



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Love Letters

1 John 1:1–4

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series: Love Letters

Have you ever thought about this—God has a dream for your life. Just like every parent has a dream for their child's life, God has a dream for his children too. As time goes on, a parent's dreams shift from what we want our children to **do** to who they'll **be**. Who cares what job they have? Who cares what hobbies they have? We want children who are in loving relationships with us and their Heavenly Father.

Embedded in the heart of a father and mother are dreams for their children. The greatest joys you'll experience on this earth are connected to your children. And the greatest heartache and pain you'll ever experience is related to your children. No one can hurt you as deeply as your kids. They are part of you. Your heart is tied up in them. It's not about what they do for a career; it's about who they become.

Our heavenly Father has a dream for each of his children too and each of his churches. That dream is we become like his Son, Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29 says it is God's desire that we be conformed to the image of his Son. Ephesians 4 says that the purpose of the church is through relationships that we grow into the fullness of Christ.

Primarily your Heavenly Father is not interested in the job you have, the accomplishments you achieve or the service you perform, but his primary dream is about the kind of person you become. He wants you to become compassionate, kind, gentle, faithful, loving, humble, patient.

And God has designed that we experience his dream through relationships. It is all about a relationship with him and with other people. He wants to have casual conversations with you as you're driving, working in your yard, standing in line for coffee. Talk to him. He wants you to turn to him and trust him for the big decisions in your life. He wants you to accurately know who he is. He wants his children to deeply love one another.

Notice how these dreams and desires are all about relationship. The books of 1st, 2nd and 3rd John show us the ingredients that make the best relationships. These books serve as a manual for how to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and how each person's relationship with Jesus Christ affects their relationships with everyone else.

Since Mark and I will be preaching through these books for the next 12 weeks, I want to give you some background. These books were letters that circulated among churches in Asia Minor. The Apostle John wrote these letters—the same man who wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation; the same John who was a disciple of Jesus; the same John who was one of the closest disciples to Jesus.

Get a picture of John in your mind as he wrote these three letters. He was living in Ephesus and he was an active participant in the church in Ephesus. He functioned as an elder of that church and to all of the churches in the region. No doubt he'd traveled to the churches in the Asia Minor region teaching them the Word of God and training up leaders for over 50 years. He was quite old since the letters of 1, 2 and 3 John are most likely the last Bible books to be written, the date being between 85-95 AD, making John close to 90 years old when he wrote these letters.

As a man who's 90 years +, John's letters bear the characteristics of a wise, old-aged church elder. Can you picture him, wisdom that's been forged from the hardships of many years and bluntness that cuts to the point? We see the combination of these two characteristics throughout these letters.

First, as a wise church elder, he lovingly addresses the people who will be reading this letter as "dear children" eight times. It's as if he's sitting comfortably on his couch, motioning with his hand for them to come close and when they get there he says, "dear child listen to me," and the very words of God pour out of his mouth.

Secondly, we see John's lack of interest to sugarcoat the truth. This is a characteristic of many people when they reach older age. I bet all of us have a family member who just tells it like it is. And when you've tried to advise them to soften their approach, they've told you to be quiet saying, "If they don't like what I have to say, they don't have to listen." ***"Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not that person"*** (1 John 2:4). ***"Don't be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you"*** (1 John 3:13).

So there's John in Ephesus, hearing reports that churches he's helped start throughout Asia Minor are facing a major crisis. The churches are being ripped apart internally. People called Gnostics

had left the church and they were starting new churches but they were changing the truths about Jesus. Remember God's dream for his children—being in relationship with him and one another. The Gnostics are destroying both of these and breaking God's heart. And John's heart is breaking too. This was not the dream he had for them when he started these churches. This was not the dream he had for them when he trained up these church leaders.

John is writing these letters to Christians, his dear children, to reassure them that the Gnostics' teachings were false. He wanted them to have confidence in the truths they had been taught about Jesus and he wanted everyone in the churches to hold the course they are on: Focus on your relationship with your Heavenly Father and your relationship with one another.

With this in mind, let's read our passage for today, 1 John 1:1-4.

**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. 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. We write this to make our joy complete.**

As John begins his letter he lays the foundation for his belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God the Father. The Word of Life he's referring to is Jesus. Similarly to the book of John, Jesus is referred to here as the Word. And his words give life. In his very being he is life. There is no death in him.

This foundation of belief in Jesus Christ is something he testifies to, namely that the Word of life:

- » was from the beginning (v. 1)
- » is eternal life (v. 2)
- » was with the Father (v. 2)
- » appeared to a bunch of people (v. 2)
- » heard (verses 1, 3)
- » saw (verses 1, 2, 3)
- » touched (v. 2)

John, all the other Apostles, and thousands of people testify that Jesus was in fact a historical human being. They saw him walk with them. They saw him eat and drink with them. They heard him talk about the weather and teach and tell stories.

They experienced his touch through hugs, slaps on the back and healing. They can easily testify that Jesus was a very real human being.

John is very thorough as he describes the various ways the Word of Life was experienced. The word "testify" is translated from the Greek word *martureo*, which means "to give evidence." And that's exactly what John is doing as he uses three of the five senses to describe their experience with Jesus—seeing, hearing, touching. What are the two senses that John doesn't use to testify that Jesus was the Word of Life? Smell and taste.

This was the core issue of disagreement between the early church and the Gnostics. The early church stood with John and the apostles while the Gnostics were teaching that Jesus only appeared to be a person of flesh. The Gnostics bought into the Greek philosophy of Dualism, which states that anything of matter is sinful and anything that is of Spirit is pure.

The implications of this distinction are vast and dangerous. If Jesus was not a man of flesh, he didn't die on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. If Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead to defeat death, there is no victory over death. In essence, if Jesus wasn't flesh, the entire Christian message would be false.

So as a foundation John is making it very clear in these opening verses that he and many others testify that Jesus Christ was R-E-A-L. John says, we heard him, we touched him, and we saw him. You can't just make up new ideas about who Jesus really was and really know him. You either know who he really was or you don't know him.

Have you ever been misrepresented? It's a horrible feeling. Years ago someone threatened to call child protective services on Cassie and me because they thought we were abusing our children. We weren't doing anything even close to abusing our children. We love our kids, protect our kids, train our kids.

These Gnostics were misrepresenting who Jesus was and he was bothered because it's insulting. But more than that, Jesus was brokenhearted about this because a person can't experience the spiritual life he provides if you manipulate who he is. You have to know him accurately or not at all. You can't have a relationship with someone if you make up who you want them to be.

So in these opening verses of 1 John, the Apostle John is making it very clear that he knows who Jesus is. He can give evidence to who Jesus is. He is telling the people in these Asia Minor churches and us today, "We knew Jesus. We can tell you all about who he really is."

Then he goes beyond testifying to proclaiming. The principal verb in verses 1-3 is "proclaim." John circles around and around

in verses 1-2 giving evidence to their testifying and then in verse 3 at last comes to the point.

**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.**

The truths of Jesus Christ are too important to keep silent. It must be proclaimed. The truths of Jesus Christ bring spiritual life to anyone who believes. It must be proclaimed. Proclaim means "to declare" or "to announce." It goes beyond the testifying and now is declaring.

There are a lot of ways to proclaim. It could look like cheering at a sporting event. It could look like standing firm and holding to your convictions even if you are persecuted for your beliefs. It's this idea that I will speak, regardless of the cost. It's easy to proclaim something when it's popular, like showing and telling that you're a Giants fan when they're winning. But what about when it's no longer popular? The Apostle John will proclaim, regardless if it's embarrassing; regardless if it costs him friends; regardless of anything. He has counted the cost and he's willing to bear the consequence, But he's also hopeful that people will believe his message. He's hopeful that his proclaiming will result in relationships. We're circling back to relationships now.

John is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. And his hope in proclaiming is that people would enter into fellowship with them, with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

**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).**

Fellowship with God and with the Christian community is the hope of the proclaiming. Fellowship is a word of rich meaning. In the Greek this word is *koinonia*, meaning "partnership, participation or having in common." This is the identical word used to describe a Christian's relationship with God throughout the New Testament.

- » Fellowship in the Gospel
- » The fellowship of his sufferings
- » For what fellowship has righteousness with darkness

There is an intimacy of relationship with fellowship. And just as our relationship with God the Father is intimate, so should our relationships with other Christians be intimate. Your best friends should be Christians. We should be meeting together to read and study the Bible. We should be gathering together to pray. We should be going to lunches together after church. Hanging out with one another on Friday nights. Turning to one another for support when we're facing difficulties that are too much for us to bear alone. At least one person from church should be a Favorite in your Contacts list. All of this because we are in fellowship with one another.

You can see the progression in these opening verses: Testifying that Jesus Christ was legit; proclaiming the Word of Life; fellowship offered. And the result of the proclaiming and offering fellowship is joy in John's heart.

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

John's heart of an elder comes out here. He cannot be completely happy so long as some of those for whom he feels responsible are not experiencing the full blessings of the gospel.

I've devoted significant time to prayer over the past weeks, asking God how this passage of scripture applies to us, the South Campus, as we celebrate one year today and start our second year. In this coming year, standing on the strong foundation of the Biblical testimony, there are two simple things for us to remember:

**We need to proclaim Jesus Christ.** We want to train you to do this with Biblical accuracy and cultural sophistication. In order to do this we'll be holding a number of trainings this year. Stay tuned for more information.

**Be in fellowship.** This means fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ and in fellowship with your people in your church. Women's Bible Study, Men's Fraternity, Community Group, church attendance on Sundays and serving together are all good ways to accomplish this. But to experience the fellowship described in 1 John we need to do more. We need to be sharing life together, opening ourselves to new friendships and deep friendships. So I encourage and challenge you to do that this coming year. Make room in your busy schedule for others, and see how you're blessed.

*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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