Confident Fellowship: Fellowship With God

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[0:00] There's John, the Gospel, and then there's 1 John, the Letter. So we're going to be reading from John's Gospel, Chapter 1, verses 1 to 14.

And Connor is going to come and read that for us. All right, it's on page 1063 in the Church Bibles. 1063. It's from the Gospel of John, not 1 John. Okay.
Thanks very much, Connor.
And turn to then 1 John, written by the same author. John's Gospel really introduces us to who Jesus is and tells us how we can believe.
[2:46] 1 John is to give us assurance or confidence in what we believe. So we're going to look at 1 John, Chapter 1, verses 1 to 4.

Let's read those few verses together. 1 John, Chapter 1, verses 1 to 4. 1 John, chapter 1, verses 1 through 5.
We proclaim concerning the word of life. The life appeared. We have seen it and testify to it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.
We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
We write this to make our or your joy complete. Well, keep your Bibles open there and we're going to pray and ask God to help us as we look at his word together.
[4:09] We're starting a new series in 1 John. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for these accounts and these letters that we can read together that tell us about who Jesus is and gives us assurance and confidence in what we can believe.
We pray that it will not just be words on a page but that your words would be the very life of God instructing us, teaching us and helping us to see the life that you have come to give.
So help us all, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Last Sunday evening on RTE's The Meaning of Life you may have watched it Gay Byrne interviewed the actor and the TV personality Stephen Fry One of the questions that Byrne asked it wasn't the main one but one of them he asked was this Does your life have a meaning?
Fry's response was this I don't think the universe has a meaning And his answer to the question what happens to you when you die he said this Anybody who thinks they know what happens when we die is a fool or a liar Now that's the belief of an atheist and it reflects what the philosopher Bertrand Russell once called the firm foundation of unyielding despair hopelessness In other words we've come from nowhere and we're all heading nowhere And that's the reality for so many people We are void of meaning and purpose and it leaves us lonely and empty It perhaps explains why Ireland has one of the highest suicide rates in Europe
[6:57] People are desperate to find meaning or true life Life that really satisfies and fulfills and wherever they turn it doesn't deliver So our question this morning is Is there meaning to life?

Can we even find true life? And if we discover this life are we even certain that it is true?
Well as John begins his letter He makes this extraordinary claim to know where we can find true life and how we can be absolutely certain that it is true He claims to know where we can find life and how we can be absolutely certain and how we can be absolutely certain it is true Look at what he says It comes at the very end of verse 1 of 1 John chapter 1 He says this We proclaim concerning the word of life Or look at the middle of verse 2 He says We proclaim to you the eternal life John and his fellow apostles claim to know true and eternal life and they are inviting us people like you and me to know and experience this life

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So look at the beginning of verse 3 He says We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us He's making it very clear at the very beginning we want you to have the life that we also have So what is this life that he is offering?
What is this life that he's proclaiming or declaring? Well we're going to see it in three steps First what we call the essence of life This life is not a thing or a thought This life is a person Look what John and his apostles have to say about this life Three things First look at verse 1 That which was from the beginning So from before time began from before the world existed from before any life on earth this life was in the beginning He was simply there Life was there So that which was from the beginning Now look down at the end of verse 2 We're told something else
[10:01] That which was from the beginning was with the Father This life in the beginning was with the Father In other words he was with God And he was one with God This life was personally and intimately involved and connected with God to the point of where John said in his gospel he was God So he was from the beginning with the Father and look at the end of verse 2 And now appeared to us So that we could know this life he appeared to us in human form Let me remind you how John put it in his gospel when he wrote about this life He said within the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us

This life that was at the beginning took on human form took on flesh and bone He had lungs that breathed in fresh air to sustain his fragile body He had a heart just like you and me that pumped blood around his body refueling with oxygen He appeared like one of us so that we could know this true and eternal life And in case we are in any doubt as to his identity just look forward to 1 John chapter 5 verse 11 1 John chapter 5 verse 11 If we are not sure who this life is it is a person well who is it here it is And this is the testimony God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son He who has the Son has life
He who does not have the Son of God does not have life So this life this person is the Son this is Jesus Christ Jesus the God man who literally moved into this world and made this earth his home He walked and he talked he laughed and he cried He is not some kind of demigod half God and half man He is fully God and fully man He is the creator of life the sustainer of life the provider of life He is from the beginning He was with the Father and has appeared to us So John says I am proclaiming to you this is who I am telling you about I am telling you about the word of life I want to proclaim to you the eternal life So first the essence of life second the evidence of life because this life is not made up this is true this is not all legend or lies
John and the apostles are concerned to give us evidence for this life so look at verse 1 let's read it 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 now can you see how the evidence is building up on top of each other creating this this watertight case if you like four things he tells us they heard Jesus speak to people they heard with their own ears what Jesus said and taught about his identity and mission it's not a second hand account not only did they hear but they saw Jesus with their own eyes as Jesus moved onto this planet and began to walk around they saw him they didn't have to rely on what others saw they saw for themselves they saw him alive they saw him crucified and killed and they saw him raised from the dead and not only that they looked at
Jesus in other words not only did they see him but they saw him do things they saw Jesus perform his miracles they saw Jesus heal the sick by a word or by simply touching someone they saw Jesus raise people from the dead they saw Jesus eating and drinking they saw Jesus sleeping and working and not only that they actually touched Jesus he wasn't a spirit or part of their imagination he wasn't a ghostly figure Jesus was a physical being that they could hug that they could embrace he was a person that they could shove to wake up as he slept on the boat he was a human being that they could carry when he was tired they heard they saw they looked at they touchedeli they wrote
[16:16] So that we can read their testimony for ourselves. That's what John's Gospel is. It is a first-hand eyewitness account of seeing, hearing, touching and listening to Jesus and writing it down.

So that we can engage and hear and listen. Let's have a look at one of those eyewitness accounts. Go back to John's Gospel. Keep your finger in one John.

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And go back to John's Gospel, chapter 20, verse 24. Now I think this is extremely helpful for us because it's one of the apostles called Thomas.
And he's a sceptic. He's a doubter. He's like one of these people who says, you don't expect me to believe all this, do you? I'm not sure if I can believe it.
Now as we read this, let's remember a couple of things. First, Jesus has died and Jesus has now risen again. And Thomas doesn't believe it. And as we read this, try and feel the senses that are going on.
[17:28] What they saw, what they hear, what they touch, what they looked at. Let's read verse 24. Now Thomas, called Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. But Thomas is a doubter. He said to them, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, unless I touch him, he's saying, I will not believe it.
A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and he said, he heard him say, peace be with you.
Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it into my side, touch it, stop doubting and believe.
Thomas said to him, my Lord and my God. Then Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed.
[18:59] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. And Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written, that you, people like you and me, may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.
Do you see how important that is? Christianity is rooted in historical fact. These are eyewitness accounts, real people, who heard, who saw, who touched.
It's not a legend or a lie. These are factual eyewitness accounts that have been written down and recorded for us, so that we can know that Jesus is the God-man who has come to give life.
So the essence of life is Jesus. He is a person. And the evidence is clearly there for us all to see and to hear.
[20:17] But this life is to be experienced. It's to be experienced and it's to be enjoyed.

For example, you could tell me that a lovely ripe mango tastes good. You could even show me by eating one and cutting off great big slices and saying it tastes good.
But I'm only going to know it tastes good when I actually bite into it for myself and eat it. And so John is saying, to really know this life, you must experience it.
Yes, Jesus is the life. Yes, here's all the evidence for it. But if you are to know it and enjoy it, you must experience it for yourself. You must taste it.
Three things. First, John is saying, we have fellowship with the Father and the Son. This is where the life is.
[21:30] We have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Look at the middle of verse 3. He says, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

This is where life is. Now, fellowship is a word we often use in kind of religious terms, but we're not always sure what it conveys.
It reflects two big ideas. On the one hand, deep, personal and intimate relationship. It's like a marriage.
Deep, personal, intimate relationship. And on the other hand, shared, committed and involved partnership. And John has experienced this fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
And now he is saying to us, I personally share in the loving relationship that the Father has for the Son and that the love that the Son has for the Father.
[22:40] I share in this deep, intimate relationship. I know this love. And he goes on to say that I share in the partnership that the Father has with the Son.

And I share in the partnership that the Son has with the Father. I'm involved in the work of God, just as the Father sent the Son. So I am now proclaiming this Son, this life to you.
I'm in the fellowship. I have a relationship. I'm in this partnership. This is not just intellectual ideas on a page. This is an experience in life.

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And John says, I have fellowship with the Father and with the Son. But he doesn't stop there because John goes on to invite us to share in this fellowship.
He wants us to be involved in it. Look at the beginning of verse 3. He says, we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.
[23:47] So they've seen all of these things. They've come to experience it for themselves. And here's the reason they proclaim it and pass it on. So that you also may have fellowship with us.

John is making it crystal clear. He says, we can have fellowship with God. We can join John and the other apostles and all those in the line of history who've entered into that fellowship and enjoy a relationship and partnership with God.
So as John proclaims the word of life, as he proclaims this eternal life, he is inviting people into the fellowship. Enjoy what we have.
Now what John saw and heard, he wrote down. So that as people like you and me read this testimony, as we hear these same words, we too can believe.
And we are invited to share in this fellowship. We can know God. This is not just an idea of way out there. This is to be experienced.
[25:03] Not just for the head. This is for the heart. And this fellowship, he says, is to be enjoyed.

He is inviting us into a fellowship that is marked by joy. Look at verse 4. We write this to make our joy complete.
So at the very start of his letter, he's saying, I proclaim to you Jesus. I'm giving you evidence for Jesus. I'm inviting you into fellowship with God.
And the reason we write this to make our, or your notes will have this at the bottom of the Bible, your joy complete.
You see, this is not a cold or impersonal fellowship. This is a fellowship that brings real and lasting joy. It completes our joy.
[26:10] Listen to this quote from C.S. Lewis. He says, we are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

We're like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.
Do you see, fellowship with God isn't just a thought or an idea. It is a life of infinite joy so that our joy can be complete.
And we need to be clear as we understand this joy. This life of infinite joy does not mean the absence of difficulties or struggles.
A joy that is complete will not mean the end of painful or hard times. And I know that some of us here this morning are facing difficult and hard times.
[27:22] So where's the joy in all of that? Well, the joy is experienced in the midst of difficult things. As we enter into fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, we are entering into the love the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father.

We're entering into that partnership. We discover that within that fellowship that God is enough. That God is sufficient.
That within this fellowship He will keep you and He will hold you and your life will find meaning and purpose. This is the essence of life.
This is where we are finally satisfied and fulfilled. This is where all the searching ends and where life begins.
And so John starts out, he says, look at the evidence. Look at what we have heard and what we have seen and what we've looked at and what we have touched.
[28:36] Look at the evidence. Read it. Hear it. Believe it. And you will experience deep, infinite joy.

Fellowship with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's pray together. Father, we are amazed that God, in all His greatness, the Creator of life, the Sustainer of life, the provider of life, would become so small as a person to walk this earth so that we could know you intimately and personally.
And we thank you that you have invited us to share in that fellowship. to know deep, personal, and intimate relationship with the Father and with the Son.
To share in that love. To share in that partnership. And in that, to know infinite joy.
A joy that completes, fulfills, and satisfies. So would you please help us not to turn away and to seek life in other things or in other people.

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[30:35] Forgive us when we try to find life in our work or even our loved ones or in any other kind of activity.

activity. But we pray that we would find it purely in Jesus. The source of life. The word of life. The eternal life. Please help us, we pray. Amen.

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