

# A FAITH YOU CAN HANDLE

## 1 JOHN 1:1-10

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

A person can spend years studying Michelangelo - *his political aspirations, the painter's influence on Renaissance art* - yet never stand in the Sistine Chapel, look up at the ceiling, and marvel at his masterpiece.

A man can work in a lab - peer through a microscope as he crossbreeds grasses and flowers; yet never wiggle his toes in a velvety sod, or smell a freshly cut rose.

Someone can be a military expert - a student of battle strategies and troop deployments - yet never see with their own eyes a wounded soldier carried on a stretcher, or feel the terror of bullets flying over one's head.

I know folks who complain about the hatred in the world, and how people today no longer care about each other - yet their longest lasting friendship is six months. And they've never spent the night in a hospital with anyone who wasn't a member of their own family.

You can talk about love, even quote poetry - but have you stood with a spouse through their battle with cancer, or walked with a child through troubled waters?

I'm just saying, there is a difference between *the theoretical* and *the actual*. There are two types of knowledge: *academic* and *experiential*. **You can know about something and not really know what that something is about.** *Just ask the Apostle John...*

John was a young man when he met Jesus - probably late teens or early twenties. It's believed he was the youngest of Jesus' disciples. *And John witnessed it all...*

He was there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus began His ministry. He saw the healings, the lepers cleansed, the multitude miraculously fed.

He saw firsthand Lazarus rise from the dead. Of the twelve, John was the only disciple who escorted Jesus to the cross, and watched Romans execute his Master.

John was there when they laid His body in a tomb. And of course, three days later John was one of the first disciples to discover that the same tomb was empty.

For the forty days following, John witnessed the risen Lord Jesus coming and going - proving the reality of His resurrection. John saw Jesus ascend back to heaven.

John was a leader in the early Church. He went with Peter to Samaria to confirm the spread of the Gospel.

Later, John ended up in Asia - what is today the country of Turkey - among seven churches. He probably fled Jerusalem in the great dispersion of 70 AD. The Jews revolted against the occupying Romans, Rome retaliated, burned the Temple, and drove away the Jews.

Yet John's escape from Jerusalem was like stepping out the fire and into the frying pan - *literally*. Roman persecution followed the believers in Jesus. In the succeeding decades, John was the only one of Jesus' twelve apostles who was spared a martyr's death.

*And it wasn't because the Romans didn't try to kill him.*

The Emperor Domitian ordered John to be turned into a *french fry*. He was boiled in hot oil. Miraculously, the Lord delivered John. And since Domitian couldn't kill him, he was banished to "[Patmos](#)" - a rock island off the Turkish coast where John would receive the Revelation.

After the Emperor Domitian's death John was freed. He return to Ephesus, to pastor the churches in Asia.

What an amazing life John lived.

Raised in a tiny fishing village on the banks of a lake in Galilee - a common fisherman. He was transformed when his life intersected with Jesus. John became a leader in a movement that would shake the whole known world. John's life-experience was unparalleled.

In his second and third letters he calls himself simply "The Elder" and no one questioned who that described.

There could only be one "The Elder," and that was the Apostle John - the disciple who walked with Jesus.

But the first seven decades of Christianity gave rise to other elders - *so-called elders*. Men joined the ranks of Christianity, and the newborn Church, who claimed to be godly - but were actually ignorant or charlatans.

Imagine, Ephesus in the first century AD...

It was the crossroads between east and west, Europe and Asia, Rome and the Orient. Think of the cultural influences pressing on the Church. Christianity was attempting to survive in a boiling cauldron of rural paganism, oriental mysticism, and Greek philosophy.

This meant ambitious, power-hungry men were coming into the Church with their own tall tales, and fanciful philosophies, and self-seeking boasts.

In this letter Pastor John tells his flock, “**Wait! There’s a difference between knowing about something, and really knowing what that something is about.**”

John is an old man now, he’s walked with Jesus for 70 years. Yet now he’s listening to educated, brainy, slick spokespeople characterize Christianity and philosophize about life, *when they really don’t know what they’re talking about*. They have their ideas about Jesus, but they don’t know Him like John knows Him.

John is tired of the misinformation and complication. In contrast to the guesses and theories of others, *John knows that He knows that He knows*. He was there, man. He heard Jesus speak. His insights are personal.

And John wants those under his care to understand who Jesus really is and what it means to follow Him.

And it’s ironic, just how much the spiritual landscape of 21st century America resembles that of first century Ephesus. For we too are bombarded by misinformation and complication. Teachers have come in the name of Jesus who really don’t know the Jesus they profess.

Folks today speak of God and philosophize about life, but their ideas are base on half-baked paganism and self-esteeming psychology; more than divine truth.

Even under the Christian banner we’re often not sure if what we’re getting is *truth* or *fluff*. Are we hearing *timeless truth* or *twisted truth*? Have the teachings we receive been adjusted to our ears, or are we hearing straight up what came from the mouth of Jesus?

We need to hear from someone who really knows. Who knows Jesus. Who knows firsthand what he's talking about. *We need to study the letters of John...*

For hear the Apostle in verse 1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...” John is reporting firsthand information.

If you've watched football on TV lately you've seen the *Farmers Insurance* commercial where the agent says, “We know a thing or two because we've seen a thing of two.” Well John could say the same, “We know a thing or two because we've seen a thing of two.”

John and his fellow disciples heard Jesus with their own ears, saw Him with their own eyes, scrutinized Him in their minds, even touched Him with their hands.

Reading 1 John is like sending someone into Jesus' camp wearing a wire. It's an eye-witness account.

John's life wasn't altered by stories he'd heard, or someone's clever argument, or a feel-good philosophy.

John met a man in real life. They lived side-by-side.

They became friends. Jesus was everything John hoped He'd be. He touched John's life in radical ways.

Recently, I was meeting with some pastors and heard a fascinating testimony. Pastor Anthony is starting a CC in Dothan, AL. *And oh how those Alabama fans need the Gospel! Pray for Anthony!*

But it's amazing how he came to the Lord...

He was converted when he read a Scripture. And not John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life..." Or Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord..." Not any of the verses you hear quoted when people give a testimony.

What led Anthony to the Lord was 2 Timothy 4:13, where Paul writes to his young protege, Timothy, "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come - and the books, especially the parchments."

*How does that verse convert somebody to Christ?*

Anthony told us he'd always thought the Bible was a collection of make-believe and mythology - *but when he read that verse it hit him!* It had to be written by a real person - an actual human in a real-life situation.

The author was cold and alone, so he asks a friend to bring him a warm coat and a couple of magazines.

Anthony concluded, "If the Bible is about stuff that actually happens - if it's historical and addresses real people in real-life situations it best be taken seriously."

And this is how John introduces us to Jesus! The Master is real. Jesus is alive. John touched Jesus and Jesus touched John, *and the touching continues...*

Christianity is not just something mystical, ethereal, spiritual - it's more than a philosophy and abstract ideas. **It's a faith you can get your hands around!**

*Grab the shoulder of the person next to you - go ahead... It's that real.* You can get a handle on Jesus!

Once, a young child awoke in the night. He called out to his mother, "Touch me, please touch me with your finger!" She thought his request sounded strange.

The mother asked, "*Why Son?*" He cried out, "I'm not here. Touch me, Mommy, so I may be here." The child didn't feel like he existed until he'd been touched.

And the cry of this little boy is the cry to God from every human heart. *We all long to be touch by God.*

We don't feel truly here - we question our existence, and our purpose for living until our Creator touches us.

God of course waits, until we repent and turn to Him in faith. In the meantime - while we go untouched - we seek to justify our existence in a million other ways.

*Is this what you've been doing? Are you empty and lonely. Do you long to be touched in a meaningful way by someone greater than yourself - the hands that created you in the first place? And in the absence of what you need are seeking other things in its place?*

John said life started for him when he touched and was touched by Jesus. He calls Him, "*the Word of life.*"

Again John writes, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...*"



Jesus didn't have a beginning. He was *"from the beginning."* John's Gospel starts, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Jesus was God. He was fully human and He was fully divine.

Every heresy involves confusing this central truth.

The false teacher errs on one side or the other. He either stresses Jesus' humanity in a way that diminishes His deity. Or He exalts His Godhood to such an extreme that it limits Jesus' humanity. The truth is in the balance. **Jesus is all God and all man.**

In becoming man He never stopped being God. And as God He was in never prohibited from being human.

Jesus wasn't God one day, and man the next. In being God, He was always man. And in being man, He was always God. **Jesus was fully God and fully man.**

Think of it this way. Take a red paint and a blue paint.

Let **red** represent humanity. We come from the dirt. We're from the red clay... Let **blue** represent deity. God sits in the heavens high above the blue sky...

Take the two paints and blend them together. Mix them so thoroughly you can no longer tell where the red ends and blue begins, or where the blue ends and red begins. Keep blending the colors *and eventually you get purple...* Purple is the royal color. And King Jesus, Messiah, was a perfect blend of God and man.

John doesn't just say Jesus was *"from the beginning,"* He also calls Him, *"the Word of life."* The term John uses *"Word"* was technical verbiage in the Greek language. It was used by their philosophers.

The Greek Word is *"logos."* - *"the logos of life."*

The Greeks observed the order and symmetry in nature, and concluded there had to be a *cause* behind the *cosmos*. They *searched for* and *theorized about* this grand purpose. They even named it, *"the Logos."*

As my words express the thoughts in my head, the logos revealed the mind and purpose behind the universe. Yet the Greek philosophers were never able to identify *the Logos*. It remained an unknown force.

But here John shocks his readers by reporting that he has seen, and listened to, and scrutinized, and even touched *the Logos!* He's *handled it*, and *heard it*, and even *hugged it!* For what the Greeks thought of as an *impersonal force*, John knew as a *personal friend*.

John knows that *the reason behind all reality* is not an *"it,"* but a *"He"* - His name is Jesus. And John writes this letter so you too can know Him - and can experience the joy, light, love, and life that's in Jesus.

John adds in verse 2, *"the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us..."* The meaning of life, the unified theory behind all that exists, isn't some cryptic, hidden, mysterious secret. The *"Logos"* has been revealed.

As verse 2 puts it, “*manifested*” - which means “put on display.” And John had the privilege to meet *the Logos*. He spent 3.5 years rubbing up against eternity.

John realizes He broke bread with the philosopher’s pursuit - with every human’s quest. Eternal life and ultimate meaning is found in John’s friend, Jesus.

He says in verse 3, and “*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*” John’s faith was more than theory and philosophy, but a real-life person.

And John was privileged to live up-close with that person. John touched Jesus and Jesus touched John.

And yet, he doesn’t write of that relationship as a past friendship. John and *Jesus might’ve been old friends, but they were still friends.* They’re relationship had stayed current. Jesus is alive, and by His Spirit John fellowshiped with the Father and His Son Jesus.

And John’s intent in writing this letter is for you and I to enjoy the same relationship he experienced.

I think it’s crucial we identify God’s top priority for our lives. *What is God’s number one goal for you?*

Until we nail this down we’re destined for frustration.

Let me ask you a multiple-choice question, “*Which is most important? 1) To get to heaven. 2) To serve God. 3) To do God’s will. 4) To know God more.*”

Hey, jot down an answer - *1 through 4*. Let's see if you get it right? In reality, very few Christians do. Let's think about these four choices for a few moments...

**# 1, get to heaven.** It's important to go to heaven, especially considering the alternative. *But what about until then? And after you're there what will you do?*

**# 2, serving God.** Hopefully, we all want to serve God, and He has meaningful service for all His kids, but if we're all about serving, and there's nothing in our lives that refreshes us we're destined for spiritual burn out. Perhaps *you've been there done that? I have!*

**# 3, do God's will.** Certainly life goes better when we live it in God's will. Steer outside the white lines of His will and you're headed for a crash. *But once we're in the will of God, what then? Isn't there more to our relationship with God than simply avoiding trouble?*

This is why the correct answer is **# 4, to know God more.** John says he writes this letter so we might have **"fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ."**

I'm glad I'm going to heaven - and I love serving the Lord - and I desire with all my heart to walk in His will...

But if that's *all your about*, heaven will seem boring. Serving God will turn into a drudgery. And walking in the will of God ends up feeling restrictive and pointless.

The deeper purpose for my life is to know God - to fellowship - to lean on Him - to spend time with Him - to know and be known by the God who created me! This is why Jesus died on the cross, *so we could know God.*

The first man, Adam, walked with God in the garden.

The Bible uses sweet imagery. Genesis says it was Adam's habit to walk with God *"in the cool of day."*

Imagine, late in the afternoon, the sun is setting. The heat of the day is past. The cool night air is closing in.

And there's the Almighty with His child by His side. They're discussing the day, and life, and eternity, *and who knows what else.* And this was the experience Adam look forward to every single day of his life.

The first man lived life in a conscience awareness of God's presence. And this is now God's desire for us!

This is what Christianity is all about. God wants you to have fellowship with Him. *And what is fellowship?*

We'll talk a lot about fellowship in the weeks ahead, but here's the short definition, **how about "two fellows in the same ship."** You are invited to climb on board with Jesus. *Sail together, talk together, eat together, visit places together, remain in the same boat together.* Think of all this means... Jesus no longer wants you to think of your life independent from His.

If all you're focused on is just getting to heaven, or doing ministry, or finding God's will for your life; then Christianity will feel boring, and tiring, and restricting.

The great pastime of heaven will be knowing God.

The underlying benefit of serving is knowing God.

And the major joy found in His will is the opportunity to know Him more! Don't turn these means into ends.

It's only when **knowing God more** is our #1 goal will we find fulfillment and joy in our relationship with Him.

As John puts it in verse 4, **“And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”** The byproduct of knowing God, and cultivating a sense of His presence in your life, is a deep-down, abiding, fullness of joy.

If you want your heart to be an overflowing cup of joy *slow down, quiet your mind, open up to the Savior, and give Him an opportunity to reveal His presence to you.*

Verse 5 tells us, **“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”** God is a person, but He has characteristics similar to the properties of light.

*Light invigorates and illuminates. Light warms. Light drives out darkness. Light produces color and beauty.*

God is not like the light of the moon - **a reflected light**. God is like the light of the sun - **a radiant light**.

He's the source for all love, and purity, and truth, and beauty. Realize, God doesn't just abide by a standard.

God is the standard. He has become the standard for us all. ***“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”***

And John continues this analogy of light, verse 6, **“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”**

It's interesting, every living thing struggles toward the light. House plants grow toward the window. Life leans toward the light. The only plants that don't are dead.

John is adamant. You can say you know Jesus, and you're alive in Him - yet if you walk in spiritual darkness you're lying to yourself and others. *If like the shade; then you're shady.* You're living out of touch with God.

And I'm afraid this is the case with many so-called Christians today. They're shady. They hang out in the gray shadows. They've compromised with this world.

They entertain themselves with sin and cultivate dark appetites. They're no longer fighting to stay in the light.

**You can't walk in darkness AND walk with God.**

In his book "[The Great Divorce](#)" CS Lewis starts his story in the gray city of the dead. The narrator boards a bus along with ghostly creatures from the underworld.

These passengers are selfish, petty, quarrelsome.

The bus makes its final stop in a city full of light. But the passengers on the bus don't like this city. They call it a "[cruel light](#)" for it exposes them as the ghastly and horrible people they've become. When they see *the bright people, the shining people* approaching them from "deep heaven" all the passengers race back to board the bus. **What they dislike most is the light.**

And this is exactly what John describes. People who walk in this world's darkness have rejected God's light.

John tells us why it's so important to walk in light. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Here's how we grow as Christians - we walk in God's light.

Plants grow by a process called "photosynthesis."

A plant has cells that transform light into energy. They absorb light and use it to process food, and grow.

Likewise, a Christian grows by "a kind of spiritual photosynthesis." The human spirit is designed to absorb the light of God. The presence of Jesus in my life is the catalyst by which I become more godly, and good, and loving, and kind, and pure - more Christlike.

2 Corinthians 3:18 explains this process, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Living in God's presence has a mirror effect. The more I hang out with God the more He rubs off on me.

Remember, it's not up to a plant to grow. Light causes its growth. And it's not up to a Christian to grow ourselves. Our job is to stay in the light - and the light of Christ will fuel a steady and fruitful spiritual growth.

In essence, Christians need to be *spiritual bugs*.

Look at my porch light in the summertime, and watch the moths and bugs hover around that light. We need to be like spiritual bugs and live in the light of God.



*Read His Word, worship His majesty, rest in His peace, behold His glory, seek His presence - be a lover of God's light. You grow by hanging out in the light.*

In fact, here's what we all need... **a spiritual tan.**

Some of you sport a nice tan in the summertime. And a tan requires very little effort. Just find a nice spot on the beach, stretch out on a towel, do the rotisserie turn from time to time - and before you know it you're *baked and beautiful*. All it took was time and availability.

**And this is how we grow in Christ...** Just spend daily time in the light of God's presence - *and the God-beams, His glory* will rub off on you. The light of Jesus will be absorbed into your character and disposition.

Live in God's presence and the blood of Jesus provides a slow burn. It's continually purifying us.

But read verse 8, **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."**

Here's what hinders God's light from having its effect on us - **dishonesty**. *Hide your sin, or cover it up, or ignore it, or deny it, or act self-righteous - think you no longer need to be changed and purified* - such self-deception acts like a 45 sunblock. It shuts out the light.

Repentance is the desire to change, and if we don't maintain a repentant spirit it stunts the light's effect.

John says, **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves..."** Don't misunderstand, repentance isn't the absence of sin. It's the willingness to change.

None of us are *sinless*. No matter how much you grow spiritually - as long as you inhabit a sin-stained body, and live in a sin-infested world - at times you'll sin. It's been said, "**A Christian isn't *sinless*, just a person who *sins less and less*."** The truth is we all sin.

This is why verse 9 is so important, "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" And again in verse 10, "**If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**"

The key is honesty. Stop dodging, and excusing, and denying... ***We all have to own what we've done!***

Once a Catholic priest was hearing the confessional of an older lady. She was hard-of-hearing, and would shout out her sins so loud everyone could hear her.

The priest suggested that from now on the lady could just write down her sins and hand him her list.

The next week she entered the confessional booth and handed her list to the priest. He looked at it, and said, "**Mam I'm sorry, but this is your grocery list.**" The poor lady shouted, "***Oh dear, I left my sins at Publix.***"

I'm pretty sure Publix doesn't want your sins, ***but you really can leave your sins with Jesus! Just fess up!***

Be honest! For "***He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***"

It's been said, "The only sin that God won't forgive is an **unconfessed sin.**" John says whenever we sin we should immediately ask God to forgive and cleanse us.

Of course, this verse prompts a question... **If the moment we're saved God forgives all our sins - past, present, future - why do we still need to confess them?**

And here's the answer - **our confession maintains a repentant attitude.** As far as God is concerned our forgiveness was assured by the blood of Jesus at the time we were born again, but our repentance is kept up-to-date and nurtured by honest, humble confession.

Confession keeps our heart in the right posture. It keeps us receptive to God's light and able to grow.

Let me close with a reminder, there is a difference between *theoretical* and *experiential* knowledge.

If you're tired of folks who talk about God, **but are just guessing.** If you want to know your faith is real. *Have a faith you can get your hands around* - listen to John. He was there. *He saw, He heard, He handled.*

And he wants us to live in touch with this God. Live in His light and be changed and cleansed by Jesus.