



The Church: Love For One Another

Summary and Goal

God's sacrificial love to us, through Jesus, sets an example for how we should think and act toward others. The love that we have for one another should lead us to make sacrifices and prioritize the best interest of the beloved above our own. This helps us value relationships more than we do possessions and cultivates a willingness to leverage our resources to bless and minister (through actions, not just words) brothers and sisters who are in need.

Main Passages

1 John 3:11-24

Session Outline

1. Supplying Physical Needs (1 John 3:17)
2. Loving by Telling (1 John 3:18)
3. Encouragement Toward Good Works (1 John 3:14)

Theological Theme

Christians love others because they themselves have experienced the amazing, immeasurable love of God in Christ.

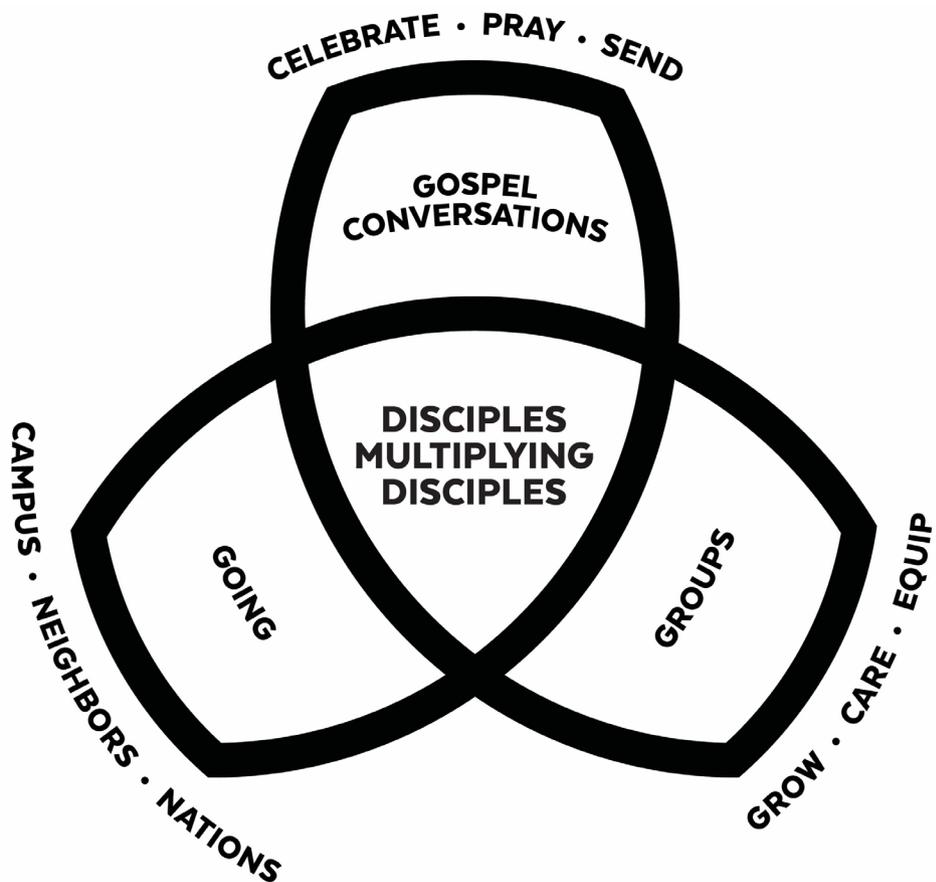
Christ Connection

Christians are enabled to do the good work of loving others only because they have been made alive in Christ. The gospel not only saves people, but it makes them free to do good works for God's glory.

Missional Application

Christians often find that when they love someone through sacrificial service, they are given opportunities to tell the people they are serving about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Suggested Opening

Have member with socials/party responsibilities speak about planning Group Christmas party, remembering to invite the lost and searching each member has been praying for over the last month.

Suggested Closing

Have member with missions responsibilities speak about mission projects. Group can choose from and reference link to missions website. Group should choose project by next week.

brentwood.church/service-opportunity-finder/

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Session Plan

The Church: Love For One Another

Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever used a real compass (not a phone application)? If so, what did you use it for?
- ❓ How does a compass work? What is its purpose?

A compass works by magnetism. The needle in the container is just barely affixed to its position so that it is free to twist and turn in any direction. On the other hand, it isn't free at all because there is an invisible force that is compelling it toward the magnetic north pole.

Christians, of course, aren't compass needles. They are sentient creations of God who have been made alive in Christ and delivered from the curse of sin. They, however, still battle against the old sin-dead nature, which still works to supplant the Christian's love for God and neighbor with a love for self and sin. This is why Jesus told His followers to love each other as He had loved them (John 15:12). They needed clear instruction, as do we.

1. Supplying Physical Needs (1 John 3:17)

Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other as He loved them. There are two ways to understand this command. First, we can read this passage as a command and an explanation of how to carry out that command. Second, we can read this passage as an opportunity to consider and ponder the love of Christ toward poor, wretched sinners. This command is a directive, but it is also a description.

- ❓ How did Jesus describe His love toward His followers in John 15:13?
- ❓ How did Jesus' sacrifice on the cross instruct Christians in their understanding and practice of love?
- ❓ Application: What is one specific and tangible way that you can sacrificially love others?

2. Loving by Telling (1 John 3:18)

In 1 John 3:18, John told his readers that they shouldn't love with empty speech, but in action and in truth. We know what it means to love in action. When our brother or sister needs clothing, then we provide it to them. But what does it mean to love "in truth."

-  Read John 15:15. What else did Jesus do out of love for His disciples according to this verse?
-  Why is telling others the truth about God necessary to truly loving them?
-  Application: What are some specific ways that you can love someone by sharing God's Word with them this week?

3. Encouragement Toward Good Works (1 John 3:14)

John was addressing all believers in 1 John 3:11-24. He said, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters." We should note that he wasn't saying that Christians should love non-Christians (though they should). In this text, He was talking specifically about loving one another. He was telling Christians that they should look around at their fellow Christians and find ways to love them.

-  What encouragement for loving one another is found in this verse?
-  Read Hebrews 10:24. How does this give practical means of loving one another in the church?
-  Application: What are some practical ways that Christians can spur one another on to good works today?

Conclusion

-  In what ways have others shown you sacrificial love? How have you expressed sacrificial love to others?
-  With whom can you share God's Word in an act of love? What has prevented you up to now?
-  In what ways do you need to be spurred on to good works? In what ways can you spur others on to good works?



Expanded Session Content

The Church: Love For One Another

Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever used a real compass (not a phone application)? If so, what did you use it for?
- ❓ How does a compass work? What is its purpose?

A compass works by magnetism. The needle in the container is just barely affixed to its position so that it is free to twist and turn in any direction. On the other hand, it isn't free at all because there is an invisible force that is compelling it toward the magnetic north pole.

Those who are in Christ, though they are free, are also compelled toward something. When a dead sinner is made alive by the mercy and kindness of God in Christ, his or her soul sets off toward the Redeemer. Like a needle toward a lodestone, the Christian's soul cleaves to God. What is the force that draws them that way? It is love. The Christian prays to God, sings to God, reads God's Word, gathers with God's people, submits to baptism, and takes part in the Lord's Supper because the love of Christ compels them (2 Cor. 5:14). We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Yet, God's love doesn't only compel Christians to love God, but also to love those around them. Christians love their neighbors.

Christians, of course, aren't compass needles. They are sentient creations of God who have been made alive in Christ and delivered from the curse of sin. They, however, still battle against the old sin-dead nature, which still works to supplant the Christian's love for God and neighbor with a love for self and sin. This is why Jesus told His followers to love each other as He had loved them (John 15:12). They needed clear instruction, as do we.

Session Summary

Those who love God with the kind of love that God Himself has shown toward His children do so because of who He is, not because of the services that He can provide them. That's not what divine love

is according to Scripture. That sort of love is more akin to greed or selfishness than biblical love.

Furthermore, not only will true Christians love God selflessly, they will also love their neighbor sacrificially. The blueprint for sacrificial love is found in the pages of the Gospels. God the Son, Jesus Christ, was both the expression of God's love for His people and the explanation of how God's people ought to love one another.

The theme of 1 John 3:11-24 is love for one's neighbor. John listed several startling truths that put meat on this often-abstracted bone. It's quite easy to say, Christians should love one another. But considering what that really means and how to carry it out is a much messier business. Here are seven observations on this type of love according to 1 John 3:

- Loving our brothers and sisters is evidence that we have passed from death to life (v. 14).
- The one who does not love remains in death (v. 14).
- If you hate your brother you are a murderer (v. 15).
- We know how to love by considering Christ's example (v. 16).
- Love is expressed in compassion and action toward those in need (v. 17).
- The fruit of love produced in us gives us confidence when our hearts condemn us (vv. 21-22).
- Being obedient to the command to love others strengthens our prayers (v. 22).

The bottom line is that those who are in Christ will not only have an abiding affection for their God, but they will also love their neighbor. A redeemed soul always results in a changed life and that changed life will always reflect the character and will of the Redeemer. Christians love because Christ first loved them. The next logical question is, "In what ways do Christians love others?" John said, "This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us" (v. 16). Further, Jesus said, "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Let's consider how Jesus loved Christians in order to discern a template for how Christians should love others today.

1. Supplying Physical Needs (1 John 3:17)

Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other as He loved them. There are two ways to understand this command. First, we can read this passage as a command and an explanation of how to carry out that command. Second, we can read this passage as an opportunity to consider and ponder the love of Christ toward poor, wretched sinners. This command is a directive, but it is also a description.

 How did Jesus describe His love toward His followers in John 15:13?

Jesus said that there isn't a greater love than when a person sacrifices their life for another. Don't forget that Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the upper room during the last supper. He was only hours away from being delivered into the hands of Roman soldiers by one of His own disciples, condemned to death by Pilate, and fastened to a wooden cross.

We can't know what the disciples thought when they heard Jesus say those words, but their meaning became crystal clear before long. Jesus perfectly exemplified this "greater love" in His sacrifice. Jesus, on the cross of Calvary, did something for sinners that they are unable to do for themselves. He paid the price for sin. He bore the wrath of God. And through His death, He wiped away the sin debt of all those who would call upon the Lord with faith in the gospel and with the repentance of sin.

 How did Jesus' sacrifice on the cross instruct Christians in their understanding and practice of love?

Christians can't offer themselves up as a sacrifice for the sins of another. Only Christ could do that because only He was a spotless, blameless offering. Jesus loved people more perfectly and more sacrificially than Christians could ever love another. Christians, however, can follow in their Savior's example by loving one another in sacrificial ways that reflect the divine love that Jesus portrayed at Calvary.

Love means sacrificing one's self for the beloved. When Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you," He meant that Christians should love their spouse, children, fellow church members, and neighbors in a sacrificial way. He meant that Christians ought to put the good of the beloved before their own good. Jesus meant that their acts of love should be characterized by selflessness and other-centeredness.

Jesus' love was tangible, visible, and concrete. It was a real cross. He bled real blood. He felt real pain. His love went far beyond well wishes. John referred to this when He said, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him?" (v. 17). Sometimes loving our brother simply means supplying them with physical resources to help meet physical needs.

Lewis Bayly, a church leader in England in the 17th century, gave this counsel regarding the family meal after Sunday morning service: "And when you go to dinner, in that reverent and thankful manner before

prescribed, remember according to your ability to have one or more poor Christians, whose hungry bowels may be refreshed with your meat, imitating holy Job, who protested that he did never eat his morsels alone, without the good company of the poor and fatherless; that is the Commandment of Christ our Master (Luke 14:13).”¹

 Application: What is one specific and tangible way that you can sacrificially love others?

2. Loving by Telling (1 John 3:18)

In 1 John 3:18, John told his readers that they shouldn’t love with empty speech, but in action and in truth. We know what it means to love in action. When our brother or sister needs clothing, then we provide it to them. But what does it mean to love “in truth.”

 Read John 15:15. What else did Jesus do out of love for His disciples according to this verse?

Jesus said, “I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father.” That may seem a strange example for Jesus to give in order to explain how He had loved His disciples and how His disciples ought to love one another. But if we consider carefully what Jesus said here, this way in which He loved them (and us) will become a very great and precious truth to Christians.

The only way for people to know God is if God reveals Himself to them. God must self-disclose if His creation will draw near to Him and understand the truth about Him. God, however, is under no obligation to do so. God doesn’t need people, and He would still be a perfectly good and holy God if He chose to remain shrouded in complete mystery and left us to wonder. In fact, because of the sinfulness of man, this is what we deserve.

But God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creation. From Genesis to Revelation we see God’s constant overtures toward mankind. This revelation culminates in the Person of Jesus Christ, God in flesh (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ revealed to His disciples the Word of God. And because of God’s care and provision for all Christians in all times, He has preserved His Word in written form for us. The very words that Jesus spoke to His disciples, words He learned from His Father, are preserved for us!

 Why is telling others the truth about God necessary to truly loving them?

In Action and in Truth

With the phrase, “in action and in truth,” John declared that faith which is only talk is false faith.

What could be more loving than to explain to someone what God has said about the condition and salvation of their eternal soul? Like the disciples then, people today are like sheep that have gone their own way. They are in desperate need of instruction concerning God's nature, will, and provision for their lives. Furthermore, Christians likewise are in desperate need of God's Word. Just as a baby must be nourished in order to grow, Christians receive nourishment from the Word of God first and foremost. This doesn't mean that people will always receive God's Word as an act of love, but that doesn't change the fact that it is.

 Application: What are some specific ways that you can love someone by sharing God's Word with them this week?

3. Encouragement Toward Good Works (1 John 3:14)

John was addressing all believers in 1 John 3:11-24. He said, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters." We should note that he wasn't saying that Christians should love non-Christians (though they should). In this text, He was talking specifically about loving one another. He was telling Christians that they should look around at their fellow Christians and find ways to love them.

 What encouragement for loving one another is found in this verse?

Read what Jesus said in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." The mercy and grace of God in Christ is astounding. Christ chose those men; they didn't choose Him. He pulled them from darkness and sin-death to light and life. What a Savior!

Not only that, but He saved them so that they could serve Him. They were to "go and produce fruit." Here we see the third and final way that Christ loved His disciples and how Christians should love one another. He spurred them on to good works. Jesus made them productive citizens in the Kingdom. Jesus does this in Christians today. As Christians grow in faith and walk in step with the Spirit, then they produce fruit. This is the kindness of the Lord working on behalf of His children, for the children of so great a Father have a growing desire to serve the purposes of their Father. Blood-bought Christians long to do God's will.

 Read Hebrews 10:24. How does this give practical means of loving one another in the church?

Christians love their fellow believers when they spur them on to good works. The writer of Hebrews exhorted, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24). Christians should look for opportunities to spur one another on to do God’s will in their lives.

- Application: What are some practical ways that Christians can spur one another on to good works today?

Conclusion

Those who are in Christ are not only devoted to worshiping and serving God, but they also are diligent to love their brothers and sisters in Christ. This love isn’t an emotional reaction to circumstance, but an abiding affection for and commitment to fellow sinners who have also been called out of darkness into His marvelous light. The love that Christians have for one another is manifested in meeting physical needs, telling them the truth of God’s Word, and spurring them on to good works.

- In what ways have others shown you sacrificial love? How have you expressed sacrificial love to others?
- With whom can you share God’s Word in an act of love? What has prevented you up to now?
- In what ways do you need to be spurred on to good works? In what ways can you spur others on to good works?

Prayer of Response

Pray for our church. Pray specifically that the pastors and congregation would take Christ’s command to “love each other as I have loved you” seriously. Pray that unbiblical conceptions of love would be banished from the hearts and minds of your fellow church members. Finally, pray that the membership of the church would be compelled by Christ’s love to love one another sacrificially and concretely, as their hearts stay set on the astounding lovingkindness of God in Christ toward them.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in 1, 2 & 3 John* by Daniel Akin
- *Be Real* by Warren Wiersbe
- *The Letters of John* by Colin Kruse

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Church: Strengthened For Every Good Work

Main Passages

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Session Outline

1. Loved, Chosen, and Called by God (2 Thess. 2:13-14)
2. Stand Firm (2 Thess. 2:15)
3. Encouragement and Strength (2 Thess. 2:16-17)

Memorize

Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.

- 1 John 3:24

Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 John 3:11-24
- Tuesday - Ephesians 4:32
- Wednesday - 1 Peter 3:8
- Thursday - Galatians 6:2
- Friday - Hebrews 13:16
- Saturday - Philippians 2:1-4

Historical Context of 1 John

Purpose

John made four purpose statements. First, he wrote to promote his readers' fellowship and joy. "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1:4). Second, he wrote to help readers avoid the pitfalls of sin, yet find forgiveness when they stumbled. "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin" (2:1). Third, he wrote to protect believers from false teachers. "I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (2:26). Finally, he wrote so they might know they had eternal life. "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13). This last purpose statement governs the other three and brings them together in a unifying theme. In summary, 1 John was written to confirm Christians in true apostolic Christianity by helping them avoid the destructive beliefs and behaviors to which some had fallen prey.

Author

Ancient manuscripts are unanimous in naming "John" as the author of 1 John. This was understood to be John the son of Zebedee, the "beloved disciple" who was also the author of the Fourth Gospel. The style and vocabulary of 1, 2, and 3 John are so close to that of John's Gospel that they beg to be understood as arising from the same person. Some contemporary scholars theorize that an "elder John" (see 2Jn 1; 3Jn 1), not the apostle, may have written the letters. Others speak of a "Johannine school" or "circle" as the originators of the epistles of John (and perhaps Revelation too). But the view with the best support is that Jesus's disciple John was the author.

Setting

Second-century sources reported that around AD 70, the year the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, John left Jerusalem where he was a church leader and relocated to Ephesus. He continued his pastoral work in that region and lived until nearly AD 100. Ephesus is probably the place where John wrote the three NT letters that bear his name. They could have been composed at any time in the last quarter of the first century.

Special Features

John's first letter addresses a setting in which some people in the local church had departed the fellowship (2:19), apparently because their doctrine, ethics, devotion, or some combination of these conflicted with those of the church. John wrote in part to stabilize the situation. He reaffirmed and enlarged on key theological truths, particularly the doctrine of Christ. He extolled love and emphasized the necessity for belief to be matched by action. A personal relationship with Christ is the foundation of the Christian life, and out from this grows obedience to divine commands. True faith, proactive ethics, fervent love for God and people—most of the epistle revolves around one or more of these three emphases as the author instructed, admonished, and encouraged his readers.

Extended Commentary

1 John 3:11-24

3:11-15. Again we hear the message of love from the beginning of Jesus' ministry (2:7). Before learning what love is, we read what love is not. We should not be like Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel, because Cain's actions were evil, while Abel's were righteous. Abel's righteousness apparently engendered profound resentment—anger great enough to prompt murder. Just as Cain resented Abel's righteousness, so the world will resent our righteousness. As a result, just as Cain hated Abel, so the world will despise Christians. This again counters the claims of the antichrists to be righteous Christians, while manifesting a lack of love and even a hatred toward true Christians.

True Christians, those born of God, have love for their brothers placed in their hearts by the Lord, so that we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Loving our brothers does not give us eternal life. God does that through Christ. If we have eternal life, we will manifest it by loving our brothers. We may have difficulty loving some Christians who make it hard to love them, but a fundamental desire to love them will show through our lives. Even Jesus' disciples quarreled among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. That was an unloving thing to do. It did not, however, relegate them to the realm of the unsaved.

3:16-18. In stark contrast to this unspeakable hatred is Jesus' remarkable love. We can understand what love is by looking at Jesus' example. He laid down his life for us. We ought to be prepared to do the same for one another. While the necessity of laying down our lives for one another is rare, the necessity of helping meet one another's needs is not. The true test of a Christian's love is not his words (loving with words or tongue) but his willingness to sacrifice for the sake of his brother... to love with actions and in truth.

3:19-21. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth: This phrase probably looks back to verses 17-18 rather than forward. If so, the apostle is saying that it is by our deeds of action and in truth that we know that we belong to the truth. The antichrists may have been teaching that they knew the truth by special, inner insight, even though their lives were models of greed and hatred. John countered this impression by claiming the mark of truth is a lifestyle of high moral character and good deeds growing out of our commitment to Christ.

In our desire to live lives of high moral character and good deeds toward others, we will fail. We will fall short even of our own ideals, let alone God's. When this happens, our hearts may condemn us. But we can rest in his presence, for God knows everything. He knows that we believe in Christ, that we strive to love our brothers, and that we regret falling short. God does not look only at the outer facts of imperfect love, but at the inner fact of having been born of God. The human heart is not the final standard. Rather, God is! God's power keeps us secure in him. God's power and steadfastness—not our own—give us security. As Jesus said, "My Father,

who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29).

3:21-22. We may silence our condemning hearts in two ways: (1) by confessing our sin (1:8) so that we are forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness, and (2) by resting in the fact that God knows all things, looking not just at our deeds but at our hearts. Once our hearts no longer condemn us, we can have confidence before God. This confidence leads us to fruitfulness in prayer. Characteristically, John states it in absolute terms: we receive from him anything we ask.

Some passages of Scripture seem to give assurance that we will receive anything we ask for (Matt. 7:7-8), but other passages give qualifications to answered prayer. The assurances of answered prayer seem to assume a knowledge of the qualifications. Answers to prayers are predicated on our obedience to God's commands. This same letter introduces the qualification of asking in God's will (5:14). We must ask in Jesus' name (John 14:13; 16:23,26), and abide in Jesus (John 15:7,16).

Stott (p. 148) points out that the receiving of answers to prayer is the Christian's habitual experience since the verbs are in the present tense. The conditions, along with the verb tense, suggest that John did not intend to promise a blank check for any and every prayer, but that answered prayer is the ongoing experience of the Christian. Even Jesus' request that the cup of crucifixion pass from him was not answered affirmatively (Luke 22:42). We should observe, however, that the request was followed by the statement, "Yet not my will, but yours be done."

3:23-24. What commands must we obey if we are to be fruitful in prayer? We must believe in Jesus and love one another. These two ideas stem from the same attitude of the heart, and John sees them as one command. To do one is to do the other. Those who obey God's commands live in him, or abide in him. Similarly, John 15 links abiding with obeying (15:9-10).²

References

1. Bayly, Lewis. *The Practice of Piety*. Britain: D. Midwinter, 1716.
2. Walls, David. *I & II Peter, I II & III John, Jude*. Edited by Max Anders. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012.

Author Bio

Lewis Bayly (The Practice of Piety)

Lewis Bayly (c. 1575 – 26 October 1631) held the office of Bishop of Bangor from 1613 until 1631. Having gained a reputation as a preacher, Bayly received several church and royal preferments. He was appointed as domestic chaplain to Prince Henry after the succession (and later became chaplain to King James) and as treasurer of St Paul's Cathedral in 1611.

David Walls (I & II Peter, I II & III John, Jude)

David Walls serves as the senior minister of First Congregational Church, Traverse City, Michigan. He is the author of four books, a frequent speaker on college campuses and at Bible conferences, and serves as an adjunct professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is married to Patricia and they have two adult sons, Jeremy and Kent.

Max Anders (I & II Peter, I II & III John, Jude)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling 30 Days to Understanding the Bible, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Daniel Akin (Exalting Jesus in 1, 2 & 3 John)

Daniel L. Akin is the president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in Humanities from the University of Texas at Arlington and has authored or edited many books and Bible commentaries including *Ten Who Changed the World* and *A Theology for the Church*.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Real)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Colin Kruse (The Letters of John)

Colin G. Kruse (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is senior lecturer of New Testament at Melbourne School of Theology. In the twenty years following his ordination into the Anglican ministry, Kruse gained practical experience in parishes in Australia and the U.S. along with five years of missionary service as a theological lecturer in Indonesia. Besides journal articles on the New Testament, Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Kruse has authored several books including *Paul, the Law and Justification* and *New Testament Models for Ministry: Jesus and Paul*. He has also written the Tyndale New Testament Commentary on 2 Corinthians and the Pillar New Testament Commentary titles *The Letters of John* and *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*.