

Deep Joy

Scripture: 1 John 1:1–4

Part 1 Identify the Issue

If there's one thing that no one wants to be, it's "shallow." No one wants to live a superficial life. Deep is good, right? Friends want to have deep conversations. Philosophers want to think deep thoughts. Coaches want to have a deep bench. Fans want their teams to go deep into the playoffs. Investors are hoping for a deep recovery. Gardeners want their plants to have deep roots. "Deep" implies substance. If something is deep, it's profound, it's sufficient, it's real, it's enduring.

We want to be deep people. We want to live deep lives.

The Book of 1 John is actually a letter from the apostle John to a community of believers, probably in Ephesus. It's a simple book. He doesn't cover a wide range of topics. Instead, John chooses to focus on a few simple truths and drill down into them.

We get the gist of John's message in a couple of verses from 2:24–25, especially as they appear in The Message translation: "Stay with what you heard from the beginning, the original message. Let it sink into your life. If what you heard from the beginning lives deeply in you, you will live deeply in both Son and Father."

So with that goal in mind, let's dig into John's letter. Read 1 John 1:1–4.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] What do the first three verses of 1 John tell you about the rest of the book?

[Q] How does this make our joy complete (v. 4)?

[Q] What does that tell you about joy?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus Christ really lived.

The first thing John wants to tell us is that Jesus Christ really lived. John was writing at a very precarious time in the life of the early church. This letter was written late in the 1st century (probably between 70–90 ad), so it's been about 50 years since Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth. The first generation of believers, those who actually encountered Jesus, have just about died off. John was one of the last living apostles. So he's writing to Christians who never personally encountered Jesus of Nazareth but heard about him from someone who did (or those who heard about Jesus from someone who heard about Jesus from someone who actually met Jesus—you get the idea). As time went by, things got a little ragged. Questions come up. Doubts creep in: Did it really happen? Is it really true?

Well, John is writing to people with those questions. They weren't there when Jesus lived and taught and died. They're going on hearsay. Not only that, but enough time had passed that people were beginning to mess with the message. Some were questioning the humanity of Jesus. Others were questioning the divinity of Jesus. A particular strain of false teaching going around was that Christ wasn't really human. He just appeared to be human. He appeared to have a body. He appeared to die.

So John writes to these believers at this precarious time in the life of the church to set the record straight. Jesus Christ really lived. We saw him, he writes. By "we" he means not only himself, but any other apostles and first generation believers who might still have been alive. We saw him heal the sick and multiply the loaves and fishes and calm the storm at sea and raise Lazarus from the dead. We heard him say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and, "I and the Father are one." We even touched him, he writes. Maybe he's remembering how he leaned up against Jesus at the last supper.

[Q] Are you a first generation Christian (your parents were not Christ-followers), a second generation Christian (your parents were committed believers), or a third generation believer (both your parents and grandparents were Christ-followers)?

[Q] What is something good about being a second or third generation believer?

[Q] What can be the problem in being a second or third generation believer?

[Q] What kind of doubts and questions have you had or still have about Christ?

[Q] What kind of evidence convinces you that what you know of Christ is true and helps you stay faithful to him?

Teaching Point Two: John and the apostles personally experienced Jesus Christ.

The second thing John wants to tell us is that he and those with him really experienced Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't just live, John tells us, but he also changed their lives.

We need a quick grammar lesson to appreciate what John is saying here. Notice that John doesn't simply say "we saw Jesus and heard Jesus and touched Jesus." That would have been the simple past tense—reporting a past action. What he says is, "We have seen . . . we have heard . . . we have touched." He uses what's called the perfect tense, which describes past action with continuing results. He's not just reporting that something happened in the past. He's reporting something that happened that continues to have an effect right up to the time of writing.

An example: If someone says to you, "I saw the Grand Canyon," all they're telling you is that at some point in the past they made visual contact with it. That's the past tense. If someone says to you, "I have seen the Grand Canyon," that's the perfect tense. They're telling you that they not only saw it, but that the seeing of it has made a lasting impression on them and they'll never forget it. They've been changed by the experience.

That's what John is saying here. We didn't just see Jesus and hear Jesus and touch Jesus. We experienced Jesus, and the experience of seeing, hearing, and touching Jesus continues to shape our lives. His words are still ringing in our ears. His works are still vivid in our minds' eye. Our nerve endings still tingle at the sense of his presence.

[Q] In fact, John says twice that the experience is so real that Jesus has become our life. How does he say it in verse 1? How about verse 2?

[Q] How is Jesus Christ your life? In other words, how has he changed you and given you purpose?

[Q] Let's explore this idea further. How do you see his handiwork in:

- nature?
- people's transformed lives?
- hearing his voice through Scripture?
- convicting you of sin?

[Q] John wrote this letter for people who called themselves Christians but for a variety of reasons weren't experiencing the fullness of life. Is that true of you? Explain.

Teaching Point Three: You can personally experience Jesus Christ too.

Look again at verse 3. The word, fellowship, or koinonia in the Greek, means “to share, or to have something in common.” It’s not enough for John to be experiencing this life himself; he wants others to share the experience with him. In fact, he wants it so badly that his own experience is incomplete without them.

[Q] Look at verse 4. That’s a very interesting statement. If he had said, “We write this to make your joy complete,” that would make sense. Why does he say “our” instead of “your”?

[Q] Give an example of when you found something so joyous that you had to share it with others.

[Q] Christian experience is incomplete until we’ve shared it with others. How can “going deeper” become self-centered or even self-indulgent if we don’t share it?

[Q] Have you ever had the privilege of leading someone to Christ or mentoring them? If so, tell us about it.

[Q] If you haven’t been confident in helping others know Christ, either initially or more deeply, what is holding you back?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

So John’s first lesson is this: You know you’re living deep when your greatest joy is experiencing Christ personally and sharing that experience with others. That’s why our vision shouldn’t be to just to go deeper in Christ, but also to get closer to those who know Christ, and to reach wider so others can come to know him.

Action Point: On your own this week read the entire book of 1 John. Jot down the things that stick out most to you and share them with someone else who you think needs to hear it.