ASSURANCE

LAUNCH PAD FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING

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How to Use *Life Design*



LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities "set the table," as it were, for the Bible study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader's guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are usually in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads or www.rbpadultministries.org. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

Preface

Am I really saved? What are the evidences of salvation? Can I count on eternal life?

Questions like these are critical for all believers to answer. Believers who never find assurance of eternal life are doomed to spiritual stagnation. Assurance of eternal life becomes a believer's launch pad for righteous living.

John knew the importance of assurance of eternal life as he penned the first of three epistles that bear his name. His recipients were under pressure from false teachers to change their beliefs about Christ in particular. The false teachers caused them to question their salvation. John's words helped the recipients of his letter gain assurance of eternal life so they might grow spiritually as God intended.

As the teacher of *Assurance: Launch Pad for Righteous Living,* you will have the privilege of leading your learners through this study of the five short chapters of the epistle. The issues of fellowship, obedience, love, truth, discernment, faith, and confidence are presented from the perspective of one who lived close to Christ on earth. These issues are of practical concern to believers as they live a "faith life" each day.

The study of 1 John will also reveal to your learners the marks of an authentic Christian. Today, as in John's day, false teachers are present and are teaching error regarding what it means to be a Christian. John's words are fit for the adults you will teach. If taken to heart and faithfully practiced, they will provide each true believer in your class the assurance of eternal life. Your learners will understand they are children of God who need to be committed to Him and who can be confident at His coming. Any class member outside faith in Christ will have the opportunity to assess his or her situation and, by God's grace, receive Christ as Savior before the study concludes.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0047) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson on 1 John. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0048) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD as printable PDFs. If you would like to make your own transparencies or PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, posters, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

Other classroom resources on the CD include visuals and handouts. The leader's guide refers to each visual as a resource. Each resource is included in the corresponding PowerPoint presentation. Instructions on when to use the handouts are included in this leader's guide.

The CD also offers supplemental case studies. Each case study can be used as an in-class review, as material for a midweek Bible study, or as an e-mail attachment to your learners. E-mailing the case studies to your learners will emphasize living out the truth in daily life. You may want to enlist a learner to handle collecting e-mail addresses and e-mailing the case studies each week.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize. For your convenience, the verse cards are set for printing on Avery business cards. Use the Avery product number 8869 to avoid cutting apart the verse cards. You can find Avery business cards at avery.com. You could also simply print the verse cards on heavy paper and cut them apart using a paper cutter. Or you could e-mail the verse cards to your learners and have them print and cut their own.

LESSON 1

Certain of Salvation

Scripture Focus

1 John Overview

Key Verse

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13).

Overview

The epistle of 1 John was written to a group of Christians who were facing the threat of counterfeit Christianity. John wrote to challenge them to abide in genuine Christianity. Their commitment to the truth would protect them from error and promote true love for one another.

Topic

Authentic Christianity

Theme

God wants His children to know that they are truly saved.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will evaluate his or her life in light of the marks of an authentic Christian.

Outline

I. Writer
II. Setting
III. Purpose
IV. Theme

Materials

- RBP transparencies 1 and 2
- Lesson 1 case study from resource CD
- 1 John 5:13 verse card from resource CD

Getting Started

Letter Analyses

Read this letter excerpt: "Having a great time; wish you were here." Discuss the questions below.

Ask: Who might have written the letter that this excerpt came from? (Encourage creative answers to stimulate thought.) **Ask:** Who might it be written to? **Discuss:** How might the setting (the writer's and readers' situations) affect the way it should be understood?

The incompleteness of the excerpt available makes it impossible to discern its full context. **Discuss:** How would it help if one knew the writer, recipients, background, or complete text of the letter?

Understanding the writer, recipients, and background of 1 John will help us to put the letter into its proper context and gain the most from studying it.

John wrote his first epistle to a group of Christians who were struggling with the threat of false teaching. Out of his deep love for the recipients, he spoke tenderly but firmly about their need to maintain fellowship with God and one another. Erroneous teaching would lead to breaking such fellowship. Holding to the truth would nurture spiritual light, love, and life.

Wisdom of the Ages

Have you ever taken the time to talk unhurriedly with an elderly person who bears the wisdom of his or her years—perhaps someone involved in ministry, a consummate homemaker, a World War II veteran, or someone who has lived an interesting life? **Discuss:** Describe the situation for the group.

The Bible states that there is great value in gleaning from the wisdom of godly elderly people (cf. Prov. 20:29).

The Apostle John was the last surviving apostle, and according to tradition the only one to live a full life. Before he wrote the capstone book of Scripture—Revelation—he penned three short letters giving direction for Christian living. The book of 1 John is not only divinely inspired but also conveys the wisdom that this Christian statesman had gleaned through his many years.

Ask: What information do we gain about the character of John from the gospels? (He was the brother of the apostle James [Matt. 4:21], called one of the sons of thunder [Mark 3:17], one of the inner three of Christ's disciples [Matt. 26:37], and the disciple whom Jesus loved [John 13:23].)

Searching the Scriptures

I. Writer

The letter of 1 John has historically been attributed to the apostle John. It is one of the few epistles in the New Testament that does not have an explicit statement of authorship. Because of this, many scholars, particularly in the last century, have questioned whether the apostle John was really the writer of this letter.

There are good reasons for concluding that this book was indeed written by John, the beloved disciple.

First, this was the stated belief of many of the earliest Christian writers. These writers, typically called the Church Fathers, lived only a few generations after John. Not all of them spoke directly to the issue, but Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian all stated clearly that John the apostle wrote this epistle. Although their testimony may not be conclusive evidence, it certainly is a strong witness that should not be ignored.

Second, in 1:1–3 the writer declared that he was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ during His earthly life. Certainly the apostle John fits this description. John was one of the earliest disciples whom Jesus called to follow Him (Matt. 4:21, 22). Throughout Christ's ministry John, along with James and Peter, was in the inner circle of the disciples. He was one of the few who witnessed the full range of Christ's actions. Because this letter was written by a significant eyewitness of Christ's incarnate ministry, John has to be considered one of the most likely possible writers.

ASK: What significant events in Christ's life did John witness? (See Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; Matt. 17:1–3; 26–36; John 20:1–10.) (Question 3)

Third, there are frequent and detailed parallels between 1 John and the gospel of John, in particular, John 13—17. Scholars who deny John's authorship of this epistle even argue that it was written in conscious imitation of the gospel because the similarity between the books in both writing style and content is so great. It seems more likely to explain the similarity as due to the fact that the same person wrote both books.

Fourth, the epistle has a tone of spiritual authority. John was one of the leading apostles whom Jesus commissioned to serve in His place. Throughout this epistle, John spoke of the truth that he had received and proclaimed with confident authority.

READ: John 19:26, 27. **ASK:** What deeply personal commission did John receive from Jesus? (Question 4)

Fifth, the writer often referred to his readers as "my little children" (cf. 2:1). The Greek term *teknia* is a diminutive for the common word for children. It is the kind of expression that a grandfather might use. His firm apostolic tone was tempered with deep compassion and affection. This language implied that the writer was an elderly, revered Christian leader. If this were the case, it would fit with the designation of the writer in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 as "the elder." In addition, it matches the portrayal of John in the early writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius, as they described his ministry as an old man in Ephesus.

Taken together, these five pieces of evidence strongly support John's writing of this epistle. This especially beloved disciple of Christ served his Lord for many years. Toward the end of his long life, he spoke firmly yet tenderly of the need to love and live God's truth.

ASK: Why might critics want to deny that John wrote 1 John? (Question 5)

II. Setting

Most of the New Testament epistles were written to address specific situations. For the letters of Paul, the historical narrative in Acts gives information

about those occasions. Even with that knowledge, however, it is difficult for modern interpreters to grasp all of the references.

With John's letters, the historical setting is even harder to determine. The Book of Acts details his involvement in only four episodes early in his ministry (Acts 1:13; 3:1; 4:19; 8:14). Consequently, the setting must be drawn from inferences in 1 John and the few references found in the Church Fathers.

Hanging heavily over the book is the threat of false teachers. For example, 1 John 2:18 and 19 refer to many antichrists who have gone out from true Christians. They had previously been identified with the church, but their teaching and behavior evidenced that they were not genuine believers. Instead, they were attempting to seduce the Christians into error (2:26).

Scholars have attempted to identify these false teachers by using John's teachings as he opposed their error. At least three brands of error can be inferred.

ILLUSTRATION: Write "Gnostics" on the board. Beside it write "spiritual" and "material," then draw a heavy line between those two words.

The Gnostics held to a strict division between what is spiritual and what is material. This doctrine did not develop fully until later in history, but there seems to be anticipation of it in the New Testament, especially in Colossians and 1 John.

DISCUSS: Why would Gnosticism undermine Christianity at its very core? Think about the incarnation of Christ. (Question 6)

Gnosticism insisted that the Son of God could not have become human because that would bring the spiritual and material realms together. This false teaching would rule out Christ's incarnation and thus His substitutionary death on the cross and future reign on His millennial throne as a descendant of David.

DISCUSS: How might Gnosticism have affected the early Christians' assurance of salvation? (Question 7)

ILLUSTRATION: Write "Docetists" on the board. Beside it write "spiritual" and "material," then cross out the word "material."

The Docetists claimed that Jesus' humanity was not real. Instead of being truly human, Jesus only appeared to take on a physical body. This false teaching emphasized the deity of Christ to the extent that it denied His humanity. In other words, He did not genuinely enter the human race and identify Himself with sinful humanity.

READ: Philippians 2:5–8. **ASK:** Why was it important for Christ to become a person? (Question 8)

ILLUSTRATION: Write "Cerinthus" on the board. Beside it write "spiritual" and "material," then cross out the word "spiritual."

Irenaeus wrote that John countered an opposite type of error, promoted by Cerinthus in his gospel. Cerinthus argued that Jesus was only a man. When Jesus was baptized, the divine Christ descended upon Him, but Christ left Him before the crucifixion. When Jesus died on the cross, then, He died as a mere human, not as the perfect God-man offering the substitutionary atonement for sin.

It is impossible to know precisely which false teaching John was countering in a given verse. In fact, it could well be that his readers were facing a mixture of overlapping and contradictory false teachings. The focus must be kept on the truth which John set forth.

ASK: What was the common denominator of all these false teachings? **ASK:** What false religions today threaten to shake a believer's understanding of and trust in Jesus Christ? (Questions 9, 10)

According to 1 John 2:19, some people within the Christian community had already defected to falsehood. They had moved away from the solid truth into false speculations, which had produced a spirit of arrogance in their hearts. In their self-deceit they claimed to have arrived at a state of moral perfection, in which they were no longer contaminated by sin. They doubtless urged genuine Christians to forsake simple belief in Christ so that they could achieve a supposedly higher level of spirituality.

ASK: Why do false teachers bother with trying to influence true believers? (Question 11)

Theological error often results in ethical error, because wrong belief typically produces wrong behavior. This was certainly the case with the false teachers against whom John wrote. John used strong terms such as "seduce" (2:26) and "deceive" (3:7) to describe what they were teaching.

John, therefore, used a twofold approach when writing against false teachers. On the one hand, he firmly countered the false teachings by raising solid logical and theological objections. On the other hand, he encouraged Christians to stay with the truth they had received by giving them warm pastoral reassurance.

READ: 1 John 2:21–23. **ASK:** Which approach to writing against false teachers is John using in these verses—firm countering or pastoral reassurance?

READ: 1 John 3:1–3. **ASK:** Which approach is John using in this passage? (Questions 12, 13)

III. Purpose

In his gospel, John stated clearly in John 20:30 and 31 his purpose for that entire book. That explicit purpose statement enables the reader to understand how the whole gospel is structured, and what it is endeavoring to teach.

John's first epistle is more difficult to understand. In this letter, John presented at least four distinct statements of purpose.

BIBLE STUDY: Assign each of the following four verses to volunteers to read: 1 John 1:3, 4; 2:1; 5:13. After each verse is read, ask the learners to identify John's purpose in writing this epistle. (Questions 14–17)

What is clear is that John was speaking to the faithful Christians, not to the false teachers. Because of this, his purpose was pastoral and constructive. He did not focus his attention on repudiating the error of the heretics, although he did counter some of their false claims. Rather, he spent most of his time in reassuring and warning those who had held to the faith. John knew that they were under attack, so he came alongside them to provide encouragement and support. At the same time, he warned them of the serious threat posed by the false teachers. As a loving spiritual father, John cared deeply about their present hurts and their potential harm.

Just as the threat was a mixture of false teachings, so John's response had a combination of purposes. He reassured them of the theological truth, especially about the identity of Jesus Christ. In addition, he reminded them of the reality of sin and of God's provision for forgiveness. Moreover, he reminded them of the necessity of maintaining fellowship with God and with one another. In doing all of this, John countered the doctrinal and practical errors of the false teachers. He wanted to fortify the Christians in genuine truth and love so as to keep them from falling into error.

IV. Theme

First John is a very difficult book to outline, because it was not written as a theological treatise. Instead, John was responding to the urgent threat posed by the false teachers. He spoke as a spiritual father to his children. In warm, yet firm, tones he repeated several key themes.

Throughout the book he brought his readers back to the foundational truths of the Christian faith. He wanted to remind them of "the old, old story" to defend them from the brand new erroneous views of the false teachers.

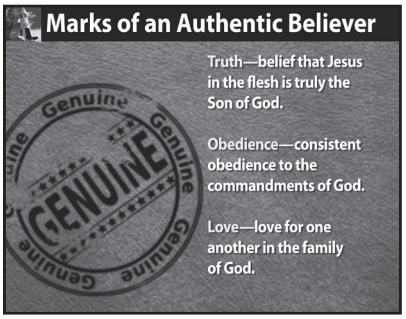
READ: 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 24; 3:11. **ASK:** What common phrase in these verses points out John's emphasis on the foundational truths? (Question 18)

John wanted his readers to stand on the firm bedrock of God's truth, rather than slipping on the shifting sand of human speculations.

Numerous times John spoke of knowledge and certainty. The false teachers had raised doubts about the person of Jesus Christ, as well as other central tenets of the faith. To counter these doubts, John reminded them of what they could truly know about Christ.

The false teachers claimed to be Christians even though their teachings diverged greatly from the teachings of Christ. John devoted much of this epistle to describing three distinguishing marks of authentic Christianity.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2 as you present the main themes of 1 John.



The theological mark was belief that Jesus was truly the Son of God in the flesh. The moral mark was consistent obedience to the commandments of God. The social mark was love for one another in the family of God.

These three marks were not set forth as the way to become a Christian. Instead, they are already true of people who are genuine Christians. Each of these marks required the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit teaches God's truth, including a proper understanding of Jesus Christ as the unique God-man. It is the indwelling Spirit who enables Christians to obey God and to love others, because these actions and attitudes are contrary to the natural sinful bent of humans.

ASK: Which of these marks is the most important? Why? (Question 19)

The false teachers were wrong in their understanding of Jesus Christ, and their lives were characterized by disobedience and lack of love. John's readers, however, were true Christians. As they evaluated their lives in the light of the three marks of Christians, they would be reassured of their own spiritual status in Christ. This renewed confidence would in turn blunt the doubts that the false teachers had shot at them.

Another prominent theme in 1 John was the vital connection between faith and love. John had little patience for people who claimed to love God, but at the same time did not love their Christian brothers and sisters. He argued that godly belief must produce godly behavior. Because of that, godly behavior that expressed love for others was an accurate indicator of true belief in God. The Holy Spirit who indwells all genuine Christians teaches them both what to believe and how to behave.

Making It Personal

Theme Evaluation

Invite learners to conduct personal evaluations of themselves in the areas

Use the case study for lesson 1 as desired.

of understanding God's truth, obeying God, and showing love for others. **Ask:** Do you believe that Jesus in the flesh is truly the Son of God? If so, how does that belief affect your life? **Ask:** Is your life characterized by consistent obedience to the commandments of God? On what do you base your answer? **Ask:** Would your fellow believers describe you as a genuinely loving person? (Questions 20–22)

Character Emulation

Ask learners to list ways in which they might learn specifically from the Apostle John based on what they have studied in this lesson.



Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the response for this lesson: Understand the marks of authentic Christianity.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the 1 John 5:13 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.