

The
Seedbed
Daily Text

**THIS
IS HOW
WE KNOW**

1 John

J. D. WALT

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Introduction

**“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?
For we saw His star in the east and have come to
worship Him.”**

—Matthew 2:2 (NASB)

I remember as a child the first time my father showed me the Big Dipper. With the lights from town dim in the distance, we looked into the vast expanse of uncountable stars in the clear, crisp night sky. “There’s the Big Dipper,” he quietly remarked. Having no idea what he meant, I inquired, “What’s the Big Dipper?”

He said it was a constellation; a collection of stars that formed the shape of a large ladle, or dipper. Then he took my hand and extended it toward the sky with his as he traced the shape of the seven stars that made up the dipper. Wow! How had I missed it before? The better question is, How on earth would I have ever seen it had someone not pointed it out to me?

Now that I saw them, those stars seemed to shine brighter than the others around them. It gave me that feeling of being on the inside of something. In the midst of literally billions

on billions of constantly shining stars, I now knew one of the great secrets of the universe.

It's amazing how we can look at something endlessly and not really see it, and once we finally do, we can't miss it. It was there all the time, beckoning to us, waiting on us to have eyes to see.

As it is with the stars, so it can be with Scripture—726,109 words (or stars) come together to form this ancient text arranging themselves in 31,102 distinct constellations, or verses. These constellations order themselves into sixty-six different galaxies, or books of the Bible. All of these galaxies together make up an intricate universe of wisdom and an expansive array of revealed truth, every jot and tittle of which tells the story of the God of heaven and earth.

“The heavens declare the glory of God;” sings the psalmist, “the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge” (Ps. 19:1–2). Despite this, one can gaze at the pages of this magisterial book and miss its essential meaning. Someone must take our hand and with theirs trace the ancient constellations for our eyes to see. That's what the inspired writers of Scripture do.

Near the end of the Bible is a short sermon of profound consequence. It has come to be called 1 John. Penned by the apostle John, author of the gospel that also bears his name, this little book traces the arc of a series of giant constellations that together illuminate the intergalactic wonders of the entire universe.

My father revealed another awe-inspiring feature hidden in the brilliance of the night sky that night. He showed me how the last two stars on the ladle end of the constellation aligned to point to another star. He called it the “North Star.” He told me from ancient times, when a person was lost at sea or in the woods at night they could find the seven stars of the Big Dipper, and by tracing a line through the last two stars they could locate the North Star. With north in sight, it was easy for them to locate south, east, and west as well.

There’s a short phrase repeatedly echoing through the pages of this first epistle of John. Each time it begins with these words, “This is how we know.” We see it at least half a dozen times. “[This is how] we know that we have come to know him” (2:3); “This is how we know that we belong to the truth” (3:19); “This is how we know that we live in him and he in us” (4:13); and “This is how we know that we love the children of God” (5:2). It is as though John were holding our hand, tracing these constellations of revelation with his finger for our eyes to see.

In one way or another we can trace them all back to the constellation pointing us to them in the first place: John 3:16. If Scripture has a Big Dipper, this is it. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This is the introduction to the gospel; what we might call the first half. In the most interesting way, these stars align to point us toward true north, orienting our lifelong journey to the gospel’s conclusion, or the second half. “This is how we

know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).

In this edition of the Daily Text we will walk and work our way through 1 John. Each chapter picks up the Scripture text where the last left off. In like fashion, each chapter offers a short reflection on the text along with a prayer and a question for the soul’s searching. Some will want to read a chapter a day while others may choose to read a series of chapters at a time. My only request is that you read it together with others. After all, this is how we know.

As we embark, let us do so with the mind and heart of those ancient sky-gazing kings who first followed the star to Bethlehem. “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:2 NASB).

1

I Believe John

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.

Consider This

John still can't wrap his mind around what happened. It is as though he speaks these words aloud so his own ears can hear them. The curious and almost cryptic trilogy of phrases, "the Word of life," "the life," and "the eternal life," reach to grasp a heretofore-unprecedented category of reality. When a human being passes through death and comes out on the other side even more alive than before, we have an indescribable situation.

"He is risen indeed," just doesn't do it justice.

Someone so completely human yet unutterably divine cannot be comprehended; one can only behold him. It leaves an eyewitness saying to himself as well as to his listeners something akin to, "If I hadn't seen and heard and touched him with my own hands, I wouldn't believe it either."

And this is the challenge of Easter. That Jesus was raised from the dead can never be proved; only believed.

You ask me how I know he lives? John. I believe John.

The Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for eyewitnesses to the miracle of your Son. Thank you for inspiring them to write it down. And thank you for the millions of disciples who have given themselves and, at times, their lives to get this revelation to us. Come, Holy Spirit, and usher us into the fellowship of the Father and the Son and reveal to us through John's letter the indescribable mystery of the gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Question

What difference does it make to you that our faith is founded on the testimony of actual eyewitnesses and not merely on our own spiritual experience?

2

The Seduction of the Middle

1 JOHN 1:5-7 | This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with

one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Consider This

John shoots straight. We need that in times like these. Light or darkness. Truth or lies. Fellowship or isolation. I appreciate the simplicity of these binary terms. We live in an age that hungers for a third option, a middle way, an in-between place.

No one wants darkness, but we will readily settle for less than pure light. It results in dimness. No one wants lies, but we will willingly accept something for less than pure truth. It results in the confusion of compromise. No one wants isolation, but we will graciously make do with less-than-real relationships. It results in crowdsourced anonymity.

Cutting to the chase: we want our relationship with God to be independent of our relationships with other people. We also want it to be defined more by the quantity of our quiet times than the quality of our relationships.

John will not have it. We want to believe a living relationship with God is possible while our relationships with other people languish. Perhaps the biggest misconception we have is that our relationship with God will determine our relationships with other people. It's just the opposite. If you want to know what kind of fellowship I have with God, examine my relationships with other people.

If I do not have fellowship with, say, my wife, I am not walking in the light. The extent to which I am willing to

ignore the problem is the extent to which I am willing to live isolated in the dimly lit shadows of half-truths. What is a shadow but a shade from darkness? What is a half-truth but a lie by another name? Something deep within the human condition doesn't want black or white. We crave fifty shades of gray.

Thank God for John, who loves us too much to leave us in the comfortable death trap of neither here nor there, in the lukewarm water of somewhere in between.

John shoots straight. We need that in times like these.

The Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for inspiring these un-minced words from John. Reveal to me the mushy, undefined middle places in my life. In particular, turn your searchlight onto my relationships. Show me where I need to make amends. Come, Holy Spirit, and show me the way to walk in the Light. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Question

What relationships in your life are compromised or broken at present? What might this be telling you about your relationship with God?

3

The Antidote to Self-Deception

1 JOHN 1:8 | If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Consider This

The longer I live, the more I realize we human beings have an almost limitless capacity to deceive ourselves. In other words, sin may not be our biggest problem. I'm beginning to think our biggest problem is the way we deceive ourselves *about* sin.

I'll go first. Like you, I probably wouldn't come out and claim to be without sin. My problem is the way I have slowly adopted patterns of sin in my own life that I don't even see as sin anymore. They have become my normal.

For instance, I remember a time in my past when I was a fiercely analytical, point-out-the-problem kind of person. I considered it a gift. I had what I considered the spiritual gift of figuring out what was wrong with just about anything—including you. One day, by the mercy of God, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that I had a critical spirit. What I had normalized as the “gift of critical analysis” was actually the sin of a critical spirit.

Translation: I was self-deceived. I hurt people with impunity. The real bottom line? This was a failure to love. In my judgment, John's greatest gift to us will be the ability to

understand sin through the lens of our relationships rather than through the metrics of our personal performance. Lots more on that to come.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Here is a walking-around prayer as we walk this way with John. It's something of an antidote to self-deception: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

See what I mean? More on this tomorrow.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus, I confess I am a sinner. Now would you help me to actually confess my sins, and not just the outward behaviors, but the inward dispositions and broken ways of my life? Help me to understand sin not as my failure to live up to my standards, but as my failure to love you and other people. In your name, Lord. Amen.

The Question

What is the difference between identifying yourself as a sinner and actually confessing your sins?