

Who is Jesus Actually?

John's Three Letters



Louis Nel

Who Is Jesus Really?

Meditations on the
Three Letters of John

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May 2024



Contents

Foreword

1. The True Jesus? Introduction
2. Silent Night - 1 John 1:1
3. Jesus Is Life - 1 John 1:1-4
4. Light and Darkness - 1 John 1:5-2:2
5. Do You Know God? - 1 John 2:3-11
6. Song For You - 1 John 2:12-17
7. Antichrists and Believers - 1 John 2:18-27
8. The Drakensberg - 1 John 2:28-3:10
9. Brotherly Love - 1 John 3:11-17
10. Qualms of Conscience - 1 John 3:18-24
11. False Prophets - 1 John 4:1-6
12. True Love - 1 John 4:7-12
13. Fear - 1 John 4:13-18
14. Visible Love - 1 John 4:19-5:5
15. Uncertainty - 1 John 5:6-13
16. Prayer - 1 John 5:14-21
17. Just a Short Note - 2 John
18. Hospitality - 3 John 1-8
19. Live Out What You Believe - 3 John 9-15

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Foreword

Our entire faith revolves around the question: “Who is Jesus really?” For every Christian believer, this question is crucial. John provides the answer clearly and unmistakably: Jesus is both God and man, and this concept continues to give meaning to every believer's existence today.

However, merely believing that Jesus exists and that He is God does not make you a believer—the devil believes that too! A living relationship with Jesus is the answer. Such a relationship is not just an internal thing; your faith

must become visible in your everyday life. Your confession and your actions must testify to what you truly believe.

It is only when you begin to live out love in a way that physically impacts other people's lives positively that your faith becomes a reality. Your acts of love actually make God visible on earth.

This series of daily reflections is not intended to be an in-depth Bible study on the letters of John. Rather, I have aimed to stimulate thoughts to learn more about Jesus and to live out love.

Louis Nel

1

The True Jesus?

Introduction to 1 John

It is the year 90 AD. With a trembling hand, a very old man, deep in his nineties, sits in deep contemplation, pen in hand. In his thoughts, the question churns: “How could they misinterpret my book? I’ll just have to spell it out more clearly for them!”

John, the “beloved disciple” and the youngest of Jesus’ twelve, dips the quill into the inkwell. Five years ago he began his book with the words: “In the beginning was the Word...” Why would he use

any fancy language? He will state it in exactly the same way again, because it is, after all, about Jesus and Who He is! "That which was from the beginning," John writes.

"Who is Jesus really? How can I make it clearer for everyone to understand who He is? There are so many misconceptions about this question! Yes, there's only one way: I'll have to explain it in a letter to the people!"

"That 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." John's thoughts drift

far back and a smile plays on his lips. "It was sixty years ago! Can it really be that long? But one thing is certain: I experienced Him personally back then!"

Today, there are still misconceptions about who Jesus really is. The answer is crucial for every believer because our entire faith is woven around Jesus' identity! John writes that Jesus is both God and man and this gives meaning to every believer's existence today.

Of course, it is very important to believe that Jesus truly is the Son of God and Man. They claim that 75% of all South Africans hold

this belief and call themselves Christians. The question is whether this belief is sufficient for your salvation? Can this faith bring you to heaven? True Christianity involves a personal relationship with Jesus. It doesn't remain just an internal thing but must manifest in concrete actions. When you begin to live out love in a way that physically impacts other people's lives, your faith becomes visible. The fact is that your acts of love make God visible to people on earth!

It is precisely when believers act lovelessly that the work of Jesus suffers. John speaks about this

topic in his first letter. There were doctrinal differences that led to friction, causing some church members to go their own way. Division in a congregation paralyzes it to the extent that love completely disappears.

From John's letters we can deduce what was happening in the congregation. Some had a problem with the incarnation of Jesus and the practical life of the believer. They believed that when you have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, you are sinless because you have complete knowledge. Moreover, their lives did not reflect their faith at all.

They did not accept that Jesus truly became man to die for our sins and thereby achieve forgiveness and acquittal. They reasoned, like the Greeks with their gnosticism, that they had received divine seed through the Holy Spirit and therefore could not sin. Thus, they did not need Jesus' atonement and forgiveness. Consequently, their knowledge of God was such that their deeds did not need to reflect their faith. The same gnosticism is still prevalent today!

John wanted to provide perspective on the person of Jesus and wanted to expose the

distorted perceptions of the Gnostics and show what faith truly is about.

You must read the three letters of John as a unit because 2 and 3 John don't make much sense until you have read 1 John. It appears that 1 John was written to the general community, while 2 John was directed to a specific congregation and 3 John was a personal letter to Gaius.

There is also a significant similarity between 1 John and the Gospel of John. 1 John is almost an explanatory commentary on the Gospel of John. This is especially noticeable in the great

similarity in the description of the incarnate Jesus. The introduction particularly strikes you immediately, almost a verbatim repetition of John 1:1. Furthermore, Jesus' farewell discourses in John 15-17 are beautifully explained in 1 John.

I invite you to join me on this spiritual journey through John's letters!

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, my prayer is that you will remove the scales from my eyes so that I can see and experience the true message of this wonderful book!

2

Silent Night

1 John 1:1 - He is the Word, the Life!

It is quiet, deathly quiet in the Bush - that is Marloth Park's Bush where we once had our little bush cottage. Far away in the distance the great Crocodile River murmurs softly. The flames from the cosy fire creates all sorts of patterns: fairies dancing on a log, an aardvark with its long snout and a glowing red eye.....

The night is dark and frightening. A laughing hippo roars, vulgar and rude! The Egyptian geese

chatter incessantly in Egyptian, squabbling with each other over one invading the other's personal space. Outside the circle of firelight, it is pitch-dark night. Something moves there in the unseen, tangible darkness. A twig snaps. Then silence. Deafening silence! Mosbolletjie and I each sit with our own thoughts. An unease gnaws at my inner being. Across the Great Crocodile a lion roars deeply, softly, with great authority. A gentle, cool breeze rises from the river. It feels as if I hear God's soft voice in it: "Do not worry - I am in control!" A great peace descends upon my mind.

God truly is in control of everything!

Silent night, bushveld night;
all at rest, God keeps watch.

A lion roaring in solitude.
Everything cloaked in darkness.
God's peace is over all;
Jesus' peace over us.

I open my drowsy eyes reluctantly, first one, then the other. A bright red ball peeks through the glossy leaves of the buffalo thorn tree. The early morning is indeed the golden hour, isn't it?! I take note, turn over and go back to sleep! A full hour later, I drag myself out of bed with great effort and sit on the

porch, full of anticipation for what the day will bring. So now the birds should be descending upon us in their hoards. But alas - not even a peep! We scatter maize curnels and hang apples in the trees to lure the feathered folk, but in vain: no one takes the bait!

Suddenly, a kudu cow appears as if out of nowhere, stepping from tree to tree and plucking all our apples! Once they have disappeared down her throat, she stands right in front of me. Her huge, mournful eyes are like deep, dark pools pleading for something more to eat. She tries to make me feel guilty so that I

will fetch more apples. Her pleading face says: “It’s dry. No food in the veldt!”

A wrinkly-faced warthog with knobs like young tree stumps on his cheeks and a set of formidable tusks picks up the maize curnels meant for the birds. Late afternoon, as the shadows of the marula tree stretch out, a terrible cacophony erupts: the end of the world has arrived! A chorus of terrified baboons screech from the massive old Cluster Fig tree by the river. Little ones scream, Dad threatens, Mother pleads. Lion? Perhaps leopard? We can only wonder.....

The red sun falls with great fanfare between the thorn trees. Desperately, its rays grasp at the day that has passed. Then night, pitch-dark, terrifying. I quickly build a fire and the flames bring relief. King Lion's authoritative roars echo over the quiet bushveld. We are safe on the porch, aren't we? The Lord is my Shepherd, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..... The roars vibrate through the silence and hang heavily in the dark night.

On the embers, a sausage sizzles: kudu sausage! I feel

slightly guilty when I think back to the kudu cow's pleading eyes this morning. A fruit bat flutters by a few times. The pale spindly legs of a duiker take shape on the outer edge of the circle of light. A bushbaby bounces like a rubber ball through the branches and lands in front of the porch in the red bushwillow. The duiker's companion also steps closer while the bushbaby's friends jump around like popcorn in a hot pot. The fruit bat makes another graceful pass with translucent wings.....

Then silence. Everyone is gone. Mosbolletjie and I are left alone

with our thoughts. Alone? No! The Creator of everything we have experienced is here with me! How breathtaking are God's creations! And these things He gives me to remind me that He is great and almighty and infinitely full of love, and that He truly is the Word and the Life. I will sing His praise with my whole heart!

Silent night, bushveld night.
Over the veldt, sweet and light,
sounds the whisper of God's
grace
carried feather-light on the
evening breeze.
God always keeps watch,

God always keeps watch!

Prayer:

Majesty, worship His Majesty.
Unto Jesus be glory, honour and
praise! This morning I want to
honour Jesus, the King!

3

Jesus Is Life

1 John 1:1-4

Rumours are circulating that Jesus never physically existed and that what is written about Him in the Bible should be seen spiritually, almost like a poem. Other clever people claim that Jesus did live 2,000 years ago and that He was crucified and buried, but that He never rose from the grave. He only rose in the hearts of His disciples!

Today, we have the wonderful privilege of reading the full truth from John's pen. For three years,

he was in Jesus' company every day. He lived, worked and spent time with Jesus. Thus, he speaks with the greatest possible authority about Jesus. He saw what Jesus did with his own two eyes. He witnessed all the miracles and healings, even the dead being brought back to life. He touched Jesus with his own two hands. Jesus was not a spiritual being but a concrete reality, a person of flesh and blood. With his own two ears, John and his fellow disciples heard the astonishing statements of Jesus, the wonderful parables He told that left the crowds hanging on His every word. The

poignant answers every time the scholars tried to trap Him were breathtaking! The highlight, however, was that sermon on the mount which, after 2,000 years still resonates and deeply touches people's hearts!

John testifies about this Jesus, stating that he could not come to any other conclusion that although He was human, He is truly God. He was there from the beginning. When that beginning was, no human mind can comprehend because it is lost in the mists of time. It was before any time and even before creation, even before anything

existed. Jesus, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, created everything that exists—the immeasurably vast universe, the earth, and ultimately humanity. Only a fool and a madman would not believe this! Along with creation life also came, life that He created. But even more importantly: He also gave eternal life, life that will endure for all eternity!

Without the belief in eternal life, life on earth is utterly meaningless. The thought of eternal life gives meaning to everything. It encourages you to have that intimate, personal

relationship with the living Jesus that John had. John is bubbling over with excitement when he talks about his relationship with Jesus and he wants to share it with everyone. He also wants us to share that excitement with each other. You live your faith life on two levels, horizontal and vertical. When you look at a cross, you first see the pole reaching heavenwards. Similarly, you must have a vertical relationship with God. But as the horizontal crossbar of the cross shows, your relationship with God is inseparable from your relationship with the people around you. A relationship with

Jesus is not a solitary relationship but involves fellow-believers as well as non-believers.

When you have a true intimate relationship with God, it cannot help but overflow into a bubbling joy. Thank goodness those days are over when everyone thought that when you entered the church building, you had to put on your stern church face and dared not even smile. Do you remember those days?

I can't wait for Sunday morning because for me, a church service in Ballito every Sunday is a wonderful experience. When you step into the church building, a

few beaming faces are waiting to welcome you! Not forced smiles, but believers who are overflowing with the joy of life! You immediately feel excited for the service...

The music team is wholeheartedly involved in everything they do and you feel the warm love radiating as they lead the congregation in praise and worship. They have truly mastered the art of creating an atmosphere of worship in the congregation!

After the service, no one wants to go home. Everyone sits on the cheerful benches under the big

old fig tree, drinking coffee and chatting for who knows how long because it's wonderful to be part of God's family!

It is a wonderful and very exciting fact that joy and happiness are not just something that will happen one day in the hereafter but that we can already experience them now. Eternal Life is not something for the future; you have Eternal Life from the day Jesus becomes part of your life. In 1 John 1:1-4, John explains that Jesus became human and that the result of this is that you and I can have life and joy. The fact is that Life is the

result of this revelation and joy comes about when believers share it with each other and thus bring about fellowship. The fellowship spoken of here is between believers but also between us and God so that there is a bond between us and God.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to praise and thank You. It bubbles within me because Jesus LIVES and He loves me!

4

Light and Darkness

1 John 1:5-2:2

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

I grew up in the era of candles and paraffin lamps. On our farm at Waterval Boven, we initially didn't have the luxury of electricity, so we relied on a little candle flame to provide us with light. Besides the candles and ordinary old paraffin lamps, there were of course the highly temperamental "Aladdin" lamps. Its flame burned under a delicate asbestos mantle attached to a small framework. This mantle

would glow and provide a bright light. If the flame was turned too low, the mantle wouldn't heat up and there would be no light. However, if the flame was turned just a bit too high, the mantle would burn pitch black, requiring hours of patient work to clean it again!

But then Grandpa bought us a Lister generator. What a miracle! Light! And that without the temperamental mantle lamps and candles! But the Lister came with a price. When it got dark in the evenings, it was my job to get the machine going. With my thin arms, I had to turn the crank until

my knees were almost giving out and then, without losing speed, I had to push a lever forward with one hand and hope the machine would catch; otherwise, it was the whole process over again!

However, the big nightmare for me was turning off the machine when everyone was already in bed. Without bothering with a candle, I would press the stop button and then run back to the house as fast as my little legs could carry me while the old Lister slowed down and the lights dimmed. And then, when the light bulb in my bedroom finally blinked its last, I would leap from the door

straight into bed so the pitch-black night couldn't catch me!

A wonderful thing—light! And this is precisely John's starting point when he explains that because God is Light, there is absolutely no darkness in Him. John uses the contrasts between light and darkness to describe how a believer's lifestyle should look. In verses 5-10, he explains sin and forgiveness using the imagery of darkness and light. He makes a series of negative and positive statements, such as: If you claim to have fellowship with Jesus but live in darkness, you are lying.

But if you live in the light, Jesus cleanses you.

John's message is that a believer's lifestyle must align with the origin of their faith. God is Light and we are His property, so our way of life, actions and thoughts must naturally reflect God's light. I definitely cannot live in God's light circle if my life is darkened by sin. Of course, we cannot deny that sin exists in a believer's life, but when we confess our sins we have the assurance that God forgives us. After all, He gave Jesus as a Mediator to take away our sins!

Light is symbolically associated with authenticity, truth and goodness. In the Old Testament God is associated with light. For example, look at the creation story where light is created even before the sun, moon and stars. In contrast, darkness represents falsehood, inauthenticity and evil. Have you ever felt the evil, icy chill a pitch-dark night on a farm can send down your spine? Especially when walking past the old haunted house?

When there is sin in your life, you can definitely experience uncertainty in your faith life. Sin creates a separation between you

and God. By sinning, you build a wall between you and God that prevents God's light from illuminating your life. Note: it is you who builds the wall, not God! Naturally, no human can claim to be sinless, but God expects us to step out of the darkness and deliberately move away from sin. Then you must establish a genuine, intimate, personal relationship with Him. When that happens, the sin, like a dark shadow, will naturally slip out the back door.

Of course, it doesn't happen without pain and there is a price to pay. We can't just forget that

we have sinned, but you must confess your sins. When you do this and acknowledge that you have sinned and are remorseful, it means you take responsibility for it. At the same time, you truly acknowledge God as the God of Light, the One who is faithful and who made atonement for your sins on Golgotha.

When your relationship with God is right, the next step is to also set right your relationship with your fellow-believers. Having a personal relationship with fellow-believers means not only living out love but also experiencing the salvation of Jesus Christ together.

When this happens, you see how God breaks down the dividing wall we built so that His wonderful light can illuminate our entire life!

Prayer:

Lord, I must confess this morning with sadness that there is still so much sin in my life. Please help me to break free from it so that I can walk in Your light!

5

Do You Know God?

1 John 2:3-11

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

My army days happened in relative peace. There wasn't a border war yet, and of course, the Second World War was already years in the past (I'm not that old, you know!). Conscription was a nasty thing for the vast majority of troops, something we were forced into against our will and wanted to get through with the absolute minimum effort possible, something I was quite good at! If you could worm your way out of a

task, you did so with enthusiasm. The gruelling night watch, often in pouring rain in a vehicle park full of old trucks and ghosts opening doors for you, was a millstone around your neck. For what and against what enemy were we supposed to guard this heap of junk? And then there was the drill work where the hated sergeant drove us until we dropped. I just couldn't see the point of it! High officers like the brigadier or general, we never saw. They were far above us. There was certainly no love lost between us! Finally, the nine months were over. But then came ten years of

three-week camps, where your precious leave had to be sacrificed to keep some officer happy in the dusty plains of Potchefstroom. The officers, from their comfortable chairs, would yell us poor troops into the dry earth while we had to suffer in misery!

But one camp was different: It started when a terrible storm nearly washed us away. Fearful, I lay in my tent waiting for the worst to happen. Then I heard the voice of our camp commander walking through the pouring rain from tent to tent, checking if we troops had kept our heads above water.

Through his self-sacrificial actions, we gained so much respect for the man that we gave our best for the rest of the camp to make it successful. During the camp, we got to know him as someone who genuinely cared for us. For us troops, the camp was a pleasure and we enjoyed performing our tasks with enthusiasm. We would do anything for our commander!

This morning's burning question is: Do you know God? You might respond, "What kind of question is that? Of course, I know Him!" Think carefully before you answer too quickly. For many believers,

God is someone up there, far above us insignificant earthly beings. Often, believers do the absolute minimum to keep God somewhat happy - you go to church, read the Bible, mumble a prayer and sing in church. You try to avoid sin, lest you might be punished!

If this is how you know God, then a big surprise awaits you! God is, first and foremost, not like that general who elevates himself above the poor troops; rather, He involves Himself with you and me personally. He truly cares for us. In Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God is with and in us.

When we experience distress, He is there to hold our hand and carry us. When we experience joy, He is with us to share it. He is, after all, our Father, our "Daddy." The question is how you and I respond to God's personal dealings and attention with us. Do we only do the minimum to avoid punishment?

Just by the way: God does not punish believers!

If we truly know God, we will strive to make Him happy. Not to benefit ourselves, but because we have seen that He was willing to sacrifice Himself for us. Out of pure gratitude, it will be a

pleasure for us to do what He asks, such as keeping His commandments. The question is: what are God's commandments? "You shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not...." No!

God's commandments can be summed up in one word: LOVE! If you truly love God, you will certainly serve and worship no one but God alone. Occult practices, such as astrology, will disappear from your life because it is like worshipping other gods. Naturally, you will then use God's holy Name with respect and reverence. And if you apply that same love to your fellow-man,

you will do nothing to harm anyone. You will not steal, hurt, gossip, commit adultery or whatever, but you will actively strive to do good to everyone who crosses your path!

The natural outcome of such a life of gratitude is that a special bond of love will grow between you and other believers because they are your family. They are your brothers and sisters in Jesus. Despite not all thinking the same about everything, that family bond binds us with a love that is possible only in Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer.

Do you truly know God? Then you cannot help but keep His commandments!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the wonderful privilege You have given me to know You. Please show me how I can serve You better!

6

A Song for You

1 John 2:12-17

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

Do you still remember the poems from your school days? Of course, you do! "Paradise Lost" by John Milton, "Ode to a Nightingale" by John Keats, "She Walks in Beauty" by Lord Byron, "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot and of course the beautiful Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare:

Shall I compare thee to a
summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more
temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling
buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too
short a date:
Sometimes too hot the eye of
heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion
dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime
declines,
By chance or nature's changing
course untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not
fade
Nor lose possession of that fair
thou owest;

Nor shall Death brag thou
wanderest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou
growest:
So long as men can breathe or
eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives
life to thee.

Isn't it beautiful? It touches your soul! It brings images to your mind of starlit fields on a clear moonlit night, of waving grass plains. You hear the jackal's song as he chats with his mate. Often, the words of a poem I learned fifty years ago run through my head!

It is then no wonder that John uses a poem to convey a

wonderful truth to his readers. They will remember this poem for a long time. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to translate a poem. I think if John had written it in English, it might have looked something like this:

“You, my little child, fear no more;
Your sins are forgiven - Jesus
 gets the glory.
Your daddy's known Jesus since
 he was a boy,
And throughout the years, He
 holds his hand still.
The Evil One is bewildered, his
 courage is very low,
Because you, dear young man,
 have overcome him so!

God is our Father - say it again
and again!

He dwells here in our hearts, and
everyone must hear it!

And Jesus, our Redeemer -
suffered on Calvary
to bear all my many sins and
yours as well.

Be strong then, dear young man -
be strong in the Lord.

With His power and His truth,
you will overcome the Evil One!”

Wouldn't it be wonderful if a
person could write the Word of
the Lord in your heart like a
poem? A poem that constantly
runs through your mind and
reminds you of Him throughout

the day and that you always remember. Or perhaps even better: like a song that you just can't get out of your thoughts. All day long, you are reminded of it. And when life presses hard, these words in your thoughts are a comfort because then you know that God is not only near but right with you and in you through the Holy Spirit. He holds you tight against His chest and gives you strength and courage to carry you through the most difficult times!

But the Word is not just a comfort to remind us of God's presence. That same song should also remind us how the Lord wants us

to live. That we should live out love towards God and our fellow-man.

I wrote a song about 1 Corinthians 13:

“Angel tongues, clanging
cymbals,
if I have no love, I’m just making
noise.

Where is my kindness, where is
my patience?

Without them, I owe a debt to
love!

Boasting and envy and with that,
arrogance,
self-centered, oh the quick
temper!

Keeping records of wrongs and
delighting in evil.

With this in my life, love is just
gone!

But love:

It rejoices and it laughs when
truth triumphs.

Is tolerant, enduring, greater than
anything here.

Prophecies will vanish, tongues
will cease,

But love will last forever.

Love will never ever cease!”

You can listen to a recording of
the song in Afrikaans at
bit.ly/engeletale

If your life is filled with the “poem”
of God’s love and grace, there will

be no room for the false poems of sinful desires and worldly things. You can't sing "Waltzing Matilda" and "Majesty" at the same time, not even in your thoughts! Similarly, sin will gradually disappear from your life as you fill your life with God's love.

It is interesting that you quickly forget ordinary prose. However, you remember a poem for a long time, and poems remain relevant even hundreds of years after they were written, while prose quickly loses its value. Just as worldly things are short-lived, the Divine remains eternally relevant. The poem of God's love will echo

through the halls of the universe forever, even long after the earth no longer exists.

Today, I must ask myself what the most important things in my life are. Is it wealth, worldly pleasure or beauty? Is it a dubious circle of friends, acceptance or business success? Or is it rather to serve God and live out His love despite rejection by my friends or even facing persecution? The latter is like that poem that has eternal value.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to make my life a poem to the glory of Your great Name!

Antichrists and Believers

1 John 2:18-27

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

The antichrist is a topic about which many books have been written and much speculation has occurred. Many people have thought that Nero was the antichrist, or Hitler. Even some American presidents have been singled out as the antichrist. In the film "The Gods Must Be Crazy," one guy called his battered old Land Rover the antichrist because it tested his faith so severely! Who is he, or

who will he be? No, we don't know. What is relevant is the "many antichrists" that John writes about in verse 18. He contrasts the antichrists and the believers, firstly to say that a believer must be very cautious of errors. But secondly, he uses this contrast to show how our lives as believers should be.

Who are the antichrists that John writes about here? I once sent a daily devotional to someone who was not on my usual mailing list. His response was sharp: how dare I send him such "nonsense"? He said I shouldn't just assume that all people are

Christians and shouldn't now try to make him one! He was quite angry!

Is this perhaps the kind of antichrist John is writing about? No, he is simply an unbeliever who refuses to listen to the Gospel. There are millions of such people and the primary task of missionaries is to try to reach them with the Gospel. The antichrists John writes about, however, are people who have already heard the Gospel and have become part of the Christian community. From within the inner circle of the congregation, from their own ranks where you least

expect it, they betray Christ and cause enormous damage!

How is this possible? Someone who has accepted Jesus cannot be snatched away from His hand, can they? Very true, but what happened to Judas Iscariot? He was part of Jesus' intimate group of disciples. He would later become an apostle. He walked with Jesus every day, saw His miracles, heard His message over and over. Yet he sold and betrayed Jesus in the most treacherous way. We might want to say that Judas was a completely different case! But was it really so different?

I think Judas had different aspirations for Jesus. He perhaps saw Jesus as a political figure who would deliver Israel from the Romans. When Judas began to realise that Jesus planned something entirely different, he turned against Him. Maybe he wanted to force Jesus into action with his betrayal. He did not see Jesus for who He truly was. Doesn't this often happen in the church as well? Think about it: why do we worship God? Of course, purely out of love and gratitude for everything He has done for us! He is, after all, the King of all kings! What if you worship God to try to manipulate

Him for your own benefit? It sounds harsh, but it often happens! God just has to be ready to jump to meet your needs and when that doesn't happen, you get angry at the church for supposedly proclaiming half-truths. They're just a bunch of hypocrites! You take your things and leave, then slander those "holy cows!" These are the antichrists against whom John warns. On Sundays, they often sit with you in the pews!

What does the life of a true believer look like? First and foremost, he is anointed by Christ with the Holy Spirit. John says

this in verses 20 and 21. God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, has confirmed or sealed you as a believer in Christ to have an intimate, personal relationship with Him and to resist errors. In a close faith relationship with Jesus, there is no room for false teachings about Christ! Error comes from the antichrist. In contrast, the believer must strive for true knowledge of faith through the Holy Spirit.

The question about the filling with the Holy Spirit is often asked, and there are different views on this. You are filled with the Spirit the day Jesus comes into your life. I

compare it to a bucket (your life) full of rocks (sins). When Jesus becomes your Saviour, your life bucket is filled with the Holy Spirit. The more rocks (sins) you throw out, the more room there is in your life bucket for the Holy Spirit and the clearer you can hear and experience Him. Without Jesus, the Holy Spirit cannot be in your life bucket. And without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will not be with you either, for They are inseparable, together with the Father, the only true God. Being a child of God and having an intimate, personal relationship with the Father and the Son is only possible when the Holy Spirit

teaches you. In this close faith connection with Jesus Christ, we as believers experience the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to get rid of those stones of sin so that I can clearly hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit in my life!

8

Drakensberg Mountains

1 John 2:28-3:10

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

I was young and full of life and the yearning for adventure surged through my youthful veins. So, when the leaders of the church's youth group in Durban came up with the idea to climb the Drakensberg Mountains, I was at the forefront, eager to join. Our friends Louis and Arthur had previously tackled the Great Dragon and now had to prepare us for the four-day climb. As the

day approached, our excitement grew.

When we set off from Durban in the cold, wet predawn darkness, each of the 21 hikers had already completed a fitness programme. I was jumping with excitement, yet uncertainty gnawed at me—would I ever make it? As we started hiking, a chilly drizzle descended upon us. The first few kilometres were easy but then my legs began to tire. The inclines became steeper and the backpack with four days' supplies, clothes and a tent grew heavier. My feet were sore and the constant rain made the world

almost impassably slippery. The promised wonderful view did not materialise as a curtain of mist concealed it.

One of the girls had trouble with her feet, significantly delaying the hike. It was late afternoon when we tackled Bushman's Pass, the last pass to the top. The climb was extremely steep and rocky but I felt we must be almost at the summit. Then, suddenly, the mist curtain lifted. Before us loomed vertical cliffs reaching heavenward. My eyes followed the unforgiving rock face up, up, up to almost infinity. My spirits sank. Must we climb all the way to

the very top? I would never, ever make it! Night overtook us and we had to camp on the inhospitable pass. There was no ground to sleep on, only rocks. It was bitterly cold, well below freezing. I longed for my bed!

Day two began with a gruelling scramble up the rocky Bushman's Pass. I struggled to breathe. Oxygen was incredibly scarce up there. And then there was that eternal bank of mist enclosing everything around us! Then I heard the lead hikers shout, "We're at the top!" I gained new courage. Keep going, persevere, push through! Finally, at the top!

Full of anticipation, we waited for the mist to clear. Then, like a theatre curtain, it opened for us. I gasped. Right before us was a sheer cliff, a kilometre high. We looked out over the entire Natal. Breathtaking, indescribably beautiful! Everything was thoroughly worth it! What a delightful sight!

John describes that "one day" we can look forward to, the day when we will be "like Jesus." As a young believer, there is also an excitement surging through your veins, just like the day I heard about the mountains. In your spiritual vision, the path seems

strewn with rose petals and all you see is the end goal. But then you begin to walk the path of faith. Soon you realise it gets harder and harder. You become tired and often that curtain of uncertainty envelops you. It's certainly not easy! John wants to encourage us here. He says we must not lose heart. Yes, we will certainly experience the assaults of the evil one and the antichrist, but we must persevere because the end is near. We must persist in our faith and remain in Jesus. Although the path to the top is slippery, steep and full of rocks, we must keep walking in Jesus' "footpath."

We might reach a point where we excitedly think the end has finally arrived. But we sigh when we see the unyielding cliffs before us. Then we must cling again to the great love Jesus has shown us. Do not let life's cliffs intimidate you and make you turn back to sin, but always keep in mind that you became a child of God through His great grace and love. Persevere and overcome the rocks of sin that block your path to the Summit.

Indeed, the mist curtain constantly hangs around you, preventing you from seeing where you are truly headed. We can

only see the wonderful description of the new Jerusalem in our spiritual vision, as John describes it to us in Revelation. We must therefore live in expectation of the wonderful, indescribable things that await us and continue to fight against sin. We must realise that it is the devil who scatters the stones of sin over our life's path, and for that very reason we must overcome sin. Sin is indeed the enemy of both God and us!

Perhaps you are now climbing the Bushman's Pass of your faith life. Perhaps it sometimes feels like you are out of breath for the last,

steep, almost unclimbable stretch. Perhaps you become discouraged because the curtain of uncertainty envelops you. Know then for sure today that the most wonderful, indescribable, breathtaking life awaits you forever at the feet of God with Jesus up there.

****Prayer:****

Lord, please give me the courage and perseverance to endure and climb the path fully to the glory of Your great Name!

9

Brotherly Love

1 John 3:11-17

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

To understand the behaviour of people towards each other in Biblical times, we must grasp the immense influence that a group of related individuals had on one another. For the Jews and most other nations around the Mediterranean, the family was the primary steel-strong bond. Family members stood by each other through thick and thin and absolutely nothing could turn family members against one

another. If one person struggled, the others helped him. The family also included uncles, aunts, cousins and nieces. The second bond, almost as strong as the first, was that of compatriots. This bond was steel-strong specially among the Jews. If you touched a fellow Jew, you touched me! Your people were, in essence, your extended family. Today, that bond is still just as strong and the Jews continue to care for each other as if for their own family.

Unfortunately, sometimes a family went astray and then there were problems, often significant problems! The very first family to

fall into this category was that of Adam and Eve. Jealousy took over Brother Cain's heart and the result was that he killed his own brother. The beloved king of Israel, David, himself had terrible family problems. David's son, Amnon, fell in love with his half-sister Tamar. In a sly way, he lured her to his room and raped her. Her brother, Absalom, was so furious about this that he killed his half-brother, Amnon. Ultimately, this hatred spread so terribly that it led to a coup, civil war and eventually to the death of Absalom and many innocent people!

In contrast to the family that goes astray stands the family that cares for each other to the point of death, where the bond of love is stronger than steel. Even when one of the family members stumbles badly, the rest will defend him with their lives, even knowing he is guilty. John calls his fellow Christians brothers, because although they are made up of a patchwork quilt of nations, they have one common Brother: Jesus. This makes them a family. Becoming part of this family does not happen just by chance. In your earthly family, you became a member because your mother gave birth to you. There is also a

birth process you go through to become part of the spiritual family: rebirth through the Holy Spirit. This makes you a full member of the great family of God the Father. Within this family, just like in the blood family, there must naturally be an inseparable bond of love towards one another.

This bond of love is strongest when there is serious persecution of Christians. We have seen how strong this bond can be under the persecution of Nero. We saw it again during the oppression of Christians in communist Russia, where believers literally sacrificed their lives for one another. The

many stories of extreme love during these terrible times bring tears to your eyes. Today it continues in many countries, such as North Korea and especially where Muslim dominance prevails.

There are three types of love that should be present in a believer's life. The first is, of course, the all-encompassing love for God. The second is neighbourly love as Jesus described it in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a practical caring love for your fellow-man, even if he is despised, an unbeliever, or even your enemy. The third is the love

John speaks of here, the brotherly love for your fellow-believer. This is a love that is all-encompassing and born of God. It is a love that forgives when your brother sins against you and stands by him or her through thick and thin despite their weaknesses.

How great should this love truly be? Jesus set the example when He gave up everything to accomplish the great act of reconciliation. He humbled Himself by becoming human. Initially, He was just a child considered property by adults. Later, He became a destitute

"street preacher" who often had to sleep in the fields. He was rejected by His own family and betrayed and denied by His own intimate circle of friends. He was cruelly executed in the most humiliating, painful, cursed manner, all for His family, you and me! Naturally, He does not expect us to do the exact same thing because it is not humanly possible. But we must strive for the love He displayed.

If that kind of love for our fellow believers is present in us, there will be no room for hatred, strife, jealousy, gossip, and slander against our brothers and sisters in

Jesus. But it must not remain just a feeling. This love must also be concretely and practically lived out by caring for one another positively. When someone is struggling, it should be natural to help where we can. In this way, God's love is fully expressed in our lives!

Prayer:

Lord, there is still so much lack of love in my life. Please teach me to truly love!

10

Qualms of Conscience

1 John 3:18-24

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

Sunday morning dawns with a wind howling around the corners of the house. I went to bed late the previous night and I struggle to wake up. Just one glance through the window makes me pull the blanket up to my nose. The rain is pouring down in buckets and it's bitterly cold!

“I'm not going to church this morning,” I groan, turning onto my side to sleep further. But suddenly, sleep leaves me and

I'm wide awake! Slowly, a knot begins to form in the pit of my stomach. A little voice somewhere in the back of my head nags at me: "You're going to get into trouble! The Lord will punish you if you don't take your place in church this morning!"

And so my conscience gnaws at me, driving me mad. I feel guilty because I didn't do what was expected of me. By the evening, I'm thoroughly sick and my conscience screams loudly and clearly at me: "Yes, I told you so! This is what you get! You should have listened!"

This morning, I want to ask an extremely controversial question, and I already know in advance that I'm going to get into trouble for this! But then, at least I know I've made a few people think. My question: "Is my conscience the voice of God?"

If I understand Johannes' reasoning correctly, then I must unequivocally say that, contrary to what I have been taught, it is not necessarily God's voice. Listen carefully to what Johannes says: "If our conscience condemns us - God is greater than our conscience, and He knows everything."

So what is my conscience if it is not the voice of the Holy Spirit? This conscience Johannes writes about is a self-condemning guilt when you fail to fulfil your duty to do what God asks of you. As a believer, I can go forward with great confidence without such a burden of conscience or guilt. As a child of God, I gain security and faith in God and, in the process, total peace of mind. Paul does indeed write in Romans 9:1 that the Holy Spirit speaks to me through my conscience. Therefore, I must carefully discern which is God's voice and which is not!

Obeying God's commandments is not a condition for His acquittal but a fruit of the personal relationship I have with God. It is a natural outflow from that relationship. What does it mean to obey God's commandments? To live out love towards God and my fellow-human beings.

It's all very well to make pretty speeches about love and to sing its praises and tell each other how wonderful love is. But love is like a rough 4x4 that just sits in the city looking good and never tackles any rough roads. A field vehicle is made to tackle the untamed, and just so, love is

there to be practically expressed in places where it matters.

Practically living out love does three things. Firstly, we honour God with it as it is one way to thank Him for everything He has done for us. Secondly, it makes you useful to your fellow-human beings and thirdly, it also does something for your inner self. When you sincerely live out your love, it strengthens your faith because then your conscience tells you that you truly belong to God. It is not just a theoretical "maybe."

How do we practically live out love? People have different

talents and strengths. Usually, it is precisely those talents that God wants you to use to make your love practical. For one person it comes naturally to comfort someone, encourage them or maybe just be a shoulder to cry on or an ear to listen to as they pour out their hearts. For someone else, it might be running a soup kitchen where worldly needs can be alleviated. It is precisely in these places where the need is greatest, that people's hearts are most receptive to the Gospel. Another way to practically live out love is to radiate bubbling joy in your workplace or wherever you go. Not only does it do

wonders for your own mood, but it is wonderfully contagious. Everyone around you soon becomes cheerful and feels good about life, even if the burdens may be heavy. I pack my trolley at the supermarket and the girl at the checkout smiles friendly. I tell her that she has the most beautiful, engaging smile. Immediately her face lights up and that smile spreads all around! Her boring day has turned into a jubilee day just because of a simple comment I made! Ask the Lord to show you how you can live out love.

Living out love practically also means that we will obey God's commandments. It doesn't help if you are a wonderful humanist who works hard to help people in need and God is pushed into the background. Just remember that we do not follow God's commandments to gain acquittal. That happens only by His great grace. However, we keep God's commandments out of love for Him and gratitude for His salvation. By doing this, there is also a bonus: it constantly reminds you that you are God's child. At the same time, it makes all doubt, as well as that bad

conscience that threatens to
accuse you, fly out the window!

Prayer:

Lord, please show me today how
I can live out Your love and
strengthen me through Your Holy
Spirit to accomplish it!

11

False Prophets

1 John 4:1-6

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

The bell at the front gate rings. I peek out the front door, convinced it's someone selling brooms again. But then I see it's a neatly dressed man and woman. Absentmindedly, I press the button to open the gate for them. It's only when they're on their way to the front door that I realize I've let in those people who tirelessly go door from to door to spread the message of the God whose

Name is known only to a select group of chosen ones.

I could kick myself, but it's too late now and I kindly invite them inside. The man gestures to a pamphlet in his hand and immediately starts with, "What is your opinion of the worldly government that has been appointed over us?"

From hard experience, I know they don't really want to talk about governments, but this is just a lead-in to discuss something much deeper. I stop the man right there: "Look, I know what you really want to talk to me about, but I know what I believe

and you won't convince me otherwise! Or can I perhaps persuade you to believe differently?" With that, they turn away disappointed and leave.

Jehovah's Witnesses are just one of the "false prophets" that make life difficult for believers today. And don't think they don't overwhelm believers with their false teachings. Not long ago, I had a long conversation with a man and woman about matters of faith. Needless to say, neither could convince the other. What struck me, however, was that the woman had once been an active member of the Dutch Reformed

Church and had been convinced by the Witnesses that she had believed incorrectly all those years. Do not take them lightly! Their persuasive power is extremely dangerous! If you must talk to them, you need to be absolutely certain that your own faith is one hundred percent rock solid and that you have thoroughly prepared yourself beforehand on exactly what they believe and what their false teachings are.

How do we recognize a false prophet? John explains it in very simple terms that we should not believe everyone who claims to

have the Spirit of God in them. “Test them all,” he urges. You must know who you are dealing with. The most important characteristic of a false prophet, according to John is that they do not confess that Jesus is truly the Christ who became human. Now, let’s test this with the Witnesses: If you ask them directly if they believe in Jesus as the Christ, they will unequivocally answer “Yes!” But then they are not false prophets, right? But let’s dig a little deeper. John, in the introduction to his Gospel, describes exactly what he means by Jesus as the Christ: “In the beginning was the Word (Jesus),

and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” In short: Jesus is truly God. Here they start to backpedal: “No, no! Jesus could not possibly be truly God but rather a divine being, like an exalted kind of angel. He is the Son of God, just as we are all children of God....”

At that point they have already failed the test for they do not acknowledge Jesus for who He truly is. They are not the only false prophets—there are many others, such as the so-called New Reformationists who poison believers with their blasphemous statements of “modern theology.”

I also consider them to be false prophets. They question, among other things, Jesus' virgin birth and His resurrection from the dead. "Jesus only rose in the hearts of His disciples," they claim. This is not the same Jesus I read about in the Bible! My Jesus did not remain in the grave - my Jesus lives!

All the false teachings out there make you fearful. It grips your heart and makes you break out in a cold sweat. But it is totally unnecessary! John says that believers belong to God and that He who is in us has already overcome the false prophets. As

believers, we strengthen each other in Jesus. It is the believer who withdraws from the congregation who is at risk of being overwhelmed by the false prophet. It is therefore of utmost importance to fully integrate into your congregation and actively participate in the church's activities. Do not miss the services. It's not just about the sermon or message. It's about members talking to each other and encouraging one another. It's about the wonderful privilege of glorifying God together with other believers, praying together, singing together, taking communion together. And if

someone is troubled by a false prophet harassing them, then the others are there to give advice and strengthen them.

Lastly, I want to say that if you are being harassed by someone you suspect is a false prophet, talk to someone you trust and read commentary from a reliable believer on the subject so you can know what you are dealing with. And of course, the most important thing: Pray! The Holy Spirit will guide you!

Prayer:

Lord, please give me the wisdom to discern between the true and the false!

12

True Love

1 John 4:7-12

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

“There is nothing like true love - There is nothing so pure, so clean!” Do you still remember the song by the very popular Group II? They enchanted the hearts of the girls! Solomon sings about love in his beautiful book, Song of Songs, so beautifully and explicitly that it should actually have an age restriction! There has been much debate about this book and there are various opinions on it. However, that is

something for another day. The question we want to ask this morning is: What is true love?

I remember the beautiful velvet pulpit cloth in the church of my childhood, where it was embroidered in the most beautiful decorative script: "God Is Love." It didn't make much sense to me because we children were constantly threatened with God's punishment! I experienced God as Someone who was very far away and terribly exalted above our insignificant earthly beings. And He was ready to punish for the slightest mischief! Church was also a punishment and that's why,

during my time of military service, I rarely attended church. I always managed to find a way out of it!

The question has often been asked whether those words you often saw on a pulpit cloth, that God is love, truly make sense? Is it relevant? Is God really Love? Or is He just the unrelenting Ruler of the universe who tolerates absolutely no sin? Funny enough, in my younger days, I never doubted God's existence. He was a reality to me. So were Jesus and the Holy Spirit, although I suspected that the Holy Spirit actually belonged rather to the "Apostolics"!

The sixties, with its Hippies who propagated love, especially free love, totally disrupted my perception of love. On one hand there was God's unrelenting, strict love and on the other the Hippies' "make love, not war" love, which said that everyone should love everyone.

Only much later did the truth about love strike me and begin to make sense. It was not enough just to know about love. It was not enough just to know about God's existence. There was one terribly big link missing: an intimate, personal relationship with God. First, there was the encounter

with Jesus the day the Holy Spirit gifted me with rebirth. And then, suddenly, I began to realise what love truly is! Naturally, God is the Source of all love and Jesus Christ is the Model upon which love is based. The Holy Spirit, I had to discover, did not belong to the “Apostolics” but is the Guide for all believers to truly experience and live out this love by loving one another.

Only then did I begin to realise why the Hippies' concept of love-everyone was so terribly distorted. Their love was based on human love and naturally, as everyone knows all too well,

human love is sadly fallible! Surely that's why the Hippie movement came to nothing! True love can only be based on God as the only Source.

In various places in the New Testament, there is the call to love: that we must love one another. Jesus quotes the commandment of love from the Old Testament and impresses it upon His disciples' hearts on various occasions. He even calls it a "new commandment" at one point. Different authors then write about this love. John repeats it several times in his letter. We begin to realise that it is of utmost

importance to live out love. But the problem is that loving is not really so self-evident. For most believers it is very difficult to truly live it out.

The fact is that God becomes visible on earth through believers' sincere love. This is, of course, the response to God's great act of love on Golgotha and it is only possible if a child of God lives in an intimate, personal relationship with Him. If love is not lived out, the root cause is that the intimate relationship is clouded or does not exist at all!

Love is not just something theoretical that you talk about and

contemplate. No, it is a practical action. Jesus lived out love in an extremely practical way when He first sacrificed all His time to heal the sick and teach people and later paid the highest possible price on the cross for people who did not even care about Him! By doing so, He set the example for us to live out love just as practically. Love means that it will cost you something. It might sometimes cost you your precious time, your money, perhaps discomfort, sacrifice or a lot of hard work and in extreme cases, even your life, but it also brings joy, satisfaction and fulfilment when you see the effects of it.

God acts in love and therefore, as believers, we must also act in love and not just contemplate it!

We must always remember that there is only one single reason why we act in love and that is out of gratitude for the great, great love that God has shown us.

Prayer:

Lord, please cultivate in me a true love that will act in a practical way!

13

Fear

1 John 4:13-18 and Psalm 116

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

Have you ever been truly afraid in your life? Every day you hear about robberies and the terrible anxiety that the victims often endure.

A few years ago, a man experienced a different kind of fear when he was attacked by a lion. Farmers were hunting a lion that had killed several of their cattle. It was already getting dark when the lion suddenly charged at one of the men. Everything

happened very quickly, but he managed to shoot. However, this did not stop the lion and the beast leapt on him and started to maul him. Desperately, he tried to fend off the lion's fangs from his head and neck with his arms. His tracker eventually succeeded in killing the lion with about five gunshots, but the man was severely wounded. The pain and fear that the poor man had to endure were terrifying!

The story reminds me of my Aunt Ann. She was a wild sort of person and when the men decided to go hunting in the Lowveld one day, she insisted on

going with them. She was a young girl and the world was wild and untamed, not long after the Boer War. Eventually, she had her way and joined them on the ox-wagon they used to travel to the hunting grounds. From Machadodorp, it took several days to reach the Lowveld, but they finally set up camp in the wilderness.

One evening, they were sitting around the campfire after a hard day's hunting. One of the men picked up his rifle to clean it, ready for the next day's hunt. But then he did the one thing all hunters are warned against: he

didn't make sure the rifle was safe. The next moment, a shot went off. The lead bullet hit a piece of iron, exploded, ricocheted and hit Ann in the thigh with a piece of whirling lead!

Suddenly, everything was in chaos. Ann's leg was bleeding terribly. The bullet had blown away almost all the flesh from her thigh and here they were, days away from any civilisation. How long it took them to get her to the railway line by ox-wagon, I do not know but I can imagine the terrible pain she had to endure on the jolting ox-wagon through the inhospitable bush. I can only

imagine the fear that gripped her as she struggled to stay alive with that terrible wound!

Eventually, she was taken by train to a small hospital in Barberton. However, the story has another side: Ann's request to her travel companions was that they sing spiritual songs for her. Naturally, everyone believed she would kick the bucket at any moment and through their tears, it was difficult to keep a note. But Ann sang along and her songs were cheerful and lively, despite all her pain and suffering. Ultimately, it became clear that it was not Ann who was experiencing anxiety but

her family with her. Even in her youthful age she was not afraid of death.

Yes, she survived to tell me the story personally and she lived to a very old age!

What makes a person unafraid in such nightmarish circumstances? Only if you have the certainty of faith can you remain fearless through the most terrifying circumstances. No, of course, you cannot achieve it through your own strength and your own "firm faith." It is the Holy Spirit within you that gives you the strength to stand firm.

Everyone is afraid of something in life. Some people want to die of fear at the sight of a spider, no matter how harmless it is. For others, it is the dark, pain or heights. The greatest fear people experience however, is the fear of death. What awaits on the other side? What will happen to you the day you die? Many people do not even want to think about it because the mere thought is too terrifying. And rightly so, because in the Bible, God's judgment is graphically described as a weeping and gnashing of teeth. There is the terrible consuming fire of hell and the pain that accompanies it, and this while

you cannot die but must endure the pain continuously - day after day - forever!

Yet, John teaches us that God is love and that He does not want to punish anyone. However, there is a condition: you must believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God's love is fully revealed when you experience this acquittal from Him in Jesus. Then, says John, you have absolutely nothing to fear because the greatest fear, the day of judgment has been removed.

You and I no longer need to be afraid of God's judgment because perfect love drives out fear. No,

love is not perfect based on some achievement we have attained, but simply because God Himself awakens and sustains it in us through His Spirit. And this makes it possible for you to sing cheerfully like Aunt Ann in the shadow of death!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, that today I do not have to fear the day of judgment. Thank you for acquitting me!

14

Visible Love

1 John 4:19-5:5

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

You've probably noticed that I have a great love for nature. I often write about the enchantment of the Lowveld's bushes, but I am just as fond of the sea. I recall one occasion many years ago when nature left me utterly speechless! I was standing early in the morning on the rocks in front of the old Beacon Island Hotel in Plettenberg Bay. Suddenly, a massive whale (they're all

gigantic!) appeared barely twenty yards in front of me. It lifted its enormous tail high above the water and then slapped the sea's surface with it, echoing like gunshots across the beach. I was filled with wonder and awe!

But it's not just the giants of the sea that take my breath away – it's everything! The deep blue colour of the sea, seagulls carelessly gliding on the morning breeze, colourful rock pools shimmering like mirrors in the cheerful morning sun. A group of dolphins playing in the waves, and the sand grains sparkling like thousands of diamonds. I

intensely experience God's presence and His wondrous love!

In the previous devotional, we clearly saw that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your life ensures that you remain in God by obeying His commandments. The natural outflow of this is, of course, that when you experience God's perfect love in this way, the fear of Judgment Day and eternal damnation disappears, and you experience God's love intensely.

However, there is more to living out your love. John says that it is essential to love your fellow-human beings as well. If you want

to proclaim that you love God and you hate someone, then something is terribly wrong! Then you are nothing less than an infamous liar! In 1 John 3:15 we read the shocking words: "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." Wow! Those are harsh words! John takes this thought further as he explains that your love for God becomes visible when you love your fellow-believers. Just as we know that day has broken by seeing the signs in the sky, sun and plants, so our love for God becomes visible in the outward signs of our

practical love for our fellow-believers. John explains that it is not easy to truly love God because He is invisible and intangible to us. However, our fellow-human beings are concrete beings that we can see and experience, so you can easily express your love to them. It is only when you do this truly from your heart that your love for God begins to become visible. Love for God and love for your fellow-believers are inseparable. One simply cannot exist without the other. It is precisely for this reason that Jesus told the scribes that love for God is the greatest commandment when they tried to

trap Him regarding the law. But He further said that the commandment to love your neighbour is equal to it.

In 1 John 5:1-5, John again emphasises the relationship between faith and love. Faith without sincere love is absolutely unthinkable. But the opposite is just as true: true divine love without faith is equally unthinkable! Love for your fellow-human beings is, in other words, the practical, visible way to show your faith. We as children of God all have the same Father and for that reason we are blood relatives of each other. We are brothers

and sisters! An inseparable bond of love between us should just be a natural outflow. The bond of faith is, in other words, at the same time a family bond that forms the basis for a bond of love. And the authenticity of this becomes the test for the believer's love for God.

How do you see that someone loves God? By their lifestyle of obeying God's commandments. The question, however, is whether God's commandments are not extremely difficult to keep? Indeed, it is not as difficult as it seems because, as children of God, we share in Christ's

victory over the sinful world. This victory enables believers to also be conquerors over evil. In other words, we must not only look at it from a human perspective but from a divine perspective, that we are children of God who are enabled by God to do so.

We must clearly understand that we believers cannot conquer the world by the achievement of our own faith. However, because we have a faith connection with Jesus Christ, we share in the victory that He has achieved. This is, of course, world-conquering! As believers we are thus part of God's victory march through this

sinful and hostile world. So when you admire a sunrise again, remember that your love for God should be made just as visible as the colours of the sunrise. But also remember that God, like the sun, provides the true light and that He has already achieved the victory for us through His wondrous light!

Prayer:

Lord, please help me today to truly make my love for You visible and to live it out!

15

Uncertainty

1 John 5:6-13

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

Uncertainty is a terrible thing - just ask Aunt Ann. This is the same old lady I wrote about a few days ago. Ann was a young girl in Machadodorp when she met the man of her dreams one fine (romantic) day. Bill was a charming surveyor, and immediately, love blossomed. Unfortunately, his visit to Machadodorp was short-lived and a week later he had to return to the wilderness in Zululand where

he was doing survey work in the St. Lucia area. A year passed where Ann and Bill could only communicate through letters. And their love did flourish!

One fine day the two decided to get married and they arranged to meet in Durban. Ann, accompanied by her sister Sarah, boarded the train to Durban, bubbling with excitement. But halfway to Durban, disaster struck: at Ladysmith the Klip river was in flood, threatening to wash away the train bridge. For a few days, they had to wait for the water to recede enough for the

train to cross. Eventually, they made it to Durban!

In the port city a second disaster struck, even worse than the first. There was no sign of Bill and moreover, there was absolutely no way to contact him. “He will come, Sis, you'll see. He **will** come!” Ann kept telling Sarah. The problem was that Ann could no longer even remember what Bill looked like because they had known each other for such a short time. “Isn't that him?” the two girls wondered about every handsome man that passed by. But alas! No Bill Landman. Finally, after a week Sarah had to return home.

“Bill has forgotten about you!” were her parting words to her sister. Ann, however, decided she would not give up so easily. She would wait for her Bill because Bill had said that he loved her and he had promised to marry her. Although the uncertainty was eating her up and she had to stay behind all alone, Ann clung to Bill's promise.

Finally, she heard why Bill had never shown up: the same floods that had hit Ladysmith had also struck Zululand and the Umfolozi River was in full flood. No one could cross it. Even the bridge had been washed away. “If Bill

cannot come to me, then I will go to Bill!” she decided and she set off for St. Lucia. When she got to the Umfolozi, she was dismayed to see masses of water separating her from the other side. A man with a rowboat was reluctantly commandeered to row her across. Eventually, her determination paid off and after a nightmare boat ride she arrived in Matubatuba where she learned where Bill was working. Her hope was not in vain and a few days later, the two were married in a small mission church somewhere in the St. Lucia bush!

Several people have told me about the uncertainty in their lives and how they didn't know if they ever had God's forgiveness. Maybe you are walking around this morning with that same gnawing uncertainty in your heart. If that is the case, I want to take you by the hand and show you the promises God gives in the Bible, the infallible Word of God.

In 1 John 5:6-9, we see that God in His almighty power and fullness testifies that the things written here are true, firm and unshakable. John says that we easily believe and accept what people tell us. If the God of Truth

then speaks, how much more will we not accept **His** testimony!

What does God testify about here? He has given us eternal life. How? Through Jesus Christ, His Son. But how do you and I obtain this? By believing in Jesus. This means we make a full surrender to Him and place all our trust in Him. It essentially means having a living relationship with Him. “Whoever has the Son has life.” This is what God says, short and powerful. But in the same breath, He also says: “Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” If you are still

in doubt, you must ask yourself this question: Is my faith in Jesus established or not? If it is, then you can cling to God's promises because you have God's full forgiveness. If you do not believe, then it is short and simple: you are condemned! John emphasizes God's testimony in his next sentence: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." It's as simple as that!

If you are still uncertain, read what God further promises in His Word: Acts 10:43; John 5:24; John 3:36; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1

John 3:14; Romans 8:16; John 10:28-30; Romans 8:1; Romans 10:9-10; John 6:47. How do I know these things are true? In Numbers 23:19 we read about God: “God is not human that he should lie, not a human being that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” Is it necessary for me to say anything more than that?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that this morning I can know from Your infallible Word that I have Your forgiveness!

16

Prayer

1 John 5:14-21

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

In the last few verses of John's first letter, he reminds his readers once again of what they receive as children of God. The first assurance we have as His children is that we can confidently approach God in prayer. But it's not just that we are allowed to pray; it's also that God hears our prayers. However, there are a few very important things to remember about prayer and answered prayers. Prayer is an

intimate conversation with God, not a rhyme recited to keep God happy. It is even less a wish list rattled off about what we want. I have also heard a few times how a minister ends his sermon with his closing prayer, using the prayer to emphasise a few points for the congregation to ensure they are well understood. Reverend, prayer is a conversation with God, not with your congregation!

Prayer is sharing your deepest longing, your pain, your joy, your wonder, your deepest secrets with God. Prayer is also telling God what you think of Him,

singing His greatness and power and marvelling at His great grace. Prayer is thanking Him for all the rich blessings He pours into your life and for pulling you, a sinful person from the pit of destruction and making you His child through His great, great grace. It is being deeply grateful for the Holy Spirit in your life. Sometimes prayer is simply being still and soaking in the presence of God like a thirsty sponge. Not only is prayer a conversation with the Holy God, but it also has a huge bonus: that conversation enriches you spiritually and strengthens your faith. Just experiencing God's holy presence and knowing that

He listens to your humble conversation with Him is already a wonderful upliftment of your spirit, no matter how heavy your heart may be.

The question is whether God ever listens to our prayers and answers them. Am I praying in vain? Am I praying into a vacuum? Sometimes it feels as if I am praying forever about an issue, but then nothing happens! Does God ever give us what we ask for? Let's look at our own human circumstances. Your little boy comes to you and asks, "Dad, I want a skateboard and a mobile phone with internet,

please. And a PlayStation. And Dad, pretty please, Johnny has a real little motorcycle - I want one too, please Dad!" What will your reaction be? If you give him everything he asks for, you will do him a huge injustice. He naturally won't see it that way; he won't understand that it's not to his advantage to get something he desperately wants. But you, as a parent have been through life and you know what will make your child strong for life.

In our relationship with God, we also often ask for things we desperately want but don't get. Just like the little boy, we also

become sulky or discouraged when we don't get what we ask for and accuse God of not answering prayers. Does God ever answer prayers?

I have written thousands of devotionals over the past few years. An achievement? Well, there is a little secret: if it weren't for God who hears my prayer every day and places the thoughts in my heart to write, I would never, ever have been able to do it!

I have the task of delivering a sermon on Saturdays for a group of Zulu-speaking people. I have also preached on various

occasions in small towns in Zululand such as Eshowe, Hluhluwe and Mtubatuba. However, I have no theological training as a minister, so preparing a sermon is certainly not easy. Often I have to wrestle with a topic. The great miracle, however, is that God never, ever lets me down. Time and again I have to watch in amazement as the message takes shape in my thoughts. Each time He answers my prayer and gives me the words to convey to the congregation. Is this not answered prayer?

Often, God does not answer prayer in the way we want. Why? The answer is found in 1 John 5:14, where it is written that God hears our prayers if we ask for anything according to His will. Sometimes something we ask from God seems very noble and good but God has something completely different in mind for us. What we ask for may be good but God knows better. His thoughts are, after all, much greater than ours! From my own life, I can give an example: I wanted to become a minister and preach the Gospel. However, everything went wrong for me and I just could never understand it.

But then the Lord gave me this internet ministry instead. The devotionals now regularly reach thousands of people! How many people would have listened to my sermon if I had become a minister? Maybe two or three hundred? Indeed, He answered my prayer but in a very different way than I wanted. And much, much better!

Prayer:

Lord, I praise and thank You deeply for the great privilege of being able to talk with You. Thank You also for hearing my prayers!

17

Just a Short Note

2 John

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

With the advent of the internet, we have almost entirely lost the art and the delightful pleasure of writing a letter. Occasionally, someone still sends a letter via email, but even that is becoming rare. We communicate through social media - WhatsApp, Facebook or Twitter (now even abbreviated to X) and usually, it's just a cryptic note! Life has become far too rushed, and there

simply isn't time to sit down and write anymore!

Ah, I still remember from my childhood how Grandpa used to drive from the farm to the post office every morning. As he stood there beside the postbox, he would open all the letters and quickly read all of them. He couldn't contain his curiosity to wait until he got home! Naturally, the letters would then be passed from one to another until everyone had read them a few times over. And then the content of the letters would be discussed to the point of boredom!

Those letters were an extension of the writer's personality. Because he couldn't speak with you face-to-face, he poured his heart and soul out onto that piece of paper.

Oh yes, and I remember as clearly as yesterday, when I was in the army, sitting in a tent on the dusty plains of Potchefstroom, madly in love. My Sweetheart was far away from me and the longing was immense. In the evenings, I would sit in the tent and pour my love and longing onto a piece of paper. In the mornings when that Jeep came from town in a long dust trail, I would already be

waiting there, fidgeting with impatience and excitement for a letter from my beloved! I would first inhale her delightful scent that still clung to the envelope, then open it with trembling hands, quickly read through it, and then go and sit under a tree and absorb every word, over and over. Aaah...., the nostalgia!

It was early morning somewhere in Asia Minor. Someone knocked on the door and when the woman opened it, he handed her a small papyrus scroll, neatly rolled up and sealed with a drop of wax. It was addressed to her and her hands trembled slightly as she

carefully broke the seal, for she just knew that this letter was of great significance! She was a respected leader in the congregation. "*From the elder,*" she read. "It's from the Apostle John," she explained unnecessarily to the messenger, who stood awkwardly to one side. "Peter! Come quickly! We got a letter from John!" She was so excited that she couldn't contain her laughter. "*To the chosen lady and her children,*" she read further. "I'll gather the congregation immediately," she thought aloud.

It wasn't exactly a long letter. The whole letter fit nicely onto one standard papyrus sheet. She quickly read through the letter and then ran as fast as her feet could carry her to another member of the congregation. "Just look what we've received!" She was very excited. The news spread like wildfire, and that same evening the whole congregation was gathered to listen to what John had written. The congregation leader read the letter dramatically while you could hear a pin drop. Every word was absorbed. The letter was read over and over again until every bit of symbolism was deciphered.

“Yes, there you have it: we must love one another! The Apostle John writes that himself!” someone commented.

“Indeed! But don’t forget the truth, that’s also very important!” someone else contributed.

“Yes, but is it really necessary to repeat it over and over?” someone else wanted to know.

“Of course! He emphasises it because it’s so immensely important! If there is no love, our faith means absolutely nothing! Moreover, loving one another also means living according to God’s commandments. It’s stated very clearly in the Apostle’s letter!”

There was an underlying murmur as everyone agreed that mutual love was definitely something very important!

“I still don’t quite understand about the antichrist,” someone complained from the back rows.

“But didn’t you listen to what John wrote? It’s the people who constantly try to undermine the things we’ve been taught. They only want to impose their own theories about the Gospel on us. You shouldn’t even lend your ears out to them! Avoid them, because they might just influence you too. Stay away from them completely.”

“Yes,” an old greyhead agreed, “the things that John taught us about Christ – that is the true doctrine of God! If you change it, you deny God. But if you hold on to this faith and live it out, you truly acknowledge God for who He really is.”

That night, church continued until very late and the short letter with its modest 245 words was discussed over and over down to the smallest detail. What John wrote on that little papyrus scroll is just as fresh, relevant, and important today for you and me, almost two thousand years later. The message, that we must love

one another and stay away from the “antichrist,” still stands just as firm!

Prayer:

Father, I thank You for that little letter from John. Please write love on the papyrus of my heart so that I can live it out with everything within me!

18

Hospitality

3 John 1:1-8

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

3 John is a very short letter, only 219 words long. Unlike most other letters in the Bible, this letter is very personal. It is not addressed to a congregation but to an individual, Gaius. In the letter, John thanks Gaius for being so hospitable when he receives the itinerant preachers. Indeed, it's the small things in life that matter, such as hospitality in this case. This is where your Christian lifestyle becomes visible

to the world. Through the small things, you reflect God's love and thus become an ambassador for the Kingdom.

John also writes to Gaius about various reports he has received, both good and bad. He has heard that Gaius remains faithful to the Gospel, something for which he is naturally very grateful. He also speaks to Gaius about Demetrius, a member of the congregation of whom everyone speaks highly. On the other hand, there is Diotrephes, a church leader about whom John is deeply concerned. A leader must be willing to accept authority, but Diotrephes refuses

to do so. Moreover, he gossips about John! There is no question of hospitality towards travelling preachers with Diotrephes. Perhaps he went a step too far when he read in John's previous letter that one should be cautious of people spreading false teachings. Maybe he wanted to prevent any stranger from preaching in the congregation at all costs, even if they were a gospel minister. Yes, from this letter we realise that there can be many different types of people in a congregation. There are the zealous and hospitable ones, but also the overly cautious. Each has their place in the

congregation. However, we must be careful that our actions do not harm the Gospel!

If I may use our own congregation as an example: I remember very well the years when anyone who did not belong to one of the three Afrikaans sister churches, Dutch Reformed, Reformed, and Ned Herv, was considered “sectarian.” Such churches were condemned! Eventually, the AFM also gained the status of “church”! But they were still treated with great caution. Praise the Lord that people, especially church leaders, have opened their eyes! That they have begun to realise that all who

confess the Name of Jesus are part of the family of God. These days, ministers from a variety of other churches often preach in the DR Church. This way, the bonds of brotherhood are firmly tied.

But let's take a look at what this letter to Gaius says (even though it is personal, he won't mind sharing it with us!). The writer introduces himself as "The Elder." It is not necessary for John to write his name because there was already a beautiful relationship between him and Gaius, a divine bond of love. Although Gaius was not

necessarily an elder in the congregation, he was truly a Christian you could rely on, with a rich spiritual life. This is evident from the fact that John expresses how much joy Gaius' life brings him when he hears from others that he "remains faithful to the truth" and "lives in the truth." Gaius' confession and lifestyle are absolutely Christ-centred and people notice it. It has a positive influence on other people's lives. And this is precisely what John's message to Gaius is about: Live out what you believe!

So what did Gaius do to deserve John's praise? It was especially

his hospitality that preceded him! It was surely not easy to be a minister at that time. Today, a minister is appointed in a congregation and gets a house and livelihood. Back then, it was very different because they had to go from congregation to congregation to preach the Word, probably at their own expense. Accommodation was also a big problem and I am sure they often met with rejection or were received very coldly! Gaius, however, received them with open arms and made it pleasant for them because he was convinced that he was doing the right thing. In this way Gaius

showed his loyalty and connection to the true teaching of Christ through his selfless love lived out in this way.

Someone once remarked that he could not understand how it is possible for Christians to love each other even before they know each other! Gaius' love for strangers became an integral part of the spread of the Gospel. Through this letter, John also wants to appeal to you and me this morning to live out God's love. Gaius did it through his hospitality. Perhaps there is a completely different way you can do it. Someone once told me that

she lived out her love by writing letters to prisoners in an American jail. There are many different ways to make God's love visible to the world. Be creative and find a way to live out your love.

Prayer:

Lord, please show me how I can live out Your love today!

19

Live Out What You Believe In

3 John 9-15

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

A few years ago, we were relaxing one morning on the verandah of our bush cottage in Marloth Park. It was a peaceful morning and everything was beautiful and serene. We had hung apples on the trees for the birds and the barbets, starlings and hornbills were eagerly devouring this treat. Through the trees, we could make out the red glow of a few impalas grazing quietly. A heavenly, peaceful

scene and I sank a little deeper into my chair to make myself more comfortable.

Then something came waddling through the grass. I made out the grey shape of a warthog, but quite a large one. He was as wide as he was tall. His sour face was covered with the most horrible warts and carbuncles and his neck folds hung in three layers. One could describe him as a bloated, fat pig. In front of the veranda lay some corn kernels that I had thrown out especially for the guinea fowl. Mr. Warthog waddled straight to them and began licking up the kernels one

by one from the dust. One thing that struck me about this warthog was the unfriendliness that dripped from his face. A cruel set of tusks framed his sullen cheeks!

Suddenly the old warthog looked up and gave a vulgar snort while his bloodshot eyes stared into the veldt. I followed his gaze and then noticed movement. A beautiful warthog sow came trotting along and close on her heels were two adorable little piglets, tails straight up. I sat up. Here comes trouble!

Suddenly the female warthog hesitated, unsure if she would be welcome at the feast. Old Sour Face growled stiffly. He turned

halfway towards her and muttered something to her, which I could clearly hear was definitely not romantic words. She tried to approach more friendly, but then the old warthog charged at her and you just saw little ones scatter, tails waving like little aeriels in the air. They ran in a wide circle and you could see stones flying. But then they came back. Old Sour Face charged again, making it unmistakably clear that these were his kernels and that they were definitely not welcome!

The poor old female and her little ones chose the path of least

resistance and dejectedly left, while old Sour Face contentedly settled under a raisin bush with a heavy sigh.....

When John writes about Diotrephes, I see this old grumpy warthog in my mind's eye. Diotrephes held a position of authority in the congregation. Perhaps he was the lead elder or something. But his leadership caused disturbances in the congregation. He made it clear to everyone that he was the leader and that he was very serious about it. Moreover, he disliked any visiting preacher. This lot had to keep their noses out of his

congregation's business. The wonderful kind of hospitality John writes about when he talks about Gaius was completely absent with Diotrephes. But he went a step further and anyone who dared to host one of these visitors was scolded and bluntly forbidden from showing hospitality. Even worse, if someone was hospitable against Diotrephes' orders, they were promptly expelled from the congregation! But that's not all - Diotrephes also slandered and maligned John himself!

“Disgusting!” we might say. But it compels us to perhaps reflect in our own hearts and see how

things are in our own congregations. More importantly: I must examine how my own life looks! Perhaps it's not as bad as with Diotrephes, but you can become so obsessed with your own views on a matter that you can damage the cause of the Kingdom. I often find myself guilty of this. I can get so carried away with a thought I am working on that I trample on others to get my plan implemented. And when it happens that someone else's plan is followed instead of mine, I become sulky and sour because I didn't get my way!

It is a fact that leadership does not mean you lay down the rules and everyone must dance to your tune. Good leadership means you motivate and co-ordinate people so that things that need to be done are completed in the best possible way.

In a final word, John wants to impress upon Gaius (and of course, this also applies to you and me) that he must show that he belongs to God. How do you do this? By not following Diotrephes's bad example, which reflects a completely wrong attitude. It shows that you do not have an intimate personal

relationship with God. That kind of relationship with the Lord bubbles out in good deeds. These are things like kindness, hospitality, serviceability and a contagious joy that everyone can see in your life. Let the motto of your life be: “Live What You Believe!” This means actively living out your faith in every area of life!

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me to actively live out Your wonderful love to the glory of Your Name!