



501 Anne St.
Jacksonville, NC 28540
Telephone: 910-347-1506
Web: www.jacksonvillebiblechurch.com

How to Enjoy Life to the Fullest

1 John 1:1-4

Are we enjoying life to the fullest, or would frustration and discouragement better describe our present experience? When joy is absent from our life, what is the cause? Often times, we try to explain our lack of joy as being due to unfavorable circumstances. We reason that we are the way we are because of the bad things that have happened to us. And yet, we observe those who have undergone far worse circumstances than ours who are basking in the deep seated joy that seems to elude us. Could it be that the real reason we lack joy isn't because of our circumstances, but rather it is because we aren't walking in close fellowship with God?

Each of us, whether or not we acknowledge it, has been created with a deep longing for a close, meaningful relationship with God. We have a vacuum inside us that only God can fill and satisfy. When we are in close fellowship with Him, we enjoy life to the fullest. However, when we try to find satisfaction in all the wrong places and apart from God, life is anything but enjoyable. How can we experience the deep seated, full joy that God desires for us? In 1 John:

John writes to a group of discouraged people who are out of fellowship with God and not enjoying life

Based on what John writes, we understand that those in his original audience aren't living holy lives. They have a love for the world. They are criticizing and attacking one another instead of loving one another. They aren't properly grounded in their faith and have allowed false teachers to come in and confuse them. No wonder they aren't enjoying life. We will never experience the complete joy that comes from fellowship with God while we continue to live in this way.

John writes to a group of professing believers who claim to know and be in fellowship with God, but whose lives fail to demonstrate the reality of their profession

Most are saved, but out of fellowship with God

John believes most of those in his original audience are believers. He refers to them as “dear children” and much of what he says assumes an audience largely made up of believers (example: 1 John 1:12-14). John shows these believers who are out of fellowship with God how their fellowship with Him can be restored.

Some haven’t trusted Christ and don’t have eternal life

John suspects that some amongst his audience aren’t believers. He makes clear to this group that they need to trust Christ to receive eternal life. Having eternal life is a necessary requirement for enjoying fellowship with God.

John mentions four purposes for writing:

1. That we might enjoy fellowship with God Himself and other Christians (1 John 1:3)

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”

2. That we might have complete joy (1 John 1:4)

“We write this to make our joy complete.”

There is debate here as to whether the personal pronoun should be read “our” or “your.” There is good manuscript evidence for either reading. If you have a KJV or NKJV Bible, it reads “your.” In this case, John is concerned about the joy of his readers. If you have a NIV or NASB, it reads “our.” In this case, John is concerned about his joy as the writer. In other words, his own joy is bound up in the spiritual well-being of those to whom he ministers. There are good arguments for either reading. I think it is best to read it as “our,” but to do so in the inclusive sense referring to both the writer, John, and his readers. Understanding “our” in the inclusive sense, He writes 1 John to make our joy—that of his readers and his own—complete. He uses this kind of inclusive language in verse 3 with reference to our fellowship. It makes sense for him to do the same with reference to our joy.

3. That we might not sin (1 John 2:1)

1 John 2:1- “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.”

4. That we might know we have eternal life (1 John 5:13)

1 John 5:13- “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.”

I believe John's first stated purpose for writing to be his central purpose.

John's message: To enjoy fellowship with God, we need to be like Him—the way we are needs to be in sync with who He is

John's message flows out of Jesus' instruction to him and the other apostles in the Upper Room Discourse. It is fascinating to see the parallels between John 13-17 and 1 John. Consider all of the shared concepts of these two passages: love, obedience, the Spirit of truth, abiding in Christ, joy, eternal life, etc. What John learned from Jesus in the Upper Room from having personally been with Him there he passes on to us in 1 John.

1 John can be split up into three main sections. These main sections are introduced by "This is the message" or "this is the testimony." In each section, John tells us something about God that he witnessed, that he has personally experienced from being with and watching Jesus. Each section tells us something about God that we ought to imitate if we expect to enjoy fellowship with Him.

1:5 "This is the message...God is Light"

God is holy—If we are to enjoy fellowship with God, we must be holy

3:11- "This is the message... 4:8- God is Love"

God is love—To enjoy fellowship with God, we must love each other

5:11- "And this is the testimony...5:20- God is Life"

God is life—To enjoy fellowship with God, we must possess eternal life

In 1 John 5:20, John introduces a forth trait about God, a trait that is demonstrated throughout the book

God is the true God—To enjoy fellowship with God, we must believe the truth revealed about Him through Jesus Christ

It is evident as we read 1 John that the apostle had to deal with false teachers who had infiltrated the church.

What was the nature of this false teaching?

Consider with me what John writes to combat it.

1 John 2:22-23- "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also."

1 John 4:2-3- “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”

These false teachers deny Jesus is the Messiah. They deny that Messiah has come in the flesh.

Robert Gromacki well summarizes what has become the most common and traditional view of the nature of the doctrinal attack John’s readers are under:

“Their heresy centered about the person of Christ. They denied that Jesus was the Christ (2:22; 5:1) and that God the Son had become incarnate (4:2-3). In essence, it was a denial of the union of two natures, human and divine, into one person. The heresy possessed the nature of incipient Gnosticism that became mature in the second century. Some have equated it with either Docetic or Cerinthian Gnosticism. The former taught that Christ appeared as a real man, but He was not. He did not have a real material body. Rather His appearances were similar to the theophanies or Christophanies of the Old Testament. Cerinthus, on the other hand, taught that the spirit of the divine Christ descended upon the man Jesus at the latter’s baptism, indwelt Him for the duration of His ministry, and left Him shortly before His crucifixion. He contended that Jesus was born naturally of both Mary and Joseph. Both views attacked the nature of the person of Christ, especially His incarnation, and indirectly the value of the atonement.”

While I respect how scholars come to accept the traditional view, I disagree with it. It seems unlikely to me that if incipient Gnosticism was the problem John is dealing with that so little of the New Testament would be written to combat this heresy. I believe that it makes much more sense to conclude that John is dealing with Judaism, not Gnosticism or incipient Gnosticism. Judaism is a problem that is dealt with all over the New Testament and it makes sense to understand it to be the problem here. All of the false teaching that John confronts can be traced back to Judaism. The Judaizers denied that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. They denied that the Messiah had come in the flesh, not believing Jesus to be Him.

John’s point in referring to Jesus as “Him who is true” and God as the true God is clear. If a person desires to be in fellowship with God, he has to believe the truth revealed about God in the person of Jesus Christ.

If a person is wrong about Jesus Christ, he is wrong about God, because Jesus Christ is the final and complete revelation of God to man. A person cannot believe a lie or false teaching about Christ and at the same time be in fellowship with the true God. Those who are in fellowship with God will recognize false teachers and reject them.

Holiness + Love + Life + Belief in the Truth = Fellowship with God that brings true joy

How can we accomplish this? How can we be holy as God is holy so as to enjoy fellowship with Him? How can we love as Jesus loved so as to enjoy fellowship with Him? Certainly not by gritting our teeth and trying harder.

A life of holiness and love that allows us to enjoy fellowship with one another and with God is only possible when we abide in Christ

To abide in Christ is to draw from Him all we need to sustain our life and produce the fruit of a life like His

As was mentioned earlier, John expands on in 1 John aspects of what he learned from Jesus in the Upper Room Discourse in John 13-17.

John 15:4-5- “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

The word John uses for “Remain in me” in John 15 is found in 18 verses in 1 John.

1 John 2:28- “And now, dear children, continue in Him (abide in Him), so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed at His coming.”

1 John 3:6a- “No one who lives in Him (abides in Him) keeps on sinning.”

1 John 3:24- “Those who obey his commands live in Him (abide in Him), and He in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”

To have fellowship with God, we need to live in holiness and love for one another. To live in this manner requires that we abide in Christ, drawing from Him what is needed for a Christ-like life to be a reality in us. When we abide in Christ and are in fellowship with Him, the result is joy.

Remembering again the relationship between 1 John and the Upper Room Discourse, consider the result of abiding in Christ and abiding in His love in John 15:11- “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Being in fellowship with God and abiding in Christ go together and produce the same result—complete joy.

Introduction to John’s letter (1:1-4)

The basis of John’s message (1:1-2)

John introduces his message by stating that it is based on his own experience with Jesus, with God in the flesh. John doesn’t write a theoretical book, but one that testifies to what he has personally observed from living with, following, and sitting under the instruction of Jesus from the beginning of His ministry (See John 15:27). John shares the following about his and the other apostles experience:

They heard Christ

The saw Christ

They looked at Christ (the word refers to a careful, deliberate, contemplative observation)

They touched Christ

Though we do not see all that John saw, we believe the testimony of what the apostles did in fact see. We have firsthand reliable witnesses of what we believe.

Remember the special blessing that our Lord pronounced on those who believe based on the testimony of Scripture concerning Christ without having seen Him physically (See John 20:29).

John gives a convincing argument about his firsthand experience with Christ so as to set himself apart from the false teachers who are making false claims about Christ whom they did not see and did not know firsthand as he did. These false teachers deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah (1 John 2:22) and they deny that God the Son had become incarnate (1 John 4:2-3).

In contradiction to this false teaching, John asserts that the life, that is Jesus Christ, appeared. He was with the Father, but appeared in the flesh to John and the other apostles. John saw Him, heard Him, and touched Him. Now it is his privilege to bear witness to what He has seen and to proclaim Christ, the eternal life.

The purpose of John's message (1 John 1:3-4)

John's main purpose for writing is that we might have fellowship with each other and ultimately that we might have fellowship with God Himself

When this has been accomplished, we will experience complete joy

John personally experienced a close relationship with the Eternal One—with God Himself and the complete joy it brings, and so can we as we apply what he has written in 1 John.

Again, in order for us to have fellowship with one another and with God, there are prerequisites to fellowship that must be met. He presents four characteristics of God which must also be present in people to have fellowship with Him. The word fellowship refers to active sharing of that which one has in common with others. If we are to enjoy fellowship with God, we must have the following in common with Him. We must be holy. We must love one another. We must have life through faith in Jesus Christ. We must believe the truth revealed about God.

In a couple of weeks, plans are to install a temporary sign on the outside of our building that reads, "Can we know for sure that we are right with God?" This sign will serve to advertise to the community our present sermon series on the book of 1 John. The question we will pose on

this sign is really two questions: 1. Can we know for sure that we are right with God in the sense that we are in fellowship with Him? 1 John answers this question. The answer is yes. When we have holiness, love, life, and believe the truth God has revealed in and through Jesus, we can at that point know things are right between us and God and that we are in fellowship with Him. 2. Can we know for sure that we are right with God in the sense of knowing for sure that we are one of His children and that we have eternal life? Again, the answer is yes. John writes, “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.”

Please notice who it is that John gives assurance that they have eternal life—to you who believe in the name of the Son of God. God’s Word is clear. If we have trusted in Christ as our Savior, we can be sure we are saved and that eternal life is in our possession.

If we have come to the place where we recognize we are sinners who fall short of God’s glory and who can’t do anything in and of ourselves to get to God; if we believe that Jesus came and died for our sins in our place and then rose again three days later; if we trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, then, yes, we can know for sure that we have eternal life. I hope that you will keep coming the next several weeks as we learn more in answer to the question, “Can we know for sure that we are right with God?”

How are we doing? Are we enjoying life to the fullest? If we aren’t enjoying life and we want to enjoy it more, 1 John is the book for us. If we aren’t enjoying life, we need to consider how the presence or absence of fellowship with God comes to play on this issue. If things are not right between us and God, life will not feel right. It is only when we are right with God, when we are in close fellowship with Him, when we are living and loving others as He would have us to that we are able to enjoy life to the fullest. God help us to abide in Christ in order that we might enjoy the fellowship with Him that He intends for us.

Maybe you’re thinking, “I’ve blown it. I don’t know how the fellowship with God you have been talking about will ever be possible in my life. I have not been living in the light. I have not been loving others as I should; in fact my behavior sometimes has been hateful. I doubt I could ever experience the complete joy you have been talking about.”

Recognizing how we blow it, God has made provision for us as believers to be restored to fellowship by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. John writes in 1 John 1:7- “and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” In 1 John 1:9, he adds, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Joy will continue to elude us as believers if we continue in sin and are loveless in our relationship with others. However, joy can be restored through restored fellowship with God that comes when we confess our sins. To confess our sins is to agree with God that our sin is wrong and admit what we have done with a view toward having our fellowship with Him restored. Again, this restoration of fellowship was all made possible by the work of our Savior that we remember this morning as we observe communion—the shedding of His blood on the cross. As we partake this morning, let’s be careful to make sure that you are in fellowship with the host of

this table—the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise Him for the provision He has made for us to be restored to fellowship with God on the cross.