

# 1 JOHN

## THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

This 5-part series looks at 5 essential truths of the Christian faith by exploring the 5 'we know' statements in 1 John. There is an emphasis throughout on what God has done for us.

### Session 1:

Title: We know that God has come to us

Passage: 1 John 1:1-4

Focus: Doctrine of the Incarnation

Timing: 20-30 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzzgroups: These are questions to discuss in pairs or small groups. Use your discussions to inform your time of prayer ministry at the end.

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

#### Icebreaker:

Has anyone ever met someone famous in person? (Take a vote on the most impressive!)

Interacting with someone in person is a much more significant and impactful experience than seeing them on TV/cinema/blogs. You get to encounter them and interact with them, rather than simply observe them from afar. It is this sort of encounter that John is referring to at the start of his first letter.

#### Read the passage...1 John 1:1-4

### 1. Encountering Jesus

John is very keen to emphasise that he is an eye witness to Jesus. He knew Jesus personally. It is on this basis that John has the authority to write to his audience. Not only that, but his emphasis on being an eye witness establishes from the start that Jesus has walked among them – John can testify to that, he can speak from experience that Jesus is real.

John uses his words carefully. He refers to Jesus as "the Word". He's deliberately making reference to "the Word" as it is used in the gospel of John (John 1:1), which, in turn, makes reference to the creation story in Genesis (Genesis 1:1). From the beginning, John is saying: *"the Jesus that walked among us, and who I encountered personally, is the real deal."*

At the very start of this letter, John wants to establish clearly the truth of the incarnation. This is the foundation on which John is going to write the rest of the letter. As such, the incarnation is a crucial basis for this letter and for our faith.



St Philips

# THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

## A study in 1 John

Let's take a moment to explore the theme of 'encounter' within the Doctrine of the Incarnation:

### i. Emmanuel

God with us. And more than that, God chooses to be with us. He takes the initiative (1 John 4:10). The incarnation, therefore, is an act of grace in itself. Grace was not just poured out at the Cross, but was the very basis for God's encounter with us in the first place.

### ii. Trinity

The Father, Son and Spirit exist in a perfect relationship of perfect love. The incarnation is the starting point for making our participation in that relationship possible. In Jesus, God says: "yes", to us joining in with that love.

The Word becomes incarnate (1 John 1:1). It is Jesus, the Son, who is made flesh. But that is not to say that the Father and the Spirit are not involved. It is not that only part of God (in Jesus) became incarnate, but that in Jesus, all of God's divinity became incarnate. It is the distinct person of Jesus, who is entirely divine, who becomes incarnate i.e. the incarnation is an act from all three persons of the Godhead. The Theologian Karl Barth, describes it like this:

*"The Father is the divine Who, the Son the divine What and the Holy Spirit the divine How."*

### iii. A double encounter between two fully human beings

John emphasises that he has encountered Jesus. This is a key feature of the incarnation: in Jesus, we get to encounter God. Jesus's incarnation makes relationship with God possible again.

However, there is more to it than that. Crucially, with the incarnation, Jesus gets to encounter us too. This is made possible by a key feature of the incarnation. Jesus was not just fully God, he was fully human. The early church ended up being very clear on this point. It is only in his full experience of what it is like to be human, with all our hurt, loss, pain and fragility, that Jesus was able to stand in our place on the Cross. Jesus had to experience the fullness of what it is to be human in order to save us fully from our fallen state. If Jesus had only been half human, we would only have been half-saved.

## 2. Fellowship with God and each other

After establishing that he is a witness to the incarnation of the Word in Jesus, John describes how a shared belief in the incarnation is a mark of fellowship between Christians. As such, the incarnation changes how we do relationship:

### i. The incarnate Word shows us how to be fully human

In being fully human, Jesus gives us the blueprint of what it means ourselves to be fully human – an existence that is reconciled to the Creator, a perfect relationship of love and obedience with God the Father.

# THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

## A study in 1 John

This has a profound impact on our understanding of our relationship with God. Jesus wasn't able to do what He did on earth because He was God, He was able to do what He did because He was in a fully loving relationship with the Father: he was a human who was fully obedient to the Father and filled with the Spirit. It is just such a relationship that the incarnation has made possible for us. No wonder Jesus said we would do greater things than Him (John 14:12).

### ii. Intimacy with the Father and each other through Jesus

The Greek word used here for fellowship is *koinonia* – the word used to describe the marriage relationship, an incredibly intimate bond between humans. It is significant that it is used here to describe the Christian's personal relationship with God and with each other. The incarnation shows that we cannot know God without knowing Jesus and we can only truly know each other by sharing in Christ's truth.

#### BUZZGROUP

- Do the relationships in your Home Group reflect the sort fellowship that John is describing?
- In what ways might your Home Group grow into deeper fellowship?

Discuss ways in which you might grow in intimacy, accountability and commitment to each other. Follow this discussion up with prayer at the end.

## 3. A joy worth sharing

John closes this section of his letter by describing his joy at knowing his listeners are walking in the truth. It is in accepting the truth of the Word made flesh that John's listeners are able to share with him a fellowship of joy.

John has described a perfect recipe for joy in this passage: the conscious possession of eternal life, the daily enrichment of personal fellowship with the living God and the deepening awareness of fellowship with all God's people everywhere.

In John 16, 22 and 24, Jesus spoke of the joy that awaited His disciples. But it came to them only through His sacrifice on the Cross. It is a reminder of the realities to which John is testifying in our reading for this session: **the incarnation made the Cross possible, which has made our joy possible.**

And John is keen that people should know it. This reflects our last feature of the incarnation for this session:

### i. The incarnation shows us that God is a missional God

God sent His Son into the world to save it (1 John 4). Mission (or outreach) is inherently part of God's character. As the incarnation is God's self-revelation in Christ, so He reveals

# THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

## A study in 1 John

himself as a missional God...a sending-out-into-the-world God.

This has massive implications for our understanding of our own identity in Christ. As the Father sends the Son and the Son sends the Spirit, so the Spirit sends the Church – i.e. *us*! A true understanding of the incarnation means a true understanding of our calling to combine looking up to God and looking in to each other with looking out to the world. Up, in and out.

As we come to understand more fully the significance of the Word incarnate, so we share in John's enthusiasm in helping others realise the truth of the incarnation.

### BUZZGROUP

- What aspects of the above points most excite/encourage/challenge you?

Discuss some practical ways in which your Home Group overflows in outreach.

### MINISTRY

Here are some suggestions for ministry. That said, ministry is most effective when it flows from the conversations within the Home Group during the session.

- The incarnation is a mystery: we can't fully understand how it works but the Holy Spirit can help us understand that it happened and what it means. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with a greater revelation of the significance of the "God with us".
- Ask the Holy Spirit to increase the bonds of love and intimacy within your House Group. The incarnation is: sacrificial love, service, reaching out, walking with.
- The incarnation was a missional intervention: God reached out to us. Ask the Holy Spirit to give your Home Group a heart for mission.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to release joy in your meeting.
- Prophecy into each other's lives.



St Philips