

Why did John write First John?
1 John 1:1-4

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Twelve years this Wednesday, 2 airplanes hit the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Another flew into the Pentagon while a fourth plane was crashed in Pennsylvania. If you were alive and older than a young child, you likely remember that day. You may remember first hearing the news. You may remember watching the events of that tragic day unfold. Most of us experienced Sept 11 through a TV screen. But our experience and understanding might change if we knew or talked to someone who was actually there.

I had that privilege a few years ago at the Preaching retreat I attend in Wisconsin. One of our colleagues serves a church in New Jersey about half an hour west of Manhattan. He was at the church that day. After the towers were hit, people went outside to watch events unfold. About a half hour later, the strong smell of jet fuel dominated the air. He said he would never forget that smell. He went on to describe an off duty firefighter from their community who went to help and died trying. As his voice broke in emotion, he brought me closer to the events of that day.

You may have had a similar experience when listening to someone talk about the holocaust or World War 2. Or if you've listened to your parents or grandparents describe their lives, you're somehow drawn closer to their time and those events because you're talking to eyewitnesses.

But how do we get close to Jesus? It's not like you can just call up one of the disciples and ask them what he was like. You can't visit Jesus' mother in the senior's home to hear about his childhood. None of us were at the cross or lived in Jerusalem during Jesus' life. Is there a way for us to get close to Jesus and His life?

Today, we're going to meet someone who was there. We're going to begin a journey with Jesus' very close friend who wanted people like you and me to know Jesus and draw near Him. But he does not just offer his insights in case we're interested. He claims that we must listen to his message if we want to have any fellowship or connection to Jesus at all. How can he claim that? Why does he say we have to listen to his testimony or we can't know Jesus? Isn't that a little brash? Who was this guy anyway?

His name was John. He was one of three closest disciples to Jesus along with John's brother James and Peter. John was there when Jesus raised a little girl from the dead and when Jesus raised Lazarus. He witnessed the transfiguration when Jesus was visited by Moses and Elijah. He sat beside Jesus at the last supper. He was at the cross

with Jesus' mother and took care of her after he died. John outran Peter to the empty tomb. John went into the tomb and saw Jesus' folded burial clothes. Then he encountered the resurrected Christ.

After Jesus' ascension, John continued to minister and spread the good news about Jesus. He also wrote two major works of the New Testament – the Gospel of John and Revelation. But there is another less known collection of his writings that we're looking at this fall. They're called the letters of John or first, second and third John. They were likely written near the end of John's life near the end of the first century in the area of the 7 churches named in Revelation. In the very first verses of these letters, he claims we must listen to him or risk not knowing Jesus at all. Let's explore his claims in the first four verses of 1st John and see how we can draw nearer to Jesus through him.

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—**2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—**3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

John will describe his personal encounter with Jesus. But first he goes back to the beginning; "That which was from the beginning." What beginning? Likely the beginning of time. This one John encountered existed before time. John has a habit of pointing out the pre-existence of this one. He begins the Gospel of John with "In the beginning was the Word – Or Jesus; and the Word was with God and the Word was God." That introduction reminds us of the start of the book of Genesis. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." So in taking us back to the beginning, John already alerts us to the uniqueness of this one.

But then John describes his close encounter with this one from the beginning. He talks in the plural "We" because along with him, there were other apostles who encountered Jesus. Look at the ways John describes how he and others interacted with Jesus. We have heard. He heard Jesus' speak publicly and privately to the disciples and one on one. We have seen with our eyes. John witnessed Jesus' interaction with people and the miracles. Then he adds another dimension of sight; that which we have looked upon. It could be that he's simply emphasizing "I really did see this guy with my own eyes." Or he could be using "looked upon" as another type of seeing. You can see an event happen. But you also see in the sense of understanding that event. "I see what you mean." Maybe that's what John

does here. He not only saw the event happen but was given understanding of the event often by Jesus Himself. But the clincher comes in the last claim – “and have touched with our hands.” That takes John’s interaction with Jesus to a whole new level.

After all, there are lots of people we hear and see but never touch or never get close to. We can see and hear someone at a concert. But we don’t get to talk to them personally or shake their hand which would be another level of closeness. But John and the others got to touch Jesus with their hands. Here was conclusive proof of the material reality of Jesus. I heard him. I saw him. I touched him with my hands. Maybe John has in mind Jesus’ invitation to the disciples to touch him after the resurrection.

But how could John, a mere mortal encounter the eternal pre-existent son? In verse 2, he jumps aside for a moment to answer this. Verse 2 – The Life was made manifest to us. The life is Jesus. God took the initiative to show Himself to us through Jesus. Friends, this is a great little verse to keep in mind whenever we’re tempted to conclude God doesn’t really care about us or relating to us. We would hardly know Him if He hadn’t stepped out like this. God demonstrated His commitment to know us by becoming human and allowing witnesses like John to hear, see and physically touch him.

But why is John telling us all this? Did you notice he has not stated a purpose for all this information yet? He doesn’t say, “We heard, saw and touched the one who was from the beginning. He’s telling us all of this for a purpose which we find in Verse 3 – “That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

What is fellowship? Isn’t it just another word for friendship? So if John tells us about his close relationship with Jesus, we’re supposed to be John’s friend? Or is there something much deeper here. Fellowship means much more than friendship. It describes a close mutual relationship of common purpose and life. John is saying “I’m proclaiming my personal encounter with Christ and all I know about Him so that you can join me in a close relationship where we are together and of one purpose.” Well why is that important? “And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.” Now here is the stunning claim. Our, we, the apostles, fellowship or are in close relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ. So if you or I are not in fellowship with the apostles, by implication you cannot be in fellowship with the Father and the Son. So John claims the only way we can have fellowship with the Father and Son is through

the Apostles. Who does John think he is? It sounds a bit controlling doesn't it? It's like John says you can only get to know Jesus if you come through me. What a ridiculous claim!

Or is it? How do we know anything about Jesus? How do we know about His life and His teaching? How do we gain understanding about the meaning of his life and the call upon our lives today? Through the New Testament. Who wrote the New Testament? The apostles and their close associates. If we did not have the eyewitness testimony and writings of the apostles we would not have the New Testament. Without the New Testament, we would not have the Gospels or the letters which explain the Gospel to us. We would not be able to have close fellowship with the Father and Son. Ephesians 2:19-22 declares how integral the apostles were in bringing people to Christ. – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

So John is not saying that we must become friends with him to get close to Christ. We get close to Christ by heeding and receiving the message of the Apostles. Verse 3 again – “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you as eyewitnesses. When you listen to, receive and believe our message, you're in fellowship with the apostles who were appointed to Jesus Himself to deliver this message.” John declares this because people had left the churches he wrote to. They claimed that they were the true Christians. They claimed they knew Christ better than those who stayed in those churches. They claimed they could know Christ even if they ignored the apostle's teaching and message. John says no way. We are eyewitnesses. We have been commissioned by the living Christ himself. You cannot get to the true Christ and be a true Christian by ignoring His appointed messengers.

Friends, this is so relevant for us today because people do this all the time. They claim they know God and they're good with God. But they ignore His word. They claim to have a new revelation or insight into God apart from these gospels. They read the Gospel of Thomas and of Mary Magdalene and think these are suppressed gospels that tell the whole picture of Jesus. But those are different writings from the second century. They assumed the name of some prominent Biblical character to try to gain authenticity. But they're not Christian gospels. They weren't compiled by eyewitnesses like John. Our fellowship with the true Christ depends upon heeding the message of His appointed

messengers. We don't get to pick and choose what we like. We have to decide whether we will fellowship with John and his message to connect with Jesus.

But the question now is what do you think of John's witness?

John's claim invites us to think through what we really believe. In a way, it has the potential to unmask or uncover whether or not we're true Christians. So let's take the 4 questions true Christian test. It might be dangerous but it might also save your life. **#1 - Do you think Jesus was a real person that lived in history?** Or is he a mythological character that is just used to inspire good morals? If you answered, no, then I'm glad that you're honest. But just know that you are not a Christian according to the Bible. Because true Christians have to accept John's claim that Jesus was a real person that he heard, saw and touched.

#2 – Do you believe Jesus claims to be the divine Son of God? The one who existed before time began; the one by whom all things were created. He was physically resurrected and lives today in heaven. If you think Jesus was just another great religious leader and his body is still in a grave somewhere ,then you have rejected the apostles' claims. And you are likely not a Christian based on the Bible's definitions.

#3 – Have you received Jesus Christ into your life as your savior and Lord? You can believe the man Jesus existed in history. You may even believe his claims to be God the Son. But that does not make you a Christian. Even demons believe Jesus is the Son of the Most High God.

A true Christian believes and receives Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. They put all their hope and trust upon Jesus to save them. They do not turn to their own efforts or good works as earnings for salvation. They confess the only way they can be reconciled to a holy God is to depend on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross on their behalf. They admit they deserved God's wrath and yet have been pronounced not guilty because of Jesus' blood sacrifice. They recognize that salvation is a gift from God by grace received by faith.

Yet recognizing that Jesus was a real person in history and continues to live today resurrected in heaven, believing Jesus' claims about Himself and receiving Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord does definitively prove that we are Christians.

#4 – Is your life changing and growing to become more and more like Christ? This is the final test. The fabric of our lives is the vital test of the authenticity of our faith. And yet statistics say many Christians' lives show little or no

difference from lives around them. Why? One reason might be that we do well in proclaiming our need for Christ and the necessity of a decision for Christ. We emphasize that we must follow up that decision with baptism. We declare these are mandatory for the true Christian. But then we've made something called discipleship optional.

Decision for Christ – mandatory – Discipleship – optional.

We've said "you must repent and be baptized." And then it would be a really good idea to follow Christ and grow in Him. So basically we've adopted a view of the world that divides people into 3 categories. There are non-Christians – people who reject Christ and what he said. There are the super-spiritual Christians who passionately pursue a walk with Him and talk about God all the time and weird stuff like that. Then there is the middle category of Christians who affirm the truths and prayed that prayer sometime in the past. They look forward to heaven when they die but in the meantime have confined their Christianity to one 2 hour total slot on Sunday Morning. So there's non-Christians, Christ followers and average ordinary Christians.

There's only one problem with that view – there's no room for it in the New Testament. The apostles cannot imagine a true Christian who is not a Christ follower. They have no place for a person who claims to have received Christ yet does not follow Christ or sees no change in their lives because of Christ.

Jesus Himself said "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Wow – that doesn't fit into the North American dream does it? Denying myself – isn't our culture all about consuming whatever we want. Taking up a cross daily? That sounds like work. That sounds like it will take a long time. We want 3 easy steps to receive our best life now! Follow Jesus? I want to lead. What if I don't like where Jesus is leading? What if he's not fitting into my timetable? What if he gets in the way of my goals? Lose my life – no no no no no. I want the fulfilled life. I want to gain life. And Jesus says you can gain life. But it all depends on your definition of life. If our definition of life is "it's all about me and living out all my dreams," we can certainly pursue that apart from God. But Jesus' definition of eternal life is knowing God and the one he sent and following Him. Gaining that life will provide the deepest satisfaction for our souls and everlasting fellowship with God. It is not an easy life – it is a carrying your cross daily life but it is an accompanied life where we are never alone again. It is a forgiven life where we walk in grace and pass on God's grace to others. It is a purposeful life where we get to participate in something that will go on for eternity.

We discover this life through the testimony of the apostles like John. Through him we get to discover what Jesus was like and what he taught during his time on Earth. Through John's deep reflection and Nobel quality writing we gain understanding of the significance of Jesus' life and words. Through the Bible, God speaks. Jesus speaks and leads and directs and convicts and guides and shapes and grows us.

So when we started *Read the Bible for Life* 2 years ago this month, it was not because I thought it was some slick little program. It's because I saw, heard, sensed and feared that many in this congregation were not connecting with God through His Word. I heard about people maybe reading 1 chapter a month or not at all. When that happens, we just slide on in with what everyone else is doing around us. Our lives look like everyone else's.

When we were away on vacation I would get up most mornings and go for a walk. I brought my MP3 player to listen to some messages and podcasts. In one of them I heard this – 80% of North Americans say they know a Christian. Of those 80%, 15% saw a difference in the Christian's life compared to everyone else's life.

I believe one reason Christian's lives are so similar to the people around us is we collectively neglect God's Word. I will not soon forget the image painted by a speaker at this past March's Alberta Baptist Association meetings. He said "reading 1 or 2 chapters of the Bible a week will make no noticeable difference in your life. It's like standing in shower stall for 10 minutes while the shower delivers one drop of water every 5 minutes. So after 10 minutes you get two drops of water. You don't even get wet.

So we continue to emphasize the critical necessity of reading God's Word while inviting God to shape and renew us through the reading. If you don't have a Bible reading plan, you can join with us from the one on the front of the bulletin. We are doing a 2 year plan and we're nearing the end of year 1. But you can start now.

But we must not only read and respond to God's Word. We must engage in prayer – constant conversation and communication with God. So this past year, we looked at the book *Transforming Prayer*. We just finished several Psalms in the summer to acquaint ourselves with the Bible's prayer book. Scripture Reading and prayer are both vital practices that we do and then God meets us in them. He changes us. He grows us.

But the Christian life is more than Bible reading and prayer. Though vital, it's easy to just check those two off the "to do" list and think we've done quite enough with our Christianity for the day. But Jesus didn't say read my word and pray a little and then get on with what you really want to do in life. He said "take up your cross daily and follow

me.” All the time – 24/7. Follow him and learn how to live his way. Learn how to see life His way. Receive power to live a life saturated with God and His Word. This is called discipleship. But since most people today don’t really understand the 1st century concept of a disciple, I think the word apprenticeship might help us grasp this a little more.

An apprentice is a trainee, learner, beginner and student. An apprentice submits themselves to training under a skilled professional. When the apprentice completes his or her training, they receive their certification or papers or degree.

Christian apprentices submit themselves to training under Jesus. Our apprenticeship lasts our lifetime. We graduate when we die or if Christ returns before our death. That’s what Christ called people to during his time on earth. Carry your cross daily and follow me. Come unto me all you who are weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

That’s the call to intentional apprenticeship under Jesus. That is this year’s preaching theme. “Pursuing an intentional apprenticeship under Christ.” We start this fall with John’s letters which are all about true Christians and those who think they’re Christians but in fact are not. So John shows us what intentional apprenticeship under Christ involves.

Then in the New Year we are going to tackle the question “How can intentional apprentices cooperate with Christ’s leadership in our culture?” We’re going to talk about consumerism, unholy ambition, competition, individualism, my preferred style of worship, passive acceptance of the world’s practices, faith as a private matter and North American Self Absorption.

At Easter we’ll look at how Jesus led his apprentices to unexpected places and challenges. Then next Spring and Summer we’re going to focus on a part of Jesus that I think is largely unfamiliar to many of us – Jesus, our High Priest. Through the book of Hebrews we’re going to discover more about this one who calls us to follow Him.

But what about today? What will you do today about pursuing an intentional apprenticeship under Christ? What is God calling you to today that you will need to follow Christ in? What’s the next step that Jesus calls you take in your walk with Him?

- Receive Him for the very first time?

- Repent of living a casual Christian life.
- Join our next Baptism and Membership class which starts next Sunday?
- Join small group?
- Rearrange your personal schedule to make time for daily personal Bible Study and prayer? Give up a TV show and instead use that time for Word and prayer.
- Rearrange your family's schedule so that you stop skipping church.
- Step up to that ministry need?
- Join or invite someone to an Alpha group?
- What is Jesus calling you to today in the next stage of your apprenticeship under Him?