this?
7. The speaker on Sunday suggested that the challenges presented in 1 John are still timely:
 - The challenge to know God, rather than knowing *about* God
 - The challenge to keep walking in the light
 - The challenge to pursue love always

Which of these is most challenging for you right now? If you are discussing these questions as a group, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time to quietly open your heart and welcome God's warm and healing light.

Practice for the week: Practicing Presence

Prepare. Begin to let go of all thought of the future or past. Focus on your breathing. As you inhale, allow the light of God to fill you as you breathe. As you exhale, let go of any feelings of darkness.

Be present to where you are. Consider the environment around you—your space, the natural beauty you may see, smells, sounds, the people nearby. Truly notice these things and thank God for providing them.

Be present to who you are. Ask God to show you what you are feeling at this moment. What are your emotions? Are you happy or sad? Where is there anxiety, guilt, loneliness, anger? Ask God to bring your emotions into the light, and help you release them into God's care.

Be present to God. Rest in this awareness, being mindful of where you are and who you are, and that God who is both Light and Love is present with you.

To close this time of prayer, thank God for being present and for loving you, and slowly return to your activities, bringing the Light with you. Repeat often.

Week 3: God Is Love

Sometime before discussing and reflecting on these questions, take a moment to read through the whole of this week's section: 1 John 3:11-5:21

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. The First Epistle (letter) of John seems to have been written because of divisions and disagreements in the community, with certain people leaving. Have you ever left a church? What were your reasons? How did the process of leaving feel? Have you ever experienced conflict within a church community? How was it handled and how did it resolve? What impact did it have on the people in the church?
3. Read 1 John 3:23-24. What are the two commands the author is saying we should obey? What do these commands mean to you, and how do they apply today? What does the author say is the outcome of this kind of obedience, and what do you think this looks like in everyday life?
4. The words "command" and "obedience" can have authoritarian and subservient connotations. How do these concepts apply in our modern, more permission-giving culture, where generally we don't like to be told what to do?
5. Read the Gospel of John 1:10-13 and 3:1-8. Now read the First Epistle of John 4:7-8 and 5:1-5. What similarities do you see in the text from the Gospel with that from the Epistle? What does being "born of God" mean to you, and how does it apply in everyday life? What does the author of the Epistle say we need to do to live as children of God?
6. Read 1 John 3:11-20. Why does the author contrast Jesus with Cain? What point are they making and how does this apply to you? What does love look like according to the author in this passage?
7. One of the challenges of this letter is to be a life-giver (through love) rather than a life-taker (through fear). If you are discussing these questions as a group break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to share about relationships and situations in which you feel you need to be more of a life-giver. After sharing, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time to quietly open your heart to the possibility of being a life-giver through love.

Practice for the week: Manifesting God

One of the incredible claims of the First Epistle of John is that just as Jesus was the embodiment of God, so too we can be God in the flesh. People can see God as we live a life of love. This week, start each morning with brief meditation on 1 John 4:11-12:

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is made complete in us.

Take a moment to receive and rest in God's complete, unconditional love for you. Allow this to motivate you with love for others. Sink into the mystery that God is completely present in you as you simply love others. As you go about your day, be conscious of God in you and consciously love those around you. When this feels hard or you find yourself defaulting to something other than love, return to what you meditated upon and recenter yourself in God's love.