1 JOHN

OUTREACH

OFFERING LIFE-GIVING FELLOWSHIP WITH TRUTH AND LOVE

Dr. James M. Tarter

1JOHN OUTREACH

In 2010 my wife and I visited an officially unreached people group in India. But God had already begun to reach them in a very effective way. In 2000 He had revealed Jesus to a man in this people group through an evangelistic mission in Delhi. Of course, the evangelists were excited about the possibility of reaching this people group, but God has had a different approach than what they envisioned. God had led this man to reach out to his people in the same way that John had reached out to others that God was drawing to Jesus.

I shall describe this approach more fully in Chapter 7. Most of this book is about 1John. In Chapters 1-6 we find an often unnoticed way that John's Gospel and first epistle were helping others to share in the treasured life that John had found in his fellowship with Jesus and His Father. John wrote his Gospel to reveal Jesus and His unique relationship and fellowship with His Father and His disciples. John 14-16 adds that God's Spirit has continued Jesus' ministry to us after He left. 1John does not lay again the foundation in the Gospel of John, but builds on it by inviting those who are being drawn by God into this life-giving fellowship with truth and love. A reason that it is easy to overlook John's model is that he did not teach or describe it: he simply did it. By noticing what he did and how he did it, we too can do it.

Jim Tarter, 2010

CONTENTS

1. John's Gospel: Jesus Revealing the True God 5

2. 1John 1: Life-Giving Fellowship 11

3. 1John 1: Confession for Real Life 15

4. 1John 1-4: Truth or a Counterfeit 21

5. 1John 4: Love 29

6. 1John 5: Life Only with Jesus Christ 37

7. The 1John Outreach in India 41

8. Applying 1John to People Anywhere 45

About the Author 50

DEDICATION

to

MY WONDERFUL WIFE NITA

Whose love for the God of truth

helps her to love people with Him

Copyright ©2010, 2011 by James M. Tarter. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Permission granted to make copies for purposes consistent with furthering the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE® (1995 Updated Edition): © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

I call the New American Standard Bible the NAS. I add boldface to specific words and phrases in Scriptures to add my emphasis for discussion.

Fourth edition, 2011.

Chapter 1

The Gospel of John

JESUS REVEALING THE TRUE GOD

While on earth John received an opportunity to fellowship with Jesus. In his Gospel John shared what he found in this fellowship which continued with God's Spirit: that Jesus Christ perfectly manifested the true nature and character of the invisible Almighty God. He is a loving Father to His children through Jesus, loving us with a wonderfully unselfish love.

John's Gospel shows how Jesus perfectly revealed the true nature of His unseen Father. John begins by describing a very special Word. Consider John 1:1-3:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the* ***Word was with God****, and the* ***Word was God****. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and* ***apart from Him nothing came into being*** *that has come into being.*

Notice: this Word was with God and was God before anything was created. Then God worked with this Word to create all creation. And later this Word became human to fulfill key purposes. *"And the **Word became flesh**, and **dwelt among us**, and **we beheld His glory**, glory as of the **only begotten of the Father**, **full of grace and truth**"* (John 1:14). John 1:17-18 confirms that this Creator Word was Jesus before He came to earth: *"For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** were realized through **Jesus Christ**. **No man has seen God at any time**; the **only begotten God**, who is **in the bosom of the Father**, He has **explained Him**."*

This last verse shows one of the key purposes for Jesus to come to earth as a human. People had been unable to see God in a most important way: to see what He is really like – His true character and nature (while they mean the same, "character" emphasizes the qualities of a "nature"). People normally are aware of God, but no one except Jesus has been with Him well enough to know exactly what He is like. For example, many view invisible God primarily as a great punisher, and others view Him, Her, or It as punishing almost nothing. Therefore what is God really like? What is His nature or character?

Jesus revealed God's true nature in very practical ways, so that we can see what He is like and be transformed from glory to glory into His image. How? Consider John 5:19: *"…Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself,*

unless it is something ***He sees the Father doing****; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does* ***in like manner****."* Jesus did only what the Father did, and did it in the same way. By looking at Jesus, one can see what the Father did without any impurities added, and can see how the Father did it.

In His life on earth, Jesus showed the invisible God's exact nature so clearly that Heb. 1:3 calls Him *"the* ***exact representation*** *of* ***His nature"*** (other translations of "nature" include substance, being, or person). Therefore Jesus could tell His disciples: *"…****He who has seen Me has seen the Father****"*…(John 14:9). The disciples had seen the man Jesus for three years, but now they needed to look further and realize His nature and character, so that they could see the Father in Him. Jesus adds in v. 10: *"Do you not believe that* ***I am in the Father****, and* ***the Father is in Me****? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but* ***the Father abiding in Me does His works****."*

Jesus' exact representation of the invisible God did not include some features for our benefit, so that we can see God's true nature more fully. Hebrews 12:23 and many other Scriptures show that God is the Almighty Judge, but John 12:47 shows that Jesus did not exercise His role as the Judge while here physically. This actually helps people to see God's true nature much better, because some qualities in His full nature overpower people. Consider this further.

The fact of being eternally blessed or else condemned to eternal torment with no escape overpowers our ability to appreciate many other qualities of God. People around the world try to be right and at peace with their image of God, or angrily rebel at this image, or try to believe that He is not real or will not judge them. Why? With our sins and sin nature, being justly judged forever is so important to us that it distorts our views of the invisible God. This is like trying to examine the sun by looking directly at it: it overpowers our eyes so much that we cannot see anything. Likewise, God's almighty power in judgment keeps us from being able to learn other very important features of His true nature.

These qualities reveal much more about what God is really like: His unselfish love, faithfulness, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, mercy, compassion. The great *"I AM"* is also just, righteous, the Truth, the very best Provider, and the very best Father.

Therefore God came to us in a human body that clearly did not create the whole earth, and Jesus did not condemn people in judgment. Being careful to not overpower us, Jesus came with ordinary human strength and manifested (openly revealed) all the qualities of God that we need to see and appreciate. Jesus did teach the truth about God as the Almighty Judge (Luke 12:5, John 5:18-30, etc.) and about His other qualities that were not manifested in Jesus' human body (being everywhere, knowing everything, etc.). Because of our

limitations, not manifesting an overpowering feature of God's nature actually helps us to see His true nature more fully.

Look at what God did by coming to earth as Jesus. The eternal Word, Creator of everything, put off His almighty strength to become a helpless baby, a tiny part of His own creation: *"…Christ Jesus… existed in the form of God…but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men"* (Phil. 2:5-7).

Why did He make this sacrifice? Because we need Him so much, and He loves us. Our own deceitful hearts and the deceiving devil and demons have left everyone confused about the true nature of God, so that we would not recognize Him unless He helped us. And so God the Word became flesh, a human just like us except that He did not sin or do evil. Jesus lived a perfect life on earth (Heb. 4:15-16), doing only what God His Father was doing through Him. In this way Jesus perfectly revealed what invisible God is really like.

God has a wonderful eternal purpose for anyone who continues to let God lead him into God's ways for him: to transform him from glory to glory into the image of Christ Jesus (2Cor. 3:18), so that he can share in His divine nature (2Peter 1:4, Rom. 8:28-30).

God will be preparing us for this great eternal blessing by doing some essential work in our lives on earth while we stay in fellowship with Him and other believers in Jesus. In fact,

the key development in eternal life is to get to know Father God and Jesus Christ better and better: *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* (John 17:3). Our deceitful hearts limit how much and how quickly we can learn His true nature, but a key way to learn on earth is to live in fellowship with Him and with other believers.

In the loving fellowship with God, Jesus, and His far less perfect disciples, John found true life – eternal life, which is everlasting, but is also a quality of life that is beyond the realistic hopes of anyone who does not know God's perfect provision in Jesus Christ. John's Gospel helps us see who Jesus really is, so that through Him we can also realize invisible God's true nature and character.

God works in each person's heart to draw him to Jesus: *"No one can come to Me unless* ***the Father*** *who sent Me* ***draws him****….Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes* ***has eternal life****."* (John 6:44-47). At certain times in our lives, we are more open to receive His work than at other times. John wrote his Gospel so that we can recognize and receive God's work in our hearts to draw us to Jesus, so that we can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and thereby have the eternal life that is in Him (John 20:31).

Chapter 2

1John 1:1-4

LIFE-GIVING FELLOWSHIP

We have just seen that John wrote his Gospel in order to help us realize what God has done for us in sending Jesus, so that we can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Filled with the love of God in Christ, John did not want to keep to himself the treasure that he had found. John wrote his first epistle to help any believer – anyone receiving God's work in him to believe in Jesus – to join a life-giving fellowship in Christ with God and John and other believers like him.

At the beginning of 1John 1, he invited others to join their great fellowship with each other, so that their joy could be made complete: it would not be complete if they kept their wonderful treasure from those who needed it so much. What John could not have anticipated is that God extended his invitation to you and me and everyone else who has a Bible. This has merely let John's joy go far beyond anything that he could imagine at that time. Consider 1John 1:1-4:

[1]What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – [2]and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you ***the eternal life****, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – [3]what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also,* ***so that you too may have fellowship with us****; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. [4]These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*

In v. 1-2 John was testifying his own experience – not hearsay – which agreed with the experience of others in their fellowship. In it they had received true life through the Word of Life, Jesus. John proclaimed what they had experienced to others so that they too could join this fellowship.

Applying this to us, we must first find our life in Christ before we can testify about it. And God will develop a living testimony for each believer who continues to fellowship with God. Then we too can proclaim the eternal life that was with Father God and manifested to us with a true testimony of its reality in our lives.

This proclaiming has limited usefulness if it is only to believers who are already in fellowship with God and other believers in Jesus. But God is at work in many other people to draw them to Jesus (John 6:44-45), creating in them a deep hunger for love and life in truth and reality. If we are in fellowship with Him, then we can “hear” His telling us to invite a hungry one into our fellowship, so that he (of course, “he” includes “she”) can find this life and love in Jesus. He will fully

experience this life only by becoming a believer in this loving fellowship, but finding out that this really exists can be a huge and vital step toward becoming a believer in fellowship.

If we are to proclaim this reality, then we should let others confirm its reality. This requires us to give them some time (as God gives them and did give us as we came to know Him) instead of trying to make a "quick sell". If this helps an unbeliever to become a brother, then he may fully join our fellowship that provides life, and this fills us with joy.

Notice these key points. If we have not had a life-giving fellowship that is available in Christ, then we must get it before we can give it to others. If we have, then we can follow John's example and model: invite others into our fellowship with God and each other, so that others can taste and see that the love of God in Jesus is real and true. Then these others have now started their own fellowship with God, so that they can extend the process to still others.

Without realizing that he was following John's example, our brother in India had reached out to his people in this way. In 8 years, he had helped others to be born again, and they had already helped some others to receive Jesus, and still other people were seeing and beginning to appreciate the truth. We shall discuss this further in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3

John 1:5-10

CONFESSION FOR REAL LIFE

The rest of 1John 1 emphasizes the need for truth and being real in order to receive the life-giving fellowship that John was having in v. 1-4. Consider 1John 1:5-2:2:

> [5]*This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that* ***God is Light****, and in Him there is* ***no darkness*** *at all.* [6]*If we say that we have* ***fellowship with Him*** *and yet* ***walk in*** *the* ***darkness****, we lie and do* ***not practice the truth****;* [7]*but* ***if*** *we* ***walk in the Light*** *as He Himself is in the Light, we have* ***fellowship with one another****, and the* ***blood of Jesus*** *His Son* ***cleanses us from all sin****.* [8]*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* [9]***If*** *we* ***confess*** ***our sins****, He is* ***faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness****.* [10]*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and* ***His word is not in us****.* [1]*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may* ***not sin****. And* ***if*** *anyone sins, we have an* ***Advocate*** *with*

the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, [2]and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1John 1:5-2:2)

V. 6-7 emphasize both features of the fellowship of 1:3: it is with God (v. 6) and with one another (v. 7). Light exposes truth and what is real that could stay hidden under the cover of darkness. The key issue is what we do with sin when it is exposed in our fellowship (v. 7-10). If I deny my sin, then I deceive myself, claim that God is a liar, and reject God's word of truth out of me (v. 8, 10). If I confess my sin, then God will forgive me and cleanse me from all sin and unrighteousness (v. 7, 9). What a stark contrast! Let us consider it further.

Rom. 3:23 and all of Old Testament history demonstrate that everyone sins and is unable to escape his sinful nature by his own efforts. (My own history agrees.) Therefore in love God made a just way to save mankind: Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross. As 1John 2:2 shows, our Creator paid the just penalty for every sin that His creation would ever commit. But only believers in Jesus receive His great sacrifice for our eternal salvation, and few believers make full use of His sacrifice for our close, loving fellowship with God while on earth.

1John 1:9 tells us to *"confess our sins"* in order to receive this blessing. The Greek word for "confess" means "say the same thing". All must tell the truth when directly before God, but in confession I say the same as God would speak about my part in the real issue. This means that my heart agrees

with Him about it – I truly repent! An excellent Bible teacher, Charles Simpson, has said: "God is great at taking us from where we are to where we should be, but He refuses to take us from where we pretend to be to where we should be."

The failure to truly confess sins has caused many people to lose close fellowship with God since the beginning of mankind. Consider the ancestors of all of us: Adam and Eve. They enjoyed a close fellowship with God until they disobeyed His commandment to them by being deceived by the crafty serpent (Gen. 3:1-6). Gen. 3:7-13 shows their fatal responses to God after they sinned:

> *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. Then the* ***Lord God called to the man****, and said to him,* ***"Where are you?"*** *He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked?* ***Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"*** *The man said, "The* ***woman*** *whom* ***You gave*** *to be with me,* ***she gave me*** *from the tree, and* ***I ate****." Then the Lord God said to the woman,* ***"What is this you have done?"*** *And the woman said, "The* ***serpent deceived me****, and* ***I ate****."* (Gen. 3:7-13)

God knew all the answers of the questions He asked, but He was giving Adam and Eve opportunities to speak about their part in the real issue. They kept speaking truths to God but always avoided the truth that needed to be confessed. When Adam was hiding from God in shame, God merely asked, *"Where are you?"* Adam's sin was causing all of his

actions and clearly was heavy on his heart, but he was not willing to confess. He wanted to hide that truth because he refused to trust God's love or mercy for his fear and shame. Then God explicitly asked Adam about his sin, and he again spoke truths to God in order to avoid the key truth. Adam blamed both the woman and God for the sin: he was denying his guilt as he finally said "I ate". He missed his opportunity to confess, and lost his close fellowship with God on earth.

Then Eve missed her opportunity to confess. She accurately blamed the serpent, but avoided her guilt. By refusing to confess, she also lost her close fellowship with God. Now God would keep them from eating from the tree of life and thereby living forever – this tree of life is the cross of Christ from the foundation of the world.

How do we avoid their error? Consider this illustration. I am tired and frustrated because my plans to do a job did not work. A frustrated co-worker makes a heated comment to me, and I fire back with anger. I really want to shut him up now and keep him from treating me like that in the future, and at this moment deeply hurting him is OK.

What do I confess to God? "I desired to hurt him without regard for what You wanted." My heart agrees with God to humble myself before my co-worker and admit: "My comment came from my mess, not an honest assessment of you." I receive God's costly sacrifice for my sin, so that by faith I am freely forgiven without earning this myself – I am justly

restored to the righteousness of Jesus after my selfish sin. If I try to reduce the guilt of my sin (blaming, excuses to justify myself, etc.), then I lose my confession and the restoration of my close fellowship with God.

Now fellowship with Jesus and Father God differs from our Father-child relationship with Him through Jesus, which is established when we receive Him into our hearts and lives, when we believe in Him. For example, a two-year-old son's anger does not disturb his relationship with a good parent, but can disrupt their fellowship until he gets things straight. Fellowship may change greatly within a secure relationship, even to the extent of drying up for a time.

We are like our ancestors Adam and Eve: it is natural for any of us to fail to honestly confess our full guilt and accept His mercy in Jesus by faith for all of our guilt. Since we are so likely to fail, why does our loving God require us to confess honestly? In a brief answer, because we need to live in reality and truth instead of avoiding or denying it.

With a right heart-attitude, my good confession may be done in a moment. If my heart is not ready to fully agree with God about the real issue, then I need to work with God on the problems in my heart. God is not looking for a legalistic or long confession, but avoiding the real issue can prevent a real "confession" and growth in the truth.

What do I do about my previous poor confessions? As when I first came to Jesus, I confess to God that my sins are

too many to know or list, and I ask Him to straighten me out. Our Father will gladly do this gently over time: *"I* [Paul] *press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect,* ***have this attitude****; and if* ***in anything you have a different attitude****,* ***God will reveal that also to you****"* (Phil. 3:14-15); and *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to* ***cleanse us*** *from* ***all unrighteousness****"* (1John 1:9).

God fully cleanses our hearts while we stay in fellowship with Him – not while we are in the deadly place of staying apart from Him. To keep us close, He freely gives us the righteousness of Jesus (Phil. 3:9), so that He does not require the impossible from us. What 1John shows is that God calls us and perfectly equips us to live in close fellowship with Him by Jesus' great sacrifice of His blood, even if our sin nature disrupts our fellowship from time to time. At a great cost to Himself, He made it so simple for a believer to get back with God.

I included 1John 2:1-2 as I quoted 1John 1 to show our need to maintain a goal of not sinning in order to receive this life. Accepting my sin automatically destroys my confession.

Chapter 4

1John 1:5-4:6

TRUTH OR A COUNTERFEIT

We have seen our need for truth and reality in order to relate well with God. 1John 1:9 is His clearest promise to cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we confess our sins. This is His demand for us to be honest and real with ourselves and with Him, His demand for truth. The Greek word for truth means that there is nothing hidden, the inside is like the outside, and the unseen reality agrees with the appearance. The God of truth sees it all, so that we can expect Him to be especially sensitive to our diligent efforts to hide the truth with false appearances, and even more sensitive if we build them with motives to manipulate or deceive with evil self-seeking.

Loving the truth protects us from self-deception and from attempts by others to deceive us. John jumps into this quickly

in 1John. After introducing us to our life-giving fellowship in v. 1-4, John immediately (v. 5-7) tells us that God is Light and contrasts our fellowship with Him to the walk in darkness and failing to practice the truth. Light reveals the truth that darkness might help to hide or cover up.

We considered 1John 1:5b-10 from the viewpoint of life-giving fellowship. Now notice how this is about revealing truth:

> 5 *...**God is Light**, and in Him there is **no darkness at all**.*
> 6*If **we say** that we have **fellowship with Him** and yet **walk in the darkness**, **we lie** and do **not practice the truth**;*
> 7*but **if** we **walk in the Light** as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.* 8*If **we say** that we have **no sin**, we are **deceiving ourselves**, and **the truth** is **not in us**.* 9*If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to **forgive** us our sins and to **cleanse** us from **all** unrighteousness.* 10*If **we say** that we have **not sinned**, we make Him a liar and **His word** is **not in us*** (v. 5b-10).

I must <u>first</u> <u>apply truth</u> <u>to myself</u> (v. 8-10), because if I deny the truth of my own sin and sinfulness, then I deceive myself and really cannot go further until I receive the truth over what I like. Being one of mankind, the hardest truth for me to face honestly is my own sin: it reveals a problem that I greatly prefer to avoid, like the first ancestors of all mankind tried to do. And "sin" is anything that "misses the mark" of living by God's word to me – hearing and doing all that He tells me to do. I need to <u>love the truth</u> <u>with</u> <u>all of my heart</u> in order to really confess my full guilt, so that I want to deal with the real issue instead of avoiding it.

Throughout 1John 1-4, John provides insights and tests that identify what is the truth and what is deceptive or a lie. Ten times in 1John 2-5 he says something like, *"By this we know"* or *"We know by this"*. Eighteen other times he says something like, *"You know"* or *"We know"*. The discerning between those who bring the truth and the liars and deceivers begins within ourselves in 1John 1 and is repeatedly brought up in 1John. We greatly need to be grounded in truth.

Notice the first examples of identifying the truth from a lie:

> ***By this we know*** *that we have come to know Him,* ***if*** *we keep His commandments. [4]The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a* ***liar****, and* ***the truth*** *is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has* ***truly*** *been perfected.* ***By this we know*** *that* ***we are in Him****: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked* (1John 2:3-6).

John first helps his readers confirm that their relationship with Jesus is real and grounded in truth in 1John 1:7-10 and 2:3-6, and in v. 3-6 he also helps us to see if anyone else is lying with false statements of knowing Jesus or being in Him.

In 1John 2:18-24 and 4:1-6 John helps his readers to distinguish between those who bring the truth and the liars and deceivers in the most crucial issue: Jesus Christ or an antichrist – a counterfeit. In this context John writes:

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to ***deceive you****. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about*

*all things, and is **true** and is **not a lie**, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him* (1John 2:26-27).

V. 27 has been taken out of its context to say that we believers do not need to be taught except by God's Spirit, but even here John is giving them an insight they need. A similar distortion has been made of 1John 2:21 in the same context:

> *I have not written to you because you do **not know the truth**, but because **you do know it**, and because **no lie is of the truth**. [22] Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son* (1John 2:21-22).

In both v. 21 and v. 26-27 John was telling his believing readers that God had already let them know the truth about Jesus instead of lies from deceivers like an antichrist. Therefore his readers did <u>not need</u> <u>extra knowledge</u> to know the truth, but they did <u>need</u> <u>their discernment</u> to be <u>affirmed</u>, and here John provided this insight to affirm it.

I could say much more about truth in 1John, but here let us apply what we have seen to today. Lies, deception, hype, and exaggeration are everywhere on earth, and this includes with many who call themselves Christians. The God of truth wants people to be able to <u>find out</u>, <u>test</u>, and <u>confirm</u> <u>what is true</u> and <u>really from Him</u> in the midst of all of this deception and lies. This is a key part of our fellowship with Him and other believers, and the opportunity to find true life should be provided to anyone who wants the truth (wanting the truth is a good indicator that the God of truth is drawing him to Jesus).

Therefore this opportunity to confirm truth is a key part of our "1John outreach" to other people.

The beginning of John's other two brief epistles confirms how essential truth is for our walk with Jesus – our life-giving fellowship in Christ with God and other believers.

> *1The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I **love in truth**; and not only I, but also all who know **the truth**, 2for the sake of **the truth** which abides in us and will be with us forever: 3Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, **in truth and love**. 4I was very glad to find some of your children **walking in truth**, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father* (2John 1-4).

> *1The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I **love in truth**. 2Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. 3For I was very glad when brethren came and **testified to your truth**, that is, how you are **walking in truth**. 4I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children **walking in the truth*** (3John 1-4).

The emphasis on truth in both Scriptures is clear.

Loving Truth Needed for Real Life

Telling about the antichrist, 2Thes. 2:10-12 shows how we can set ourselves up to get deceived:

> *10and with all the **deception of wickedness** for those who perish, because they did **not receive the love of the truth** so as to be saved. 11For this reason God will send upon them a **deluding** influence so that they will **believe what is false**, 12in order that they all may be judged who did **not believe the truth**, but **took pleasure in wickedness**.*

Much is clear here, but I needed a friend (Sheila Whitcomb) to show me the following key point. We can be deceived against our wills, but "delusion" implies our willingness or even desire to be deceived. The Greek word is often translated as "error" (a wandering from the truth). Its context in the New Testament often shows a willingness to be deceived (including the error of God-rejecters in Rom. 1:27, those who do not escape the error of the false prophets in 2Peter 2:18 and 3:17, and the error of the extraordinarily self-deceived Balaam in Jude 11 and Numbers 22).

This willingness to be deceived fits well into 2Thes. 2:10-12 and "common sense": if we refuse to receive the truth for any reason, then we naturally grab for any way to replace it or justify our choice for a lie. Instead of rejecting truth, we need to love it, so that our hearts want it more than what we hope to get out of any lie. Indeed, v. 12 identifies *"taking pleasure in wickedness"* as the alternative to *"believing the truth"*.

The discussion of spiritual warfare in Eph. 6 is consistent with our need to love truth. Spiritual warfare is full of deception by lying spirits. Then it makes sense that the first piece of armor of God mentioned in Eph. 6 is the belt of truth. We are to *"gird our loins with truth"* (v. 14). "Girding our loins" is a cultural idiom that means to bind up our clothes from casual wear, so that they do not interfere with handling an urgent issue. We need to live undistracted and alert in the God of truth, always sensitive to what He wants done. This is

loving both God and truth, so that we receive and embrace the truth, even though it does not flatter our proud, self-seeking, and self-centered "flesh". We do not play around God's life-giving truth, but go straight for it and embrace it. Adam and Eve played around the truth: they spoke truths in order to avoid confessing the truth (Chapter 3).

We have seen our need to love and embrace truth in order to protect us from self-deception and from deception by others, so that we experience the life that Jesus bought for us with His blood. Now let us consider how the model in 1John can help others find the truth in God that leads to real life. You may remember (p. 11-13) that this model gives people the freedom to test and confirm what is true and real.

In John 14:6 Jesus Christ proclaims: *"I am the way, and **the truth**, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."* God has ways for people to come to Him that are <u>not</u> through <u>any one group</u> of <u>Christ</u>ians, but each group of believers should continue to extend the truth and life that <u>comes</u> <u>only</u> <u>from the Father</u> <u>through Jesus</u>. We provide life with the truth through fellowship with the Father, Jesus, and other believers in Him.

The model in 1John enables people to taste the love and goodness of the true God in a very non-threatening way. This helps them to get convicted by truth and reality instead of trying to find the truth while experiencing strong pressures

that are not related to the essential truth about God and Jesus Christ. Indeed, true fellowship with God and other believers includes a combination of love and truth that simply is not available apart from God. In Eph. 4:15 Paul showed an essential ingredient needed for believers to form the fully mature Body of Christ: *"speaking the **truth** in **love**"*. Therefore let us examine what the Bible shows clearly about this love, so that we can produce and live in this God-given combination of love and truth that is too rare.

Chapter 5

1John 4:7-5:3

LOVE

1John starts with a proclamation of a life-giving fellowship with God and other believers in Jesus Christ, and then quickly gets into making sure that this fellowship is real and true. Without truth, we do not find real life, but only counterfeits in this deceptive world. However, truth without love will crush practically all life out of fellowship. Therefore after John has shown us how to distinguish the spirit of truth and the spirit of error in 1John 4:6, in v. 7 through 5:3 he reminds us of the great love of God that is the source of our best love for Him and others (v. 19). Consider 1John 4:6b-5:3:

> *[6]…By this we know the **spirit of truth** and the spirit of error.*
> *[7]Beloved, let us **love one another**, for **love is from God**; and everyone who **loves** is born of God and knows God. [8]The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**. [9]By this the **love of God** was **manifested <u>in</u> us**, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world **so that we** might **<u>live</u> through Him**. [10]In **this is love**, not*

*that we loved God, but that **He loved us** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11]Beloved, **if God so loved us**, **we** also **ought to love one another**. [12]No one has seen God at any time; **if we love one another**, **God abides in us**, and **His love is perfected in us**.*

*[13]By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. [14]We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. [15]Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. [16]We have come to know and have believed the **love** which **God has for us**. **God is love**, and the one who **abides in love abides in God**, and **God abides in him**.*

*[17]By this, **love is perfected with us,** so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. [18]There is **no fear in love**; but **perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is **not perfected in love**. [19]**We love, <u>because He first loved us</u>**.*

*[20]If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the **one who does not love his brother** whom he has seen, **cannot love God** whom he has not seen. [21]And this commandment we have from Him, that **the one who loves God should love his brother also**. [5:1]Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and **whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him**. [2]By this we know that **we love the children of God**, when **we love God** and observe His commandments. [3]For this is **the love of God, that we keep His commandments**; and His commandments are not burdensome.* (1John 4:6b-5:3)

This section has a clear emphasis on love: it is used 32 times in 18 verses. In contrast, love was rarely mentioned before 1John 4:7 [the exceptions are our love as a <u>clear test</u> that we really are <u>walking in truth</u> (2:5, 2:9-11, 3:10-20), a brief instruction to <u>not love</u> the world nor the things in it (2:15),

and brief reminders of our Father's great love for us (3:1) and His commandment for us to love one another (3:23)].

My boldfacing provides my discussion of this Scripture except for two unboldfaced comments. God's love being or not being "perfected" in us (v. 12, 17, 18) is a "maturing into a good end result" instead of a "flawless perfection" that the English word suggests. Second, v. 12-16 form a subsection about abiding or staying in God and in love: this is a result or manifestation (v. 8-9a) of our abiding fellowship with our loving God, in which we stay in Him and He stays in us.

Here we shall consider the meaning of "love" (*agape*). Some readers may think that this is unnecessary, but common preconceived, unscriptural meanings remove love's life-giving fruit. Here is my conclusion: *agape* love is doing what God wants me to do for the loved one without this being distorted by self-seeking or selfishness. The Scriptures and our discussion of them can strengthen the conviction in our hearts that can make the difference between spiritual life and deadness in practice.

What Love Is, And What Love Is Not

"God is love" (1John 4:8, 16). It is His nature. Everything He does comes from His nature and is consistent with love. This is also true for other features of His nature, such as being righteous, just, compassionate, the Provider, and more. Therefore there is a balance in the truth that God is love, and it is often hard to realize what love is like by looking at what

we think He is doing in this world. Our deceiving sin nature, Satan, and limited perspectives make this even harder.

Therefore we need other ways to see what this "love" is really like. Love is a command, and so I decide to love or not: *agape* is not the feeling of love even when such feelings are present. And more thoroughly than any other Scripture, 1Cor. 13:4-7 tells what love is and is not. Indeed, realizing its opposite gives us a much better understanding of the real meaning of love, so that we can aim better at living in Christ. Consider the 15 qualities of *agape* love in v. 4-7:

> *Love is **patient**, love is **kind**, and is **not jealous**; love does **not brag** and is **not arrogant**, does **not act unbecomingly**; it does **not seek its own**, is **not provoked**, does **not take into account a wrong suffered**, does **not rejoice in unrighteousness**, but **rejoices with the truth**; **bears** all things, **believes** all things, **hopes** all things, **endures** all things.* (1Cor. 13:4-7)

You should consider each quality by itself at a good time for you. Here we discuss the picture from all of them together that conflicts with common ideas about "love". *Agape* love goes beyond mere good attitudes or actions toward another: I can have or do them while bragging arrogantly, rejoicing in unrighteousness, being self-seeking, easily provoked, etc. Hate, a strong dislike and hostility against another, is really not the opposite of this love. I can hate patiently and without jealousy or bragging or arrogance, etc.

Therefore what is the opposite of *agape* love? Every quality – 15 out of 15 – specifically opposes and corrects a

self-seeking heart attitude and value system. Consider how each quality of *agape* love corrects a major problem caused by a self-seeking attitude. Self-seeking:

* is not patient with others as I look out for what I want
* is jealous and is too concerned with myself to be kind
* brags and is arrogant
* acts unbecomingly when I am resisted or overlooked
* seeks its own (by its very nature)
* is easily provoked and is very sensitive to a wrong suffered
* rejoices in whatever provides well for me, whether or not it is the truth
* poorly bears, believes, hopes, or endures things from others

Self-seeking creates problems whenever people relate. If I am self-centered and self-seeking, then I lack interest in providing good for you unless that helps me. *Agape* rejects the self-seeking in my heart in order to seek for the good of another. Love corrects the effects of self-seeking and also ministers to any indifference or hatred I have.

Like grace, *agape* does not come from any redeeming feature or merit of the one who is being loved, but instead this love comes by the choice and inner condition of the one who loves. Within us is God, who is love and who enables us to love others (1John 4:8, 16, 19). If I keep loving by His Spirit on earth, then I relate well to others, seek their good, and may help both of us get prepared for our eternal futures. Indeed, love is a key to fulfilling His purpose for our lives on earth and in all eternity.

What does agape love look like? How is it expressed to a person? There really is no simple answer that fits everyone at all times, but *agape* is expressed in what the person does or does not do for another. Therefore our loving Father sent Jesus in order to show us love by a perfect Example instead of telling us a complicated answer.

One way it is complicated is that the specific expression of love to anyone depends on the way he responds to it. To illustrate, any parent should know that a sensitive, obedient, and compliant child needs a different expression of parental love and instruction than a rebellious, strong-willed child – but both need non-self-seeking love.

In another illustration, 1Thes. 5:14 shows that three kinds of people have different needs, even while all need the patience of *agape* love: *"Now we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men."* Consider this further.

The unruly do not need help or encouragement, but firm discipline and correction. The second group is fainthearted, so that they need encouragement to use their own strength instead of help (extra strength). Moreover, firm discipline or admonishment usually causes them to retreat further into inaction. In contrast, the weak lack the strength to use, and so encouragement and firm discipline are useless.

Therefore God instructs us to provide what is truly good for each person, which depends on the person's condition at

that time. Love can be firm or tender according to what the other person needs – providing the gentle firmness of God's loving Spirit and the patience of love (Gal. 5:23, James 3:17) – because a lover's love seeks what is truly good for the other person over a personal preference for a kind of ministry.

As stated on p. 34, God does more than describe what love is really like: He provides the perfect example of Jesus, who shows us love in action. 1Peter 2:21-25 summarizes the ultimate expression of His great love for us:

> *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.* (1Peter 2:21-25)

Jesus gave us this great blessing by being totally unselfish as His love for God and for us produced His complete obedience (John 14:15, 23).

I can also learn about the nature of love by carefully observing how God loves me personally. But as stated at the beginning of this section, we need to be most careful in order to not misinterpret and misunderstand. We do not know our future on earth, and we know far less about our much greater future in eternity. Love looks especially at the long-term

good, while we naturally have a much more limited perspective and interpret events from this poor perspective. We also naturally have a self-centered perspective that robs our understanding of the whole balanced truth. And my denial in failing to fully admit my sins to myself can greatly distort my understanding of many situations.

In fact, only God knows all that is needed for anyone's eternity, so that we need to turn to Him to receive what He wants to provide for any person at any specific time. We can do this as we stay in close fellowship with Him (1John 4, John 15:7, and other Scriptures).

Truth, Love, and Life in Fellowship

Describing our growing into a Christ-like Body of Christ, Eph.4:15-16 brings out the life-giving combination of truth and love that causes the growth of the body:

> *but speaking the **truth in love**, we are to **grow up in all aspects into** Him who is the Head, even **Christ**, from whom the **whole body**, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the **proper working of each individual part**, **causes** the **growth of the body** for the **building up of itself in love**.*

This is an extremely healthy body of believers in Jesus Christ, so that with love and truth they help one another grow up in a life-giving fellowship with each other and with God.

Chapter 6

1John 5:4-21

LIFE ONLY WITH JESUS CHRIST

1John 1 begins with the Word of Life and fellowship with God, His Son Jesus Christ, and other believers. 1John 1:5 to 1John 5:3 emphasizes truth and love in our fellowship. But none of this comes without Jesus: He makes this life-giving fellowship available by His great sacrifice of His life-giving blood for us (1John 1). The sinful human nature will ruin attempts to provide life, love, and truth without Jesus, coming up short in truth and love and not producing eternal life.

Truth and love fit into 1John by helping us to grow in God's *agape* love and by providing needed checks to confirm that we are fellowshipping with Jesus and the true God – not a counterfeit. And then 1John 5 follows up the previous four chapters about truth and love by bringing us back to the key to all life: this eternal life only comes through the true God and

His Son Jesus Christ. This begins with 1John 5:4-5, showing that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world, and asking and answering this key question: *"Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (believe is the verb of the Greek noun for faith).

The key of believing in Jesus for receiving our eternal life is shown in 1John 5:9-13:

> *If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for* ***the testimony of God is*** *this,* ***that He has testified concerning His Son****. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the* ***testimony that God has given concerning His Son****. And the testimony is this,* ***that God has given us eternal life, and <u>this life</u> <u>is</u> <u>in His Son</u>. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.*** *13These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,* ***so that you may know*** *that* ***you have eternal life****.*

The underlined Scripture shows the key point, so that I do not repeat it here. I will comment on a point in v. 13 that has been used to limit 1John to believers. V. 13 <u>affirms</u> that we who believe in Jesus can know that we have eternal life. This affirmation is a very helpful insight for believers, but may be even more helpful for those whom God is leading to receive Jesus and have <u>not yet</u> seen enough truth to decide. This affirmation does not undo or negate the invitation in 1John 1:1-4 to all whom God is calling into this fellowship with Him and us, and especially those who are learning the key truth.

V. 14-15 continues the affirmation given to us who have believed Jesus for eternal life: if we ask anything according to God's will, then He hears us and we can know that He will provide it. V. 16-17 provide a clarification, an example of a request that is not according to God's will.

V. 18-21 form the epistle's conclusion, re-emphasizing that our life-giving relationship with the true God comes only in His Son Jesus Christ. Indeed, in v. 13 onward John went over things that we believers can and should know: he wrote "we (or you) know" (sometimes "conditionally") in v. 13, 15, 18, 19, and 20. Consider especially 1John 5:20-21:

> *[20]And **we know** that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that **we may know Him** who is **true**; and we are **in Him** who is **true**, i**n His Son Jesus Christ**. This is the **true God** and **eternal life**. [21]Little children, guard yourselves from idols.*

Even if the whole world is deceived by the devil's lies, Jesus gives us understanding so that we may know the true God and receive eternal life. How does the warning against idols fit? The world cannot rob us of our life in Christ unless we let it set up idols in our hearts that would entice us away from the truth and the life in our true God.

In Chapters 2-6 we have seen how John extended the foundation laid in his Gospel to others who were not yet in fellowship with him. John's Gospel had shown who Jesus is and revealed His unique relationship with His Father and the

Holy Spirit. John's Gospel also revealed God's work to draw people to believe in Jesus. 1John did not go over any of this again, but started from that foundation to help those he was writing to join this life-giving fellowship instead of a lifeless counterfeit. In his invitation to extend this fellowship, he showed many ways to recognize the truth among many lies – especially about Jesus Christ or an antichrist – and to distinguish those who bring truth from liars and deceivers. Of course, God's love is an identifying feature of this fellowship in Christ Jesus and produces its life.

Let us see a good way for us to do like John did for those whom God was drawing to Jesus: to extend God's invitation for them to come into this life-giving fellowship with Him and believers in Jesus.

Chapter 7

THE 1JOHN OUTREACH IN INDIA

In the Preface I told about a friend in India who belongs to an officially unreached people group. He has reached out to his people like John reached out to others in his Gospel and 1John, who were not yet in fellowship with God, Jesus, and other believers like him. Let us see how our friend Narayan did this successfully.

Ten years ago, Narayan had met Jesus when he was in Delhi. Eight years ago he sensed that God told him to return to his people. God also led him into a very effective way to reach his people: to help them taste the love of God in Christ Jesus without rushing them to make a pre-mature decision to receive Him. They get to see that His love and the Gospel are real and true, so that when they decide for Jesus, they have also decided to leave their empty idols for the true God. This is the heart of the 1John outreach.

Within a few years God saved two other men apart from Narayan, and brought them back to other locations of this people group. By 2010, each man was using this outreach, and several hundred people had made a firm decision to receive Jesus with the forsaking of idols, while hundreds more are still checking out the reality and truth which they are starting to see and experience.

Let us examine this approach to reach this people more closely. This will help us to recognize God's leading to reach people in other situations and cultures.

Reaching an Unreached People Group

This people group is not isolated, but instead has kept its identity while being exposed to outsiders for centuries. Therefore even in secular issues, this culture has ways for its people to resist outside influences that would take its people into a different culture or bring in a different culture. In some people this resistance is strengthened by their associating the previous Christian outreach to this people with colonialism. To all of this is added the biggest factor: the subtle but intense spiritual opposition that stirs up much confusion and distortions when people are being reached for Jesus.

God had reached each of our three friends (and several others). He brought each one into a fellowship with Him and Jesus that they could testify about and proclaim like John did.

Then each one started helping some other people with whom God had been working in their hearts to bring them to

Jesus. He also answered their prayers according to His will, which includes healings and some testifiable miracles in the name of Jesus – both natural-looking and clear works of God – as well as disappointments from wrong expectations. With God's work in real-life situations and within the hearts of both believers and "the drawn" (Narayan called them "interested"), people were getting an opportunity to find out what Jesus and the true God are really like. "The drawn" had actually begun to relate to Him, to interact or fellowship with Him.

Being with other believers strengthened this fellowship. As they came together, anyone could testify of God's work in his or her life, and the more experienced could often add a helpful perspective or understanding. Most of the spreading of this fellowship with God through Jesus and other believers came within extended families. When one member decided to receive Jesus, others were able to see His work to change the believer in good ways, so that family members could see and test and taste the love, goodness, and reality of God. This has helped many to get a healthy respect of and desire for Jesus and Christianity instead of learning foreign words and concepts, which this people group naturally resists.

There was no Bible in their language, but the Bible in languages that some of them knew provided a source and foundation of truth in their lives. God had given all of them a strong desire for truth and reality, and when they could see Biblical truths without distortion, they were appreciated.

Therefore through this outreach, the God of truth has continued to draw people who strongly desire truth and who value the other features of God. These people have had an opportunity to taste the real love of God and to test truth without being pushed into making hurried decisions for Him.

In this outreach, people find God's love that casts out fear (1John 4:18-19). Fear is often the root of violent idolatry, and fear is easily provoked by other people and evil spirits who want control or to feed their greed. This approach also cuts through the resistance to outside influences that can be used like fear is used to stir up violent opposition. Because this outreach is not against human authorities, their control is not attacked, and unhealthy reactions fed by fear are minimized.

We can see how a conventional approach to reach this people group is destructive. A good Bible college in India sent a few young men to evangelize. They knew Jesus and were well equipped to preach and defend the true Gospel. One testified that he had preached the Gospel to a woman, who resisted it like she would any other strange concept from an "outsider". The more she resisted, the more he preached, which only confirmed to her that this foreign idea is a real danger, so that the content of his message was drowned out while the resistance was strengthened. Later this encounter could hinder her from seeing the truth without the distortions created by fear, or could be used to stir up fear in others.

In contrast, the 1John outreach melts this resistance.

Chapter 8

APPLYING 1JOHN TO PEOPLE ANYWHERE

I believe that the people group in India needed this 1John approach. With only slight adjustments made for differences in people's backgrounds, this should also be very effective for reaching all kinds of people with the truth and life in Jesus Christ. I first identify a few features about "culture" that could help us reach some people almost anywhere. Then we can consider how principles in India can apply in the U.S. By seeing the application in both cultures, we get key insights for helping most people anywhere to receive the truth.

A culture is defined by the values, customs, practices, ways of living, and laws that its members accept as their own. Cultures may be built on a location, race, gender, generation, education, esteemed people, strong family, economic group, social status, or any other feature. A person's heart identifies with a culture, so that his culture greatly affects his attitude

toward any idea or influence that is presented to him. These facts can help us realize that a person's "culture" is a key factor in the world-view of most people and greatly affects their attitude toward a new idea from outside of their heart's culture.

For example, the U.S. has a culture, and within it are many subcultures that various people strongly identify with. There is a "youth culture" in which many people would regard me at 66 as an outsider with alien ideas and concepts. Within the youth culture, black and Hispanic and white youth cultures are quite different. A subculture could be as small as a few select people that a person esteems (such as a clique).

Many people belong to <u>one</u> <u>culture</u> <u>or</u> <u>subculture</u> in their hearts, or belong to two or more <u>related</u> cultures (I shall use "culture" to include subcultures). These people may tolerate other cultures for other people while disregarding any practice or idea from them as an outside influence.

People must desire an idea or practice in some way in order to fully embrace it. A person firmly within a culture will resist an outside idea as being his own unless he desires it more than his culture opposes it. An outsider with a new idea that does not fit into a person's culture will surely provoke a resistance unless there is a good personal connection.

As we saw (p. 44), preaching or teaching may try to bull past or overpower all resistance, which confirms and thereby strengthens the resistance while creating fears that hinder

considering the idea for itself. Building empathy in various ways (for example, good humor) can help a listener relate to a preacher and want to receive his message. But preaching without God's leading for that approach or without helping the listener to relate to the preacher can be foolish by working against the listener's hearing and digesting the message.

The patient 1John outreach does not confirm the natural resistance by trying to run over it, but lets a person see and taste the love of God that casts out fear, and gives a desire for this life of peace and abiding joy. The God of truth draws people to truth and helps us to appreciate the wonderful features of His nature (love, compassion, faithfulness, justice, kindness, and more). This outreach heightens the hope and desire for Jesus and His way of life while melting away and answering the heart-concerns about it.

In this outreach in India, most people who have become believers are in the same subculture – often within the same extended family – but our friends also actively seek ways to go beyond this and help others to see and taste God's love. Being within the same subculture provides easy ways to connect personally, but even then subcultural differences (different values that come from being different people with different experiences, families, etc.) can be important.

In practice, it is good to remember that God draws an individual instead of a hypothetical person within a culture.

Also in practice, we must avoid superficial judgments in deciding whom God wants us to invite into fellowship with Him and us. In fact, many people whom God draws are reacting to unseen forces in their lives, or making many bad decisions as a part of learning that they need God to reign in their lives. A search for love, truth, and life in wrong places could help them appreciate the real thing when they find it. We really need to hear from the Lord in order to fit into His plans.

Applying the 1John outreach in the U.S. brings out situations that we have not considered. Many people here identify with several truly different cultures. The resistance of a culture may not be important for these people, but the need to find true life and love is still very important. The approach John used in his Gospel and first epistle provides for these basic human needs very effectively.

Many people in the U.S. have seen fellowships with the right name but without the life-giving truth and love of 1John, or have not healed from past experiences with a fellowship. Others are alienated and do not belong to any culture (often caused by deep rejection). Preaching might not bring the love that heals or convicts unto repentance, but the 1John outreach provides life and love with truth, which provides a real hope for love and life that typically has been crushed.

In the U.S., I have been repeatedly taught that good preaching must give people an opportunity to make a decision or must “complete the sale”. Each person does need to make

key decisions at special times, but to push for a decision before God calls for it could be counter-productive in the way that we have seen: strengthening a resistance by trying to bull past it when the person is not given an adequate opportunity to discover what is real and true.

To conclude, John provides an example or model for us to help others whom God is drawing to come into fellowship with the true God, His Son Jesus Christ, and other believers who have a real fellowship with Him. First, we need to be in that fellowship. Then we can see our need to pray for any person to get through all of the complications and spiritual opposition to come to the truth in Jesus Christ. We can also see our need to pray for His guidance in how to fit into His plans to help the person receive God's love, so that he comes into this life-giving fellowship with truth and a desire to stay in it.

About the Author (Jim Tarter)

I met God in 1972 when I was 27, a Ph.D. physicist and an agnostic. He quickly started showing me that Jesus authentically represented God, and that the Bible was His word. I started reading the Bible thinking that it was full of contradictions, but I got surprised. The Bible's contents provided much evidence to show that the Lord had inspired and then protected these contents to say precisely what He wanted them to say.

Having missed God so completely in my life and in the world, I read the Bible with a deep hunger to learn more about this One who knew my thoughts and who numbers the hairs on each person's head. I also joined a church in Pittsburgh, PA. The pastor was Joseph Garlington, who provided a rich spiritual foundation. This congregation had many other believers who had met Jesus and sought to put His word into practice. When I moved to Roanoke, VA, in 1978, I actively participated in another congregation that was "alive in Jesus". Such experiences helped me to learn more about God and His ways, and have provided many perspectives about His calling for the Church in the Bible, what we have done in reality, and what we need to do to fulfill His word concerning us.

I am an elder at Grace Covenant Church in Roanoke and taught in public schools in 1976-2009. I wrote two books in the 1990s: *God's Word to the United States* (from Obadiah and the Minor Prophets) and *Why, God?* (from the book of Job). Updates of both books plus 12 other books about the Bible are available at www.lulu.com (you can type "James Tarter" in the "search" space on the web page).

In summers my wife Nita and I have taken extensive trips to southern Sudan, the Congo, and elsewhere. Her heart for Jesus and sensitivity to His leadings have blessed me mightily and equipped me to go farther in His ways.

Years after I first met God through Jesus, He started opening up whole books of the Bible, which provide life-giving perspectives that the vast majority of the Church has not yet appreciated. What I saw in India sparked a fresh perspective of how 1John builds on the Gospel of John to invite people drawn by God into a life-giving fellowship with Him, His Son Jesus, and real believers in Him.