

# From Life to Life

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). I am Tonya Robey. I am an elder here and I'm part of the Women Reading Women book group.

Today's scripture reading is from John's first epistle, chapter 5, verses 13 to 21, as printed in the liturgy. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request that we have asked of him.

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life. To those who commit sins that do not lead to death.

[ 1 : 17 ] There is sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 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, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Tonya, for that scripture reading. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here, and I'm delighted to bring you God's word this morning.

[ 2 : 16 ] Will you join me in prayer? Father, we want to come before you with hearts softened by your Holy Spirit to receive the food of your Holy Word.

Lord, we ask that in the preaching of your word, you would be lifted up, and that we would be challenged and invited to continue on in the way of Jesus, the way of life, light, and love, the way that you've laid out for us here in this letter of 1 John.

So give us ears to hear, we pray, and would you change us? Would you move our hearts to live in a way that is acceptable to you, our God and our Redeemer, the one who gave his only begotten Son, that we might know your life.

So be honored, Lord, in the preaching of your word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, so today we crossed the finish line. It is my last sermon of Jonathan's sabbatical, so I feel really glad for all of you.

And I got to say, I was really tempted to preach, you know, a two-liner and just be done. Cross the finish line. But I think I owe you a little bit more than that. We're going to complete this letter that we've been in this whole summer, this letter of 1 John, and we're going to look at the final words of this letter to this early church community.

[ 3 : 41 ] But before we get to those last words, I did want to do a quick, maybe not so quick, overview of just everything that we've gone through this summer in this letter, in this sermon series that we've called Life, Light, and Love.

All right? Now, if you remember, this was an ancient letter written to an early church that had experienced what? A traumatic exodus, right, of people from their congregation. Some people had left because they began to believe different things about Jesus and his ways. Things contrary to the teaching of Jesus and to the teaching of his apostles. And you can imagine, right, how this could shake the confidence of a community that wanted to be centered around Jesus and his ways.

Like, imagine if our lead pastor, Jonathan St. Clair, came back. He's coming back in three weeks, all right? He came back after his four-month sabbatical, and he said, Hey, I've been thinking after these long four months, and you know what?

I don't actually think that Jesus is the Christ anymore. I don't think he's the Messiah anymore. I don't think he actually came bodily in the flesh, and therefore, I don't think it actually matters what you do with your bodies either, in terms of obeying his commands or not.

[ 4 : 54 ] Now, can you imagine that? If Jonathan came back and said that? Well, I mean, my first question would be, we're still on the preaching rotation, though, right? Because... But no, no, it'd be absolutely devastating, right?

It would be disorienting and disruptive for Christ Church East Bay. This is a pastor who's led us, taught us, ministered to us. Maybe some of you became Christians here through his ministry. Maybe he baptized some of you. Maybe he baptized some of your children. Maybe he's been a model for you to follow as you seek to follow Jesus yourselves. And then the very thing that this person once pleaded with us to devote our lives to, he's just dropped, right?

And he's discarded it all. Can you imagine? Well, that's what this early church went through. This church that 1 John is writing to. People who had once belonged to this community of faith had deconstructed and wandered from what they were originally taught by Jesus and his apostles. And the rest of those stuck around, who stuck around, they were shaken, and they were confused, and they were wondering whether what they believed about, like, the most important things in all of life. You know, what is eternal life?

[ 5 : 59 ] And am I in the light, or am I in the darkness? And what is the nature and essence of love? They're confused now about all of these things. So the writer opens up this letter, assuring this disrupted community that that which we heard and that which we saw as apostles from the beginning, we proclaim to you.

And we want you to have fellowship with us, because our fellowship, we know for sure, is with the triune God, with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things to you so that our joy, God's joy, your joy, my joy, may be complete.

1 John is a letter written to restore a confused and hurting people's joy in God. An inherently inclusive letter, inviting all of us to join in the joyous fellowship of the triune God.

This is a good news letter, all right? But even while this is a radically inclusive letter, we also saw that, you know, seeking, as 1 John sought to complete this ultimate joy of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and all of us with them, it isn't a relativistic unity without standards.

No. What is the first thing that it says about who God is? It says God is light, right? As opposed to darkness. God is light as opposed to all the darkness that exists in the world and that surely exists even within each of us.

[ 7 : 12 ] But the good news is that if we confess our sins, he is, what? Faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. And this is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture here in 1 John 1, verse 9.

It could have said, right? It could have said, he is merciful and gracious to forgive us of our sins. But no, it says what? He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins.

As in God bound himself to forgive us if we confess our sins. As in, it would be unjust of God not to forgive us of our sins. Why? Because he owes it to us?

Because we're entitled to forgiveness if we just say the magic word, sorry? No. But because he sent his son Jesus to be what? The propitiation for our sins. That is the atonement for our sins.

Satisfying the righteous demand of justice against our sins through his sacrificial death on a cross. This is the good news of God as both just and the justifier without compromise through the work of Christ.

[ 8 : 14 ] Now, the guarantee of forgiveness in Christ that's talked about here in 1 John, it is indeed a wonderful truth, right? But it was never meant to be a permissive truth. No, 1 John continues on and we saw earlier in this series that these things are written so that we may not sin.

And this has been a huge theme throughout this letter, more than I preferred to preach. It's like, stop sinning, stop sinning, obey, obey, obey. But this is what it said, so this is what I had to say too. That you may not sin. It's a huge theme in this letter. We cannot live in sin and darkness and hatred and be assured that we are also walking in God's life, light, and darkness. These two ways of living are incompatible.

And though living rightly doesn't earn us a right relationship with God, it is evidence that we have fellowship with the living God. See, 1 John isn't a letter simply telling us to not sin.

More than altering our behavior, it wants to what? It wants to reorder our hearts. It wants to reorient our very loves. Will we love Christ and what Christ loves or will we be anti-Christ and love what is toxic?

[ 9 : 21 ] It's a matter of ultimate significance here. Or another way we might put this is, are we children of our Father in heaven, loved by him without measure? Or are we children of an inferior Father whose love is limited and conditional?

Are we growing into the spitting image of the Father who is love himself or after some other image? According to 1 John, love begets love.

The Father begets beautiful, loving children. And 1 John wants all its readers to have this unshakable confidence of being beloved children of God.

So that even when our hearts condemn us, God is what? Greater than our hearts. Greater than our hearts or any other voice who would tell us otherwise. Who would tell us that we are less than. Not worthy of love and security and joy. But the Father's love is the only kind of love that's going to overcome the world and cast out all our fears. And if we grasp this fatherly love, if we grasp it, when we let this love sink deep down into our hearts as children of God, then and only then will we ever be able to live and love in the ways of God's abundant life without burden.

[ 10 : 34 ] Without burden. Without burden. When we see the all-surpassing love of the Father toward us in Jesus Christ. When we see Jesus as the propitiation for our sins.

The one who has already overcome the world, not by shedding the blood of others, but by shedding his own blood in our place. When we see the impossible burden of every other yoke compared to Jesus's.

Then and only then will we come under this counter-intuitively liberating yoke and know the joy of eternal life. And that is what 1 John wants for us.

And that brings us to our final ending passage today. 1 John wants for us eternal life. An assurance of eternal life. This is the whole point of this letter.

Look at our text today in verse 13. This is the whole point of the letter. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

[ 11 : 34 ] That's the heart of God for us. He wants us to have eternal life and to know that we have it. Now before we go any further, I want to pause here and talk a little bit about what eternal life is.

I don't want to take for granted that we all understand this biblical notion of eternal life. And I also don't want to take for granted that eternal life is something all of us even want, right? You know, I think a lot of us understand eternal life to be something kind of abstract.

Maybe we just translate it as heaven in our heads, right? Like it's an alternative to hell or to eternal torment or something like that. Some place or some existence that we enter into after we die.

But because none of us have died, none of us have been there, and no one can really prove this, it kind of seems just like a far-off pipe dream. Not something that we can grasp. Not something that we can experience now.

Not something that's particularly relevant to our life or very appealing. Why concern myself with eternal life when I can enjoy my current life? And then there are others of us who may tend to think of eternal life more like quantitatively, as simply everlasting life.

[ 12 : 44 ] Life that has no end, the prolonged extension and continuation of our consciousness and existence forever and ever and ever. And for many of us, this actually even sounds super unappealing, right?

Why would I want to live forever? And I know some of us in this room struggle with suicidal thoughts. We have trouble believing that even this temporal life is worth living, let alone living forever.

But if we consider what Jesus had to say about eternal life, we might find that it isn't primarily about eternal and future, a future transcendent destination or about longevity.

Sure, heaven and living forever are included in eternal life, but the main thing eternal life is about, according to Jesus, is a relationship. Eternal life is a relationship.

In the Gospel of John, John chapter 17, Jesus praying to his Father in heaven, he says this, And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[13:52] See, according to Jesus, eternal life is not primarily about an afterlife destination or some prolonged quantity of life, but it's a quality of life lived in relationship with the living and true God.

It's not mostly about where one goes after they die or how long someone lives, but it's about who one lives with, both now and forevermore. It's not something to wait to experience later, but it's something that is broken into history now and that can be experienced right now, eternal life with God in the present, here and near to us in Christ and by his Spirit.

Notice in verses 14 and 15 of our text, how 1 John, excuse me, how 1 John continues by talking about the relationship that one has when one comes into the possession of eternal life.

It's a relationship of confidence. And this is the real good news of eternal life. Not that you live forever, but you can have confidence with God. Verse 14 says, And this is the confidence we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

Verse 15, And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request that we have asked of him. So again, eternal life is about so much more than how long we live or where we go when we die.

[15:12] It's about access to God himself. It's about a personal, conversational, confident relationship with God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth.

Now, okay, maybe even that doesn't quite excite you. Maybe you're not even sure that you believe in God. You're not even sure that there is a God and that a relationship with him is something you'd even care to have.

And if that's the case, if it's the case that you're not interested in this confidence that we can have through a relationship with the God of the Scriptures revealed to us in Jesus Christ, what I want to ask you is, what is the alternative confidence that you have found?

What is the alternative confidence that you have found? What confidence do you have every evening when you rest your eyes to sleep and you allow yourself to be utterly helpless and defenseless to the rest of the world?

What confidence do you have that your next breath won't be your last? What confidence do you have that your life has meaning and purpose and will end in security and joy and peace?

[16:18] What confidence do you have that you are being led by still waters in paths of justice and righteousness and that surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life?

Verse 14, and this is the confidence that we, the children of God, have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. He hears us.

I want you to think about that for a second. Think about this kind of amazing confidence that is offered to us here in this eternal life relationship with God. See, we don't just get heaven and everlasting life.

We get God's very ear. And not just his ear, but his strong right hand and his heart. For God's children, it is his delight, it is his pleasure to answer his children's requests.

That's amazing, isn't it? What greater confidence is there than the confidence of children in right relationship with their Father in heaven, the creator and the sustainer of all things, who loves to give us good things, who loves to give us good gifts.

[17:28] Remember what Jesus said? Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. And the one who seeks, finds.

And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

This is the incredible promise of God here. Ask your perfect, loving, all-powerful, all-wise daddy for anything. And if it is his will, it shall be yours.

He will give it to you. What could possibly inspire greater confidence, security, and assurance than this? Now some of us here are like, wait, hold up though.

There's this huge caveat. I caught it. It says, if we ask anything, what? According to his will. Oh man, that ruined everything, right? According to his will, oh man, that doesn't sound so great. [18:38] What about my will? What about what I want? What good is having God's ear if he only gives me what he wants to give me? Well may I ask, have you ever wanted something that wasn't good and right for you?

I have a three-year-old and a two-year-old daughter who asked me for lollipops 10 times more than they asked me for carrot sticks, all right? Who asked me to watch Bluey and Daniel Tiger 100 times more than they asked me to read them books.

Why? Because they have no idea what's best for them or even what is possibly harmful for them. Again, we have to remember it is precisely because God is our loving Father.

He sometimes does not give us what we think we want, what we think we should be asking for. It's because of his love. He will never give us a stone for a loaf of bread or a serpent for a fish.

No matter how hard we cry out for it, he loves us too much to always give us exactly what we ask for. See, prayer is not the act of bending God's will toward ours.

[19:42] Prayer is the act of bending our wills toward his. Not my will be done, but thy will be done. And so this supposed caveat in verse 14, according to his will, is really nothing but a blessing.

It's the promise of God that he will either give us everything we want and ask for, or he will give us everything we would have asked for and would have wanted if we knew everything that he knew.

Let me say that again. God will either give us everything we want and ask for, or he will give us everything we would have wanted and would have asked for if we knew all that he knew in his perfect wisdom.

Now, isn't that good news? Isn't that good news for the world? So one point of application right here would be to consider, what are we asking God for? What are we asking God for?

Think about that for a second, and remember this promise and the confidence you can have with your requests as children of God. As one Scottish theologian that I like to listen to, his name is Sinclair Ferguson, he said, I'd rather ask and have God say no than not ask and have God say, well, you never asked, right?

[20:52] So children of God, what are the things that you want? What are the things that are on our hearts? What are the things you think your all-wise and all-loving Father wants for you? For me, one prayer that I've been bringing before the Lord, it comes from Psalm 51.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and lead me, uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

That's been my prayer. I love this prayer, and I also love how confidently I can pray it and trust that God is gonna answer you. Yes and amen. Verse 14, This is the confidence we have toward God, that if we ask him anything according to his will, he hears us.

And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. Now look with me at verse 16. I want us to notice how interesting it is that right after talking about this amazing promise that we can have anything, anything we ask for, if it is God's will, the thing this apostle talks about asking God for is the repentance and restoration of others.

[22:14] It's not our own health, it's not our own safety, it's not our own success, or a whole list of other good things that might be great for us, not even our own spiritual health and vitality, but the restoration of others back to God.

Verse 16, If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life. To those who commit sins that do not lead to death, there is sin that leads to death.

I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. God wants us to pray for other people and for their restoration.

Now you may be wondering, based on this verse though, you might be wondering what this is talking about, this sin that doesn't lead to death and the sin that does lead to death. And I went back and forth whether or not I should get into this, but here we go, okay?

I'm just gonna do really short, and if you wanna talk about it further, in further depth, I'm happy to chat about it. Send me an email, all right? Or send one of our elders an email instead, all right? But

in short, the sin that leads to death is the unforgivable sin that Jesus talks about.

[ 23 : 19 ] The unforgivable sin of not seeking God's forgiveness. That is the sin that leads to death. That is the unforgivable sin. The sin of not seeking forgiveness, of not acknowledging one's need for God and repentance.

Now then you may be wondering, is this verse saying we shouldn't pray for such people? Well, honestly, we can't know actually who is committing the sin that leads to death and who is committing the sin that doesn't lead to death.

So really, we should pray for everyone, but with the understanding that there is a kind of prayer that cannot be answered. And it is a prayer for the restoration of those who don't and won't ever want to be restored to God.

And I know I just may have opened up a huge can of theological worms right here. So feel free to email me or our elders to chat. But the main application question I have for all of us here is, do we pray for others?

Do we even pray for others and seek their restoration with God? Or more particularly, do we pray for others who are living in sin, living apart from God's perfect ways for them?

[ 24 : 24 ] Are we praying that they return to God? Do we pray for those who are continually dishonoring God and harming themselves and harming others with their choices and with their attitudes, with their actions, or maybe even just their inactions?

Do we even have deep enough relationships in our lives where we would even know about and discern the sinful habits and patterns and proclivities in the lives of those around us and be able to speak into them?

It's hard stuff. I hate doing it. I just had to do it recently with a really dear friend of mine and it was awkward and the whole time I was fearing that he would think I was a self-righteous, goody-two-shoe pastor.

But you have to do it. God calls us to pray for others and to seek their restoration back into the fold. And I know this might sound so self-righteous, right?

And we definitely need to be heeding Jesus' words to take the logs out of our own eyes before removing the specks out of other people's eyes. But why not do both in proper proportion?

[ 25 : 27 ] I mean, think about it. Think about what it means to love others like God loves them. Like what if we believed that sin was the worst thing in people's lives?

What if we actually believed that sin was the worst thing in other people's lives? How would that lead us to relate to others? When was the last time we prayed for the repentance and restoration of someone in our lives who is living apart from God?

Don't we want them to be close with God? And what does our answer to this question reveal about our hearts for God and our hearts for the people who God's heart yearns for? Again, what are the things that we most want?

What are the things that we pour out to God from our hearts? And how occupied are our prayers for both the things of God and for those around us? See, this is life and death stuff.

It's the difference between being children of God and, as it says here, vulnerable to the power of the devil. Verse 18. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.

[ 26 : 34 ] And remember, we've seen verses like this all throughout this letter. This is not about perfection, but it's about direction. It's not about stumbling into sin, but it's about that perpetual walk in sin that he's speaking against.

But he who is born of God, it says Jesus, protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. Verse 19. We know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

What 1 John is doing here is bringing everything to a head. 1 John doesn't hold back at all. You're either a child of God or you are under the power of the evil one. There is no neutrality.

I'm sorry, there is no neutrality. You are united with the truth, the true God, and eternal life, or you are united with falsehood and a false God and death itself. And this is not to say that Christians, those who are united with Christ, don't sin.

And this is not to say that those who aren't united with Christ don't do good. We believe in the common grace of God. But ultimately, this matter of life and death, this matter of eternal life and eternal death is whether or not we are united with the truth in Christ or not.

[ 27 : 43 ] 1 John ends by bringing everything full circle here. And he confronts us with Jesus Christ. In chapter 1, verse 1, it says, They experience the eternal life and they want to proclaim it.

And the same thing happens at the end. In chapter 5, verse 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 in His Son, Jesus Christ.

He is the true God and eternal life. And the question for all of us is will we trust Him? Will we believe in Him? Will we believe and receive this apostolic witness?

Will we receive this eternal life, a relationship with the one true God in Christ, or will we not? And 1 John ends with what seems like a random but rather abrupt ending.

Verse 21, Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. It's kind of a strange ending, right? But really, this is actually a profound and compelling summary of the whole letter.

[ 29 : 04 ] It's saying that the choice is not God versus many other possible good options. No, it's saying it is either the one true God who we trust in and unite with or idols, false, counterfeit gods made by human hands.

These gods that we pursue that we think can save us, that have mouths but cannot speak to us, that have eyes but are not looking out for us, that have ears but cannot hear our prayers, that have hands but cannot lift us up, feet but will not pursue us.

1 John ends by confronting us with these two options, the one true God or all the other counterfeit gods that could possibly be out there.

Will we serve and bow down to the one true God or these other gods hoping that they will save us and deliver us and rescue us and make everything right? And 1 John says, Little children, little children, don't you see?

there is no one else. There is no one else but Jesus. No other God will love you like Jesus. No other God will die on a cross as the propitiation for your sins like Jesus.

[ 30 : 19 ] No other God will pave the way for you to be the beloved children of God that you were always meant to be but Jesus. Little beloved children of our Father in Heaven, keep yourselves from idols.

Keep yourselves from that which does not love you, that which cannot save you, that which will not die for you, and that will only estrange you from your Father in Heaven.

Keep yourself from idols, little children, and stick close to your Father for His glory and for your good. And this is the gospel. And this is the gospel, the ultimate win-win in Jesus Christ.