



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*Finding Complete Joy*

1 John 1:1–4

Neal Benson

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series: Love Letters

CPC is an amazing church, and I don't just say that because I work here! Last month I celebrated my one year anniversary of being on staff, but I've known about CPC much longer. I've listened to the podcast teachings from Mark and our other pastors; we're blessed with solid Biblical teaching here. I want you to imagine being a part of a church, like ours, that found itself in a completely different place. Imagine being a part of a church where a group of influential people started leaving, openly claiming they had a special insight to Christ the rest of us didn't have.

Imagine how this might shake your faith and cause you to doubt your personal commitment to Christ. Imagine the impact this would have on our body. Imagine the pain of seeing the empty seats at your Men's Fraternity or WBS table. Imagine going to your Community Group and seeing the empty couch where some of your closest friends once sat. Imagine the difficult questions you'd have to answer from your kids or students because their leader is no longer around.

Shortly after their leaving you learned this group of people believed Jesus didn't really come in the flesh but He was more of an apparition. Now you're staying up late puzzled with the statements they're making, statements like: "He was just a ghostlike figure who looked like a man but didn't really live in a body." Their teaching is contrary to everything you've ever learned about Jesus—being fully man and fully God. You begin questioning your faith and starting to examine what you really believe. You stay up late into the night, finding yourself fixated on figuring out the truth. Thankfully, one morning at church, a letter is read from one of the leaders addressing this false teaching.

This story is basically what occurred causing the Apostle John to write First, Second and Third John. This morning we're kicking off our new series titled "Love Letters" where we'll be studying the letters of John. We believe John wrote these letters sometime after writing his Gospel. Most scholars put authorship around AD 85-95, probably making them the last of the canonical Scriptures to be written. Since 1 John doesn't follow a typical greeting and isn't addressed to a particular individual, we've come to know it as a circular letter; meaning a letter meant to be shared among many churches.

John probably writes all three of these letters from Ephesus. Since the destruction of Jerusalem follows the persecution from Nero in the mid 60's Ephesus would have become a natural center for the growing church. Unfortunately at this time in

history, Asia Minor was characterized by gross immorality and idol worship. Knowing this, it's not surprising John's letter insists on right moral behavior as the touchstone of true Christian faith. Throughout these letters you're going to see John address living in the light and avoiding darkness.

Now you might read the series title and think it's going to be all pleasant, but these aren't romantic love letters from a love-struck couple. These are more tough love letters an eyewitness of Christ wrote to a community of believers who had taken on a certain belief about the person and work of Christ that John considered unacceptable. These new beliefs involved a denial that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh, and that His death was necessary for the forgiveness of our sins.

This new thinking was introduced by a group of itinerant preachers teaching believers Jesus didn't really come in the flesh. They openly taught believers it was acceptable to sin and still love God; their teaching included a separation of the flesh and the spirit. In their teaching they denied Jesus came by blood, refuting the importance of the atoning work Jesus accomplished on the cross. The bottom line is John wants to assure the believers by showing how the itinerant preachers are wrong and how his readers are living in the truth. John knew that false teaching always leads to false living.

This can be a lot of information to take in but as we study these letters over the next 13 weeks this information is going to be vital in our understanding of the occasion for John writing these letters. You're going to have to keep on your toes because John isn't a linear writer like the Apostle Paul. John is going to address a topic, move to another topic, move to another topic and then come back to readdress these topics in greater detail as the letter progresses. There are going to be times when it may sound repetitive but it's good to have truth repeated.

### **The Incarnation of Jesus**

**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, 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. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us (verses 1–2).**

One of your first thoughts may be, "This sounds very similar to the Gospel of John," and you're right, it does! There are some

parallels here but it's better to think of them as complementary to each other, not identical. If you were to think back to the very beginning of time, before Genesis 1 was written, the earth was formless and void (Genesis 1:1-2). John wants you to think even further back in time to when God was and when you get there you can imagine Jesus, before anything we see was created, sitting with God. John really wastes no time in his endeavor to refute the false teaching of the gnostics.

Jesus was in the beginning. This same Jesus is the Jesus who called John that spring day on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He confesses to being a first-hand witness to hearing the sweet and stern voice of Christ. He goes on to remind the reader how he saw Christ; he personally laid his eyes on Jesus Christ in the flesh. It's interesting because he doesn't stop with seeing but talks about looking at Him and having **touched** Jesus with his own hands; the same rough hands that once mended nets in the sun.

The language John uses here can seem a little clunky but he has a plan. John makes an attempt to appeal to every reader by addressing all the different learning styles in our society. Not everyone learns in the same way. Some of you are auditory learners. You excel in an environment when information is presented to you by a teacher. Someone can tell you how something is done and you got it by just listening. Some of you are visual learners and prefer to see things done. Someone could present information to you orally but until you can see what is being taught you won't grasp it. Some of you are tactile learners. The best learning environment for you is a place where you get to touch everything and work with the material. We all learn in different ways and John addresses all three learning styles.

Before John uses the name of Jesus he calls him "the Word of life." The Greek word here for "word" is *Logos*. Different scholars have attempted to translate this expression in different ways. Some think John is talking about the Word of life, meaning God's eternal Word revealed to us through Scripture. You may have heard someone say something like this: "What did you read in the Word today?" meaning, what did you read in your Bible? Others think John is talking about the Word as the message of the Gospel. It's not a bad attempt but I think both fail. When John shares the phrase "Word of life" the emphasis is on life and who else is the Word of the message unless it's Christ Himself who clearly said, "I am the resurrection and the life" in John 11:25.

In verse 2 we see the emphasis isn't on *word* but on *life*. John ventures into a theological conversation here; what we've come to know as the Incarnation of Jesus. The Incarnation means the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ. John is reminding the believers that Jesus came to earth as fully God and fully man. Think about some of the accounts of Jesus Christ in the Gospels affirming his humanity. Jesus preaches a phenomenal sermon on top of a hill. Afterward He heads out

and heals a few people. We never see Him stop to take a break. While the disciples are traveling across the lake Jesus gets tired and falls asleep in the boat (Matthew 8:24).

Let's look at another example. One day Jesus is delivered horrible news that one of His closest friends has died. When He arrives it's too late; Lazarus has already been placed in the grave. Standing outside the grave Jesus breaks into tears, crying for His friend (John 11:35). Believe it or not most of us think of Jesus being 60/40. We think of Jesus being more God than man. We like the God parts of Jesus but we fail to respect the humanity of Christ. We need to remember Jesus probably stubbed His toe and bled, Jesus experienced hunger and yes, He even used the restroom. The author of Hebrews even tells us He was tempted in every way yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was 100% God and 100% man.

We just traveled in deep waters right there. Let's head for the surface for a minute, take our masks off and have a quick recap. Do you see what John did here in the first two verses of this letter? John does his best to grab our attention in the beginning of the letter by actively refuting the gnostics teaching. He does this in simple, yet elaborate, ways assuring believers of their decision to follow Christ. He reminds us Jesus existed before time, appeared in the form of man and came to bring eternal life to us as a mediator between God and man. Jesus couldn't have done this if He wasn't fully God and fully man!

### **A Personal Relationship with God**

Although John isn't a linear writer he is still able to develop logical thinking to assure the believer Jesus is the Christ. There is a reason he proved Jesus being the Christ initially and we're going to see the reason now.

**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 (v. 3).**

John actually uses the word "proclaim" only once in the Greek but the NIV translators took this verb and applied it to verses 1 and 2 to help the grammatically incorrect sentence read better in our English. John proclaims, or announces, the incarnation of Christ so the believer can experience fellowship with God. There is a reason for the proclamation.

Fellowship is a word you generally hear used in the local church. When was the last time your neighbor invited you over to BBQ, watch the Niners and have fellowship? They wouldn't say it like that; fellowship is a Christian term. This word fellowship comes from the Greek word *κοινωνία* meaning fellowship. In most classical Greek writing *κοινωνία* is used to describe the marriage relationship, the most intimate bond found in human relationships. John wants the believers to experience fellowship with other believers. John also knows this intimate fellowship is only

possible through fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. Another way I could explain fellowship, since it's not in our vocabulary, is having a personal relationship with God.

I have a confession to make this morning. My wife knows this sin I struggle with and I want to share it with you. On Saturday nights I watch *Cops*. In America we have a judicial system with different levels of security and offices to help protect our citizens. Generally, the smaller crimes are enforced by local police officers and these criminals are taken to county jail where they are released or spend less than a year for a misdemeanor. As the crimes increase so does the enforcement of those crimes. If you are arrested and sentenced for a felony, you will typically go to prison for longer than a year. As the severity of the crime committed increases so does the security around you increase. Most people think the worst punishment is capital punishment. I disagree. I think the worst punishment a criminal can experience is solitary confinement. We were created to do life in relationship and the judicial system knows the worst punishment a person can experience is no human contact.

This morning you may feel like your Christian life is being lived in solitary confinement; you're not experiencing fellowship with God or with other believers. There is something special about having Christian fellowship but that fellowship is secondary to fellowship with God. This morning may be your first time in a church or this could be a regular part of your week. No matter where you are in life this morning I want to share three ways you can break the feeling of solitary confinement in your life.

### **Reading Scripture**

One way you can experience fellowship with God is by reading Scripture. Think about reading Scripture as a way of sitting down and having a personal conversation with God. This is an opportunity for you to learn more about the God who sent His only Son to save you from your sins. You learn about the nature and character of God through His written word. If you don't understand something you can re-read it to get a better understanding. Now if you've never sat down and read the Bible on your own start with a realistic reading plan. One way you can do this is to start with reading a chapter of Proverbs a day. For example, today is the fifteenth so you could read Proverbs 15. Tomorrow you can read Proverbs 16 and continue through the week. Maybe you'd prefer to start in the Gospel of John and read a chapter for the next 21 days. Once you finish John you could move into Acts and finish out the New Testament. There are so many ways you can grow with God through reading Scripture.

### **Time in prayer**

Another way to experience fellowship with God is spending time in prayer. Prayer is the believers' personal connection to God. You may prefer to set aside some time in the morning for prayer or maybe with your schedule it would work better to pray in the

night. You may have a long commute and instead of yelling at other drivers on the road you might choose to pray. Prayer isn't a privilege reserved for the elite Christians; prayer is for everyone and can be used at any time. The next time you're waiting in line at the store you can have quick conversations with God about the things on your heart. Whenever you're praying be sure to take some time to allow God to respond to you. All too often I think we come to God with a laundry lists of prayer but never stop to listen for His response. Think about prayer as a conversation with your best friend; conversation involves talking and listening.

### **Corporate and personal worship**

There are many ways to experience fellowship with God. The last way I'd like to share is corporate and personal worship like what we've already experienced this morning. You may want to download some songs on your iPhone and go for a walk while you listen to the music and worship God. Worship isn't limited to singing. Worship is our opportunity to give God all the praise in our lives. You may prefer to drive to the beach and worship God for His creative ability in creation. You might want to go on a hike and worship God for the beautiful trees and amazing smells all around you. This isn't an all inclusive list; my hope is this will spark some ideas for you to experience the intimate fellowship John writes to us about.

### **The Incarnation of Christ + Fellowship = Joy**

We started this morning in deep waters talking about the incarnation of Christ. Then we moved to fellowship with God and how to cultivate an intimate relationship with our creator. John ends our passage with the combination of them being complete joy.

**We write this to make our joy complete (v. 4).**

It's actually pretty cool language; the thought of having complete joy. We need to be careful not to confuse the happiness of the world with having complete joy in the Lord.

Obviously John knew how troubled the recipients of this letter were and wanted to help them turn their sadness to joy. I think John wants us to know the difference between happiness and complete joy. Happiness is an emotion we feel for a period of time. Let me explain. Last summer we took our daughters to Disneyland for the first time and we had a blast! Charity had them all ready in their matching shirts and we ate a good breakfast so we could experience all Disneyland had to offer for a 3-year-old and 2-year-old. We rode It's a Small World, Dumbo, the submarine ride and many more. This was my first time taking our girls to Disneyland and there was happiness in their faces on every ride they rode, every character they met and every treat they ate. Unfortunately Disneyland closes and little girls need sleep. Our daughters experienced happiness at Disneyland last

summer but happiness is fleeting. When we experience the life John writes about is when we find complete joy.

Unfortunately, all too often, most of us don't experience complete joy in our lives either. We look for happiness in the things the world has to offer. We neglect our personal relationship with God or we look to material things to bring us happiness. Maybe you've listened to teachings contrary to Scripture and you find yourself in a rut longing for joy. Maybe you've turned your eyes from your first love and are hoping material things will bring you joy.

There have been many times in my own life when my soul felt dry and joyless; times when I got stuck in this joyless state. That's when I turn to Jesus and cry out for Him to fill me with His joy

again. Think of it like a child turning to their mommy or daddy. We can ask God to lift up our soul and renew our relationship with Him. This is exactly what John is getting to here. He builds everything we talked about and tells us the reason He is writing is so our joy will be complete. This morning if you're not experiencing the joy you once experienced in your relationship with Christ I invite you turn your eyes to Christ, let go of the things that are bringing you down and hold fast to the truth of Scripture.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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