

A photograph of a forest path covered in autumn leaves. The path is made of dirt and is covered with a thick layer of fallen red and orange leaves. The path leads into the distance, flanked by tall, slender trees with vibrant autumn foliage. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

CrossWise Living | *Bible Study Series*

# Walk

*The Letters of John*

Dr. Gail Bones





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*The Letters of John*

An intergenerational study:  
learning to walk in the light  
of God's love.

Dr. Gail Bones

## **Dedication**

For Summer Adelle Weeks,  
my first grandchild,  
gift of God, light of my life,  
who has lately learned to  
WALK.

CrossWise Living | Bible Study Series

# Walk: The Letters of John

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## About the Author

Gail Nelson Bones, Ed.D., is the founder of CrossWise Living, a ministry devoted to helping people at all stages in life navigate change through cross-generational relationships. She has been engaging audiences as a speaker, songwriter, and worship leader for over thirty years. Formerly a professor of education at San Diego Christian College, Dr. Bones is the award-winning author of *Living Cross Wise: Hope and Help for Navigating Transition* (2013).

Gail and her husband Jeff have been married for over 30 years and together have recorded seven albums of original Christian music. Along with their now-grown children, they spent many years presenting family concerts at churches across the United States. Gail is currently a women's ministry leader at her home church, a worship leader, and doting grandmother.



## About the Study

After the first introductory lesson, for each of the six weeks ahead you will have 5 days of homework to complete. Although you may wonder now how you will find the time to do this, you cannot imagine how beneficial it will be until you actually make a commitment to study the Word of God for yourself. When you ask God to help you fit this in to your daily schedule, he will show you, giving you the time and energy to keep your commitment. You will be discovering the delights of searching the Scriptures on your own, using both the Old and New Testaments to find answers to questions that will range from historical information to personal application.

Class sessions will start with a whole group discussion, where you may be asked to volunteer to share your answers or look up Bible verses to read aloud. The focus during this part of the class will on gaining and sharing knowledge.

During the second part of the class, you will meet in your small group for discussion of the personal application questions. The focus here will be on gaining wisdom, which is the ability to apply the knowledge you have gained. Because you will be in a smaller group, you will have more opportunity to share the details of how God is working in your life as a result of your study of his Word.

The final 15-20 minutes of your small group time will be devoted to sharing prayer requests. It is best if you come prepared with your request written down so that you can share briefly and concisely with your group members. This workbook contains a place for you to record prayer requests as each member shares.

# Tips for Leaders

## Suggestions for First Class Session – Introduction

1. The first lesson will provide the historical and cultural context that will widen and deepen your students' understanding of these New Testament books. You can keep it simple and just go through the passages in the workbook with your students, or you can add your own touches like PowerPoint maps and graphics. Feel free to inject your own style and personality into the presentation.
2. The study is meant to be interactive, so take full advantage of opportunities to get your students participating. Depending on the number of students you have, as they come in, you can hand out slips of paper with the passages you'll be referring to (about 30 in this lesson). Ask them to find their verses ahead of time and be ready to read when you call on them.
3. During the first session, two activities allow students to interact with those sitting near them. Monitor the time, keeping it brief.
4. Application Questions for discussion are provided in the dotted boxes for the second half of class, when students will meet with their small groups. Keep these groups small – ideally about six – which will give everyone a chance to share. For the first session, there are plenty of application questions to choose from. During the following weeks, students will have written their answers out, but this time, just ask for group members to volunteer their thoughts about any or all of these questions.
5. Make sure you have read through the material on pages 9 and 10 prior to the first session. As you go over this important background in the introductory session, your students will gain a deeper understanding of the letters they are about to study.

## Suggestions for Weekly Sessions

1. **Continue to invite participation** during the whole group sessions. You will note that most of even the informational, textual questions require critical thinking.
2. **Ask the Holy Spirit to guide** you each week as you choose the questions you want to emphasize in your whole group lesson since you will probably not have a chance to go over each question.
3. **Ask participants to mark the application questions** they are most interested in discussing in their small groups before they come to class. You may rotate the facilitation of discussion within the small groups each week.
4. **Prayer Requests.** As the leader, monitor the time. When you have about 15-20 minutes left for your session, announce that it is time to transition to prayer requests. Ask participants to come to class with their requests already written out so that their sharing will be concise enough for everyone to have a turn. Space is provided for recording these in the workbook. Have a plan for those times when someone needs some extra TLC or prayer- does your church have a counseling or prayer ministry? Is there someone who is willing to stay late to meet with ladies who might need extra support?





CrossWise Living | Bible Study Series

## Walk: The Letters of John

# SESSION 1

# Introduction

*“You’re blessed when you stay on course, walking steadily on the road revealed by God.”*

*Psalm 119:1 (MSG)*

# INTRODUCTION

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“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.” – 1 John 1:7

“... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” – Ephesians 4:1-4

“... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” – Galatians 5:22

“...so if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” – Luke 11:13

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” – John 8:12

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” – 2 Corinthians 5:7

1. Taking the verses above in sequence, what does God’s will for your life include? How does he want you to accomplish it?
2. How would you describe your “walk with God” at this point in your life? Check any of the synonyms that apply. Star those you aspire to.

- ☐ Bounce: *walk energetically*
- ☐ Glide: *to move with a smooth continuous motion*
- ☐ Hike: *take a long walk, especially in a park or a wilderness area*
- ☐ Hobble: *walk unsteadily or with difficulty, limp*
- ☐ Lurch: *walk slowly but with sudden movements*
- ☐ March: *walk rhythmically alone or in a group according to a specified procedure*
- ☐ Plod: *walk slowly and heavily, as if reluctant or weary*
- ☐ Power walk: *walk briskly for fitness*
- ☐ Prance: *walk joyfully, as if dancing or skipping*
- ☐ Pussyfoot: *walk stealthily or warily, be noncommittal*
- ☐ Ramble: *walk or travel aimlessly*
- ☐ Trudge: *walk with great effort*
- ☐ Stagger: *walk unsteadily*
- ☐ Stomp: *walk heavily, as if in anger*
- ☐ Stride: *walk purposefully, with long steps*
- ☐ Stroll: *A short, easy walk*
- ☐ Stumble: *walk clumsily or unsteadily*
- ☐ Toddle: *especially referring to the unsteady walk of a very young child*
- ☐ Traverse: *walk across or over a great distance*

3. Choose any of the synonyms (or add your own) to complete this sentence:

*Lord, I don't just want to walk with you, I want to \_\_\_\_\_!*

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## ABOUT THIS STUDY

This book is designed to help you spend time with the Lord each day by studying his Word, but not to overwhelm you with massive assignments. This is a guilt-free zone! Please don't stay away from your group meeting just because you haven't had time to complete assignments. On the other hand, commit to scheduling this as a vital part of your walk with the Lord. Each week includes 5 days of homework as well as two optional activities called "Walk and Talk" and "Walk and Worship."

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## ABOUT INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

**Question 1: What does it say?** This is a surface level question, but an important one. What's the general topic under discussion? The fact that this passage is in Scripture means it's important enough to *gaze* at rather than *glance* at it. This means noticing specifics. It also may mean observing what it does not say.

**Question 2: What does it mean?** To go a little deeper, we'll look into the subtle shades of meaning in the original Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. In addition to examining the context, we'll also cross-reference to other places in the Bible where the same topic is addressed, looking for patterns and principles.

After we've settled the first two questions, we're equipped to apply the passage to our lives. Underline the key words in the following Bible verse:

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." – 2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT).*

The Bible is our best source of the wisdom we need to live the abundant life Jesus promises. Each week provides questions for reflection and self-examination; God wants our knowledge of the Scriptures to transform our lives. In other words, how will we WALK this out?

**Question 3: What does it mean for me?** How does this passage apply to my life? We don't have license to take passages out of context to make them mean whatever we want, but we trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, who knows us intimately and lives within all believers in Christ, to speak timeless and relevant truth to us through the words of Scripture. As we listen and obey, our head knowledge becomes heart knowledge.

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## ABOUT THE LETTERS OF JOHN

### *Author*

John was one of three men in Jesus' inner circle of disciples. Although he was an unschooled fisherman, he contributed 5 of the New Testament's 27 books. John wrote these 3 letters to the early churches in about 90 AD from Ephesus after he was released from his exile on the island of Patmos. It was on Patmos that he'd had the vision of Jesus Christ and the end times that he would later write about in the book of Revelation.

He is also the author of the gospel of John, which he wrote in about 85-90 AD, 30 years after the other 3 gospels were composed. Very different in character from the other gospels— over 90% is unique to his gospel—it is a



topical rather than chronological history. This is likely indicative of the many years John spent reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' words and deeds under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised: "...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

## *Purpose*

1 John was written to reassure believers of their eternal security in God's love and to combat dangerous heresies that threatened the early church. Infiltration of false teaching has been a problem since Eve faced the crafty serpent in the Garden of Eden. Satan calls into question what God has said and, as the father of lies, attempts to twist its meaning. Cults and false religions always grow from the seed of a lie about God. Our best defense is to continue to learn all we can about God's word with the Holy Spirit as our teacher. John warns,

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:1-3).

## *Gnostic Heresy*

A central tenet of this false teaching was dualism, the belief all that all matter is inherently evil, and only the spiritual is good. This led to many other errors, several of which are specifically addressed in 1 John.

Understanding the heresies John is combating will help us to better understand the truths he emphasizes. We'll also see that these false teachings persist today under a variety of different names.

1. Gnostic teachers erroneously concluded that the incarnation could not have happened because deity could not unite itself with evil. Jesus' true humanity is thereby denied. One sub-group, Docetists, believed Christ only seemed to have a body. The other group, Cerinthianists, believed the "divine Christ" entered the body of Jesus the man at his baptism and left him before his death. As you read the first chapter, take note of what John says to refute this teaching.
2. Another critical error here is that salvation came about not by Christ's death and bodily resurrection, but through some special, secret knowledge (gnosis in Greek) given only to a few who could thereby escape the evil material body. They didn't believe in the resurrection of the body.
3. Their belief that the body is entirely evil led to two opposite streams of behavior:
  - a. **asceticism**- since the body was viewed as evil it was to be treated harshly.
  - b. **antinomianism**, or lawlessness, held that it didn't matter what you did with the body. Since it was evil and destined for destruction, it was okay to gratify every fleshly desire.

As you read, look for these resulting lies and notice how John refutes them:

1. You can walk with God and still do whatever evil thing you desire.
2. People are basically good, do not have a sin nature, do not sin and have no need to confess.

## GROUP ACTIVITY: JOHN'S BIOGRAPHY IN THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE:

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From each passage, what information do we gain about John, including his character and temperament? What do you learn about his relationship to Jesus? (Divide into pairs and have each report to the whole group what they discover in their assigned passage).

1. John 1:35-40 (as a disciple of John the Baptist, John is one of the two unnamed disciples who meet and spend time with Jesus)
2. Matthew 4:18-22 (first call)
3. Luke 5:1-11 (fishing)
4. Mark 3:13-17 and Mark 6:6-13 (as an apostle)
5. Luke 9:51-56 (Samaritan opposition)
6. Luke 9:46-50 (whoever is not against you)
7. Mark 5:35-43 (*talitha koum*)
8. Luke 22:8 and John 13:21-27 (last supper)
9. Mark 9:2-4 and Mark 14:32-41 (inner circle)
10. Matthew 20:20-28 with Mark 10:35-45 (pride)
11. John 18: 15-16 and John 19:25-27 (cross)
12. John 20:1-9 (empty tomb)
13. John 21:1-14, 20-24 (back in Galilee)
14. Acts 4:1-4, 13, 19-31 (ministry with Peter)
15. Rev.1: 9-19 (exile)

## SMALL GROUP: REFLECT & DISCUSS

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2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

How did knowing Jesus transform John's life? What kinds of growth and change did you see over the course of his life as described in the sources above?

What comes to mind first when you think about how Jesus has changed your life? Are you aware of ways you are continuing to change and grow as you yield your life to God's Holy Spirit and walk in the light of his love?

## ABOUT THE ADDITIONAL WEEKLY WALK OPTIONS

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### *Walk & Talk*

We all need more exercise, right? Many of us long to spend time with a mentor or mentee, or just to enjoy a spiritual friendship. Why not combine a walk with a focused talk? You could plan to meet with a different member of your small group each week for a walk at a designated spot. Or you could spend the next 7 weeks getting to know someone of a different age or life stage in a cross-generational mentoring relationship. We get to know one another best by sharing our lives and stories. At the end of each week you will find a personal devotional story you can read, if you choose, and then some questions to get your discussion started.

### *Walk & Worship*

Set aside 15 minutes each day for a solo prayer/praise walk. You can apply what you're learning about walking with God by choosing a scripture or passage to memorize from the weekly reading and meditating on its meaning. What does it teach you about the goodness and love of God? Look for a psalm, hymn or spiritual song that expresses the themes you are studying that day. Use this time for focused confession and expressions of gratitude to God.



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## Walk: The Letters of John

# LESSON 1

# Homework

*“Oh, that my steps might be steady,  
keeping to the course you set.”*

*Psalm 119:5 (MSG)*

# WELCOME

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Enjoy this time with the Lord as we plunge into our study of the Epistles of John! Don't feel guilt or undue pressure about completing every answer. Some of you will have lots of time and will get to answer every question. You'll journal daily and even schedule a weekly walk and talk with a friend or mentor. Others of you will be lucky to get the books open three days out of five. But it's not an all or nothing proposition! If you know you'll be pressed for time, scan through and select a few days to focus on. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you, and do what you can do. We're grateful you're a part of this group!

## *Our Approach*

The letters of John aren't organized in a linear fashion like those written by Paul, James, or Peter. In the same way that the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell the story of Jesus in chronological order, while John's gospel is more topical, his letters are more circular than linear. He introduces a topic and then returns to it, each time adding layers of meaning. It is fascinating to get to know this intense man through the stories told about him in the gospels and the book of Acts, and then to read his writings in the canon of Scripture —John's Gospel, 1,2,3 John, and the book of Revelation.

Each week we'll focus on one chapter and each day we'll look at a key word from the chapter and explore its deeper meaning from the original Greek. No one expects you to memorize 30 Greek words and their proper pronunciation, so you can relax! But you will be absorbing some, and this will only help you as you spend the rest of your life studying the New Testament in order to know Jesus better.

# DAY ONE

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**Word of the Day:** *theaomai* (theh-ah'-om-ahee) – to behold, to **look at**. To contemplate, to look upon with a sense of wondering, also, careful and deliberate vision which interprets its object.

**1 John 1:1** – “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.”

1. Read 1 John 1:1-2:2 rather quickly.
  - a. What general topics is John introducing in this first chapter?
  - b. Is there anything that surprises, intrigues, or puzzles you in this chapter? This is a place to record any questions you may have for your leader, or any specific observations you may want to bring up for discussion.

2. Next, we'll dig a little deeper in order to gain insight into what it means. Throughout our study we will be exploring the subtle shades of meaning of some of the original Greek words. References will be from one or more of the following:

Earle, R. *Word Meanings in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.

Vine, W.E. *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

Wuest, K. *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament, Vol. II*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

### *He Did More Than Just Look*

1 John 1:1 says regarding Jesus, "... which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon..." The Greek verb *theaomai* means "to contemplate, look upon with a sense of wondering," and also "careful and deliberate vision which interprets its object." It speaks of gazing at something rather than just glancing. This will be our approach as we study this book in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus.

We know that John spent the years from 30-33 AD with Jesus. He wrote his gospel and this epistle in 90 AD, some 60 years later.

- a. What does this tell us John was doing as he walked with Jesus in the flesh, and later as he walked with him in the Spirit? How does John 14:26 shed further light?

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Application questions, such as those that follow, are marked with dotted lines. They invite you to take the third step, to ask not only what the passage says and what it means, but what does it mean to you specifically? How is the Holy Spirit showing you to apply this truth in your life today? These questions will be set off from the others throughout the study so that you have the option of focusing on them in your small group discussions.

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3. What have you witnessed of God's presence, power, or love that you could confidently give eyewitness evidence for? What is your personal testimony of seeing God at work in tangible ways in your life?
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4. Spend the next week noticing the signs of God's presence in your life. How is he showing his love and care for you? What details do you notice? Expect to notice what others might call coincidences. Try to gaze rather than glance, and make a short entry of gratitude daily.

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5. Choose an aspect of God's creation and spend some time gazing upon it. What do you notice? What can you learn about God from what you see?

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