

A Tender Reminder

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[0:00] Well, if you'll get out your Bibles as the children go to their classes. And as Pastor Mike said, the third grade to fifth grade classes. Sticking with our parents this morning because teachers are sick.

So everybody else, head to your classes. Learn well. Everyone else, let's open our Bibles to 1 John chapter 2.

Remember 1 John, if you're wondering where it is in your Bible, it's toward the end. It's not the Gospel of John. It's the letter of 1 John, which is located toward the back of your Bible.

Not quite the Revelation, which is the book at the very end, but almost there. We're going to be in verses 12 to 14 this morning.

When I was in college, I sat down with some friends and watched the film Blood Diamond. It sounds really gory and graphic.

[1:00] Well, it's a little bit, but it's historical. It's not this gratuitous film. It is a depiction of a true story that happened in the 90s in Sierra Leone of a civil war that happened there with different militias fighting back and forth.

And it zeroes in, the movie zeroes in on a father, Solomon Vand, an African man whose son was kidnapped by a militia. And he was forced to become a child soldier.

And this man is doing his best to try to find his son. And there's a critical scene at the end of the movie. It's probably my favorite scene in all of cinema that I've ever watched.

Solomon Vand does find his son. But his son has been so brainwashed by the militia that he picks up a gun and points it at his father because he's so confused.

He's so brainwashed. He's forgotten how good his father is. And Solomon doesn't miss a beat. He looks at his son right in the eye and he says, his son's name is Dia. Dia, what are you doing?

[2:10] Look at me. Look at me. What are you doing? You are Dia Vand of the Prumande tribe. You are a good boy.

You love soccer and school. Your mother loves you so much. She waits by the fire making plantains and red stew.

I know that they made you do bad things. You are not a bad boy. I am your father who loves you. And you will come home with me and be my son again.

I can't do it in the same Nigerian accent that he has, but it's a very powerful scene. Dia Vand had forgotten who he was. He needed a tender reminder of who he was, of his truest and most fundamental identity.

And friends, this is the case with us too. We too can grow distant from our truest and most fundamental identity. Particularly as God's children.

[3:21] We can forget who we are. We can take it for granted. We can slip into a way of thinking and living that does not line up with our true identity.

And the group of Christians that John is writing to in 1 John were also in danger of forgetting their true identity. Instead of a bloodthirsty militia, a group of false teachers had come in and had confused the church.

And they weren't sure if they really knew God or not. They weren't sure what was right. And they were in danger of joining these false teachers and disobeying God's clear commands in Scripture. And they were in danger of losing their hold on the truth of who Jesus was. That he was God come in the flesh to die for sinners and to rise again and to call us to follow him and have eternal life.

They were in danger of losing their love and affection for each other through division and strife. They needed a tender reminder of who they were in Christ as God's children.

[4:23] Now up to this point, John hasn't addressed his audience very directly. Usually when you write a letter to someone, you start by kind of greeting them personally, making some direct personal remarks.

Paul does this in his letters. He says, greetings, grace and peace to you. I give thanks to God for you for this and this and this. John hasn't done this yet. He just kind of jumped straight to business, right?

From the first one, the first chapter. But now he does. He waits until now to address his audience very directly.

Look at verses 12 to 14. It's a very unique address. There are six statements, six reminders, six direct statements that he makes to his audience.

And it's got this little pattern to it. See if you can pick up on it as we read. I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

[5:24] I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I am writing to you, children, because you know the father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. So he's writing very directly and personally to this church.

Six times he addresses them and says, I'm writing to you. And then he gives a reason. He's reaching through the pages of his letter to grip them by the shoulders and say, look at me.

Listen to me. Child of God, remember who you are. That's the big idea of this passage. Child of God, remember who you are.

Just like Diavandi, we are forgetful children. We need the tender reminder in these verses. And notice that John has custom designed this direct personal reminder to three groups of people.

[6:32] Little children in the first and fourth statements. Fathers in the second and fifth. And young men in the third and sixth. And he addresses them each twice in the same order.

So as you can see on your bulletin, that's how we're going to unpack this tender reminder together. We'll see what John is saying to the little children, then to the fathers, and then to the young men. And then we'll wrap up with an important application question at the end.

So first, let's look at the little children. This is what all believers must remember. That's your blank right there on number one. So when he's saying little children, he's referring to all believers.

It makes most sense that he's not talking to kind of the babes of the faith, the new converts. I don't think that's what he's getting at. He's talking, I think, to the whole church. And the reason I think that is because back in chapter 2, verse 1, he says, My little children, talking to the whole church.

And he does this six other times through the rest of the letter. My little children, and he's addressing all of them. So I think that's what he's doing here. He's saying, all of you need to remember this.

And therefore, when he talks to the fathers and the young men, those are two specific age groups that fall under the whole church.

[7:49] And we'll address those in just a moment. By the way, ladies, don't be turned off by the masculine-only language here of fathers and young men. This still applies to you. Back in the first century, it was common for authors to only use the masculine terms and not both masculine and feminine.

So the ladies in this congregation would have known he's talking to them as well, as the mothers of the congregation or the younger women of the church. So this is addressing all of us, not just the men.

So let's ask ourselves, what is John saying to all the believers? What does he want his little children to know? Little children, I'm writing to you because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

I'm writing to you, children, because you know the Father. This is what John wants every Christian everywhere to have in the front of their minds.

You are forgiven and you are adopted. You are forgiven and you are adopted. This is the most basic and foundational set of truths that define anyone who trusts and follows Jesus.

[9:04] This is where he starts. Friends, what is your most pressing problem in life? Let me tell you what's not.

Your most pressing problem in life is not the coronavirus. It is not the outcome of an election. It is not your strained relationships.

It is not whether you have enough money coming into your bank account. It is not your social isolation. It is not your stress at work or at home. Although all these things are hard.

Your most pressing problem as a human being is that you have offended your God by your sin.

Your most pressing problem is that you are estranged from God by your sin because of your sin.

This is the most basic foundational message of the Bible. This is the problem that the Bible seeks to address. And it is the problem that God has acted decisively in the pages of Scripture and in history out of grace to deal with our sin and to make us, his enemies, a part of his family.

[10:20] This is the most important thing that we need to remember. Did you notice that little phrase in verse 12? For his namesake? You could rephrase that because of his name.

Whose name? It seems that John is referring to Jesus here. And when the Bible talks about someone's name, it's not like this magic formula. It's referring to who they are as a person.

In other words, because of who Jesus is, because of what he was sent to do by his Father, to die in the place of sinners, to rise again, our sins are forgiven when we trust in him.

Our greatest, most pressing problem is fully taken care of. God no longer holds our sin against us.

As our memory verse for this month reminds us, Jesus is the propitiation for our sin. That's a big word. What does that mean? It means that God has acted to make himself favorable to us through the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf.

[11:29] That his wrath is now taken away from us and now his favor is upon us because of the sacrifice Jesus offered in our place. And that means that we are forgiven.

This isn't just the key that gets us in. This is everything. We are forgiven. We're not supposed to kind of just throw this get out of jail free card away once we use it.

We are to look at it day after day after day and remind ourselves of the goodness of being forgiven.

Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven because of Jesus.

And not only are you forgiven, but you are adopted. You know God as your Father. I write to you, children, into verse 13, because you know the Father.

You have been adopted into God's family. So not only has God the judge pronounced you innocent in his court, but he has come down and stood beside you and pronounced you his child.

[12:37] He has invited you into his home to sit at his table and to reside with him forever because you belong to his son. So if you hear what I'm saying this morning, if you've placed your confidence in this Jesus, then all of this is true about you.

Let that settle in for a moment. You need to remember this. You need to call it to mind. You are forgiven. And you are adopted.

These simple, basic truths are things we must live in and delight in. This is who we are. And if you're here this morning and you realize you're not sure if that's the case for you, if you're not sure if your most pressing problem has been taken care of or not, then run to Jesus, as the song said this morning.

It is good for us to run to Jesus. God offers full forgiveness for you through the bloodshed of Jesus. There is power in the blood.

And he offers you not only forgiveness but adoption into his family. So come, run to Jesus. I'd love to talk to you about that. Me or Pastor Mike or any of us would love to talk to you and pray with you about that.

[13:57] So, all believers must remember that they are forgiven and adopted. How about the older believers? The fathers. This is the second group of the people that John is writing to.

The fathers. This is the older set of believers in the congregation. What do they need to remember about who they are? Well, it's helpful to remember that John is writing to the church of Ephesus in this letter.

Three or four decades before John wrote this letter, the apostle Paul showed up in Ephesus and spent a considerable amount of time making disciples there. And a thriving church was born. Many of the converts that Paul had made then were probably still in the church at this point, much older, and now they're being addressed by John as fathers. So what does John want them to remember, the older folks?

Why is he writing to them? Well, if you'll notice the beginning of verse 13 and verse 14, the second and fifth lines show us that John wants them to remember the exact same thing twice.

[15:02] I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. John likes that little phrase, from the beginning. He uses it a few other times in this letter.

Usually, it's referring to, like what Pastor Mike preached last week, the commandment you have had from the beginning to love one another. So it's usually referring back to when these believers first came to know Jesus.

It's referring to the beginning of their walk with Christ, when the gospel first came to them and they received it with faith and responded. It also shows up with reference to Jesus.

Look at the very first verse of this letter. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands.

It's talking about the message of the word, of the message about Jesus. About the one who came as a man, who is God, and revealed the Father to us, who died in our place, rose again so that we might have life.

[16:09] So, I think what John is telling the older believers with this from the beginning language, you come to know the one who is from the beginning, is this. The Jesus you knew at the beginning is the same Jesus that you know now.

The Jesus you knew at the beginning is the same Jesus that you know now. He's saying, listen, dear older believers, the same Jesus you first came to know and love in the beginning is the one you must continue to know and love now.

Don't stray from him. Don't get tired of him. Don't take him for granted. He is still your life. One of the dangers that older Christians face is losing the freshness and the vibrancy of knowing Jesus. We lose a sense of the privilege and childlike wonder of having fellowship with the one who saved us at the beginning. And this isn't just for folks who are in their 70s and 80s. It's for folks who have been walking with the Lord for a long time.

I've known Jesus for 30 years. It's a danger for me to take for granted what I have known in the past and to continue to have a fresh and vibrant relationship with him now.

[17:26] As we age, our faith should not match the deterioration of our bodies. It should season, of course.

It should mature, of course. But it does not mean our faith should get stiff and arthritic. Our faith should get more confident, more sharpened, more discerning, more jealous.

We must regularly remember that we know the same Jesus whose love the Spirit poured into our hearts at the beginning when we first came to know him. We still know him now. A couple years ago, we, as a staff and elders, we went to a Gospel Coalition event down in Chicago.

One of the preachers said something like this. We don't want to just become old versions of ourselves. We don't want to just get older and not mature as we get older.

There's a difference. Getting old does not necessarily mean becoming more mature. Our faith needs to grow as we grow. John was going to write to this same church years later in the book of Revelation.

[18:33] In Revelation chapter 2, he writes a letter to the church of Ephesus. And he warns them of something very scary. You have lost your first love.

He's saying that this church, which knew the Gospel, knows Jesus, is faithful in their doctrine. They're doing all the right things, but they've lost their affection for the one they knew at the beginning.

And it's a really scary thing to hear from the Apostle. Dear older believers, whether that puts you in the older category of age or just older category of being a Christian, don't get tired of knowing Jesus.

There's a freshness that we need to have in our faith. My grandmother died two months ago at the age of 102. She had been a Christian for 86 years.

And she had seen a lot. She had suffered a lot. And dementia had started to take over in her mind in the last couple of years. But Mary Nye's faith did not get arthritis.

[19:37] The older she got, the firmer her faith became. She knew the one whom she had believed at the beginning. And her walk with him was always fresh. Even in the last few years with dementia deteriorating her mind, she could not talk about Jesus or pray to Jesus without tears rolling down her cheeks.

So, seasoned believers, hear God's Word. Remember the one who you came to know at the beginning. Don't lose the love that you had for him at first.

Don't let your faith get arthritis. Keep your spiritual legs limber and moving. Remember who you are in him. Now for the young men.

The third and the sixth lines of our reminder set here. What does John want younger believers to remember? These are the under 40 crowd.

You've got energy and passion, strong convictions, strong ideals. And yet you lack some of the seasoning experience of the older believers. And what's unique about your particular season of life is that there's a lot to be done.

[20:49] There's so much that happens in the first 30, 40 years of your life. There are lots of really important decisions that you make. Positions that you take. Battles to fight. Children to raise.

Maturity to grow into. It's a lot of work. A lot to be done. What does the apostle want them to remember? Look at the third and the sixth lines here.

John says one thing in verse 13 and then repeats it and expands it in verse 14. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one.

So this is what he wants the younger believers to remember about who they are. You are warriors fighting a battle that has already been won. You are warriors fighting a battle that has already been won.

And what is that battle? Well, it's the struggle against the evil one, Satan. And particularly for John's audience here, it's the world.

[21:58] The system of the world that is opposed to God and Satan stands behind it. It's Satan's instrument to discourage us, to distract us. The world shows up quite a bit in this little letter.

It shows up in the very next passage that Pastor Mike is going to preach next week. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. John's trying to remind his flock, particularly the younger members, that they are strangers in a hostile land.

And these false teachers and the rest of the world around this little church are trying to stunt their growth. Satan has a host of diabolical schemes that he's trying to employ to try to stunt our spiritual growth, to weaken our faith, to distract us from what's most important, and discourage us on our way from making forward progress.

But how can it be that John is saying that these younger believers have overcome these forces of evil? Surely that sounds a little bit arrogant, doesn't it? If anyone's overcome the evil one in this church, I would guess he would say the older Christians, because they've fought the battles, they've had the experience and the wisdom.

So why does John tell the younger generation that they have overcome the evil one? I think it's because he wants them to take courage from the fact that it's been won for them. Remember what Jesus said in John 16?

[23:24] In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart. I have, same word, overcome the world. So through Jesus' self-sacrificial death and resurrection, Jesus overcame Satan and secured Satan's defeat as the enemy of God and God's people.

And that's what God promised would happen way back in Genesis 3. When Satan gained his first victory in the Garden of Eden, God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of

the serpent, and though the serpent would wound his heel.

So if you flip real quickly to the very end of our letter, 1 John 5, verse 4, we read this. Same word is being used here.

For everyone who has been born of God, and that includes the younger ones, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes, faith, that Jesus is the Son of God? So in other words, our faith in God, no matter how weak or small, is strong enough to hold the advancing line of the kingdom of God, not because our faith is strong in itself, but because the object of our faith is strong.

[24:44] The one we trust in, Jesus, the Son of God, He has won the victory. And we participate in that victory, in that overcoming, through our faith in Him. John wants these younger believers to remember that they've got battles to fight.

Folks, there are battles we're fighting right now. Now, we actually have a role here. We're not just passive participants here. We're not spectators. We're in it. But they are strong.

And they are already victorious as they approach those battles. And in verse 14 here reveals the source of that strength and that victory. The Word of God abides in you.

In other words, younger believers, stick closely to what you know to be true about Jesus. Let the good news of Jesus' rescuing grace soak into every corner of your being, and that will be the source of your strength.

That will be your victory, your trusting in what Jesus has already done and said. As a parent of young kids, I watch a lot of Disney movies.

[25:52] Disney can tell a good story. They're really good at that. But it is interesting how most Disney movies climax. Most Disney movies kind of climax when the main character discovers that their strength to overcome their obstacles comes from within themselves.

We just watched Moana the other day. The climax of the film is she says, I am Moana! She's like, I am the key to my victory, myself. But fellow children of God, that's not where our strength lies.

That's a false gospel. The reason we came to Jesus in the first place is because we know we can save ourselves. We aren't strong enough in ourselves. We need strength from the outside.

We must trust in the saving power of Jesus to overcome the enemy of our souls. And in that trusting, in that faith, we overcome. So believer, particularly my fellow younger believer, what battles are you fighting?

Where is your faith floundering? What temptations do you find yourself faced with? Are you distracted by the world?

[27:08] Are you discouraged by the world? Are you confused? Are you apathetic? Are you overwhelmed?

Do not forget, dear fellow warrior, you have overcome by your faith in Jesus. The battle you fight has already been won.

It is your faith in Jesus, the victor, that allows you to participate in his victory. So press forward with confidence in the strength of your captain, even when you stumble, even when you're wounded.

The war will not be lost. The battle has already been won. So remember who you are, younger Christian. You are a warrior fighting a battle that has already been won for you.

Press into it. Now let's wrap up with a two-pronged question of application for these reminders. Why and how must we remember who we are?

[28:12] This is a strange little passage, isn't it? It just kind of comes out of nowhere. John's kind of saying, don't neglect the command to love your brother, because if you are not loving your brother, you're proving you're not in the light.

And then after this passage, he says, don't love the world. It's kind of like, why is this passage here? Why does it come up here? I think it's very purposely placed here. This is why we need to remember who we are, is because of where this passage is.

Because we do fail. There are ways in which we do fail to obey. There are ways in which we do fail to love.

And in our failure, we forget who we are. In our failure, in our shame, in our condemnation, we do forget who we are. We need to be reminded. And not just in our failure, but in the temptation that surrounds us.

In verses 15 to 17, what comes right after this passage, John is very clear. Don't love the world. Because that's not, if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[29:23] In other words, if you forget who you are, you're going to love something else, not the Father. You're going to forget that you're his child. So, why? Why do we need to remember these things?

The simple answer is because we forget. We forget because of our failure. We forget because of the temptations that surround us. There is a desperate need that we have every day to remember who we are.

We've got a lot of things against us. It's our natural, human, sinful hearts. We've got the powerful influence of a God-denying world around us. We have the evil one who's over all of that.

And life is just hard. So, it's easy for us to forget. We can be like Diavandi. We can be blind to the goodness of our Father. We need strong hands to grip our shoulders and say, look at me.

Remember who you are. How? How do we do this? How do we remember who we are? Earlier this week, I was angry and discouraged because of something unkind that someone said to me.

[30:36] And I was laying in bed. It was late at night. And I was trying hard to fight the temptation to craft the perfect insult to get back at this person. And I was not necessarily being successful.

And all of a sudden, a ray of light pierced my mind. I had been meditating on this passage all week because I was preaching it. And the Holy Spirit brought verse 12 to my mind.

I told Mike this later in the week. He reminded me of verse 12. I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his namesake. That verse just popped into my head.

And I remembered who I was. The burden on my heart got lighter. I could see past the sadness and the pain because I remembered that my most pressing problem had been solved.

That my sins were forgiven. I remembered my Father's love for me. I embraced his tender reminder in the dead of night of my true identity. And I was able to sleep.

[31:39] And I didn't take the pain away completely. I didn't resolve the problem completely. But it changed my outlook. It changed how I was going to respond to the situation in particular. Now, why was this possible?

Because of verse 14. Look at verse 14. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you. The word of God was abiding in me.

I had been meditating on it all week. I think that's how we remember who we are. It's easy to overlook. But do you know what the most repeated pair of words is in this passage?

I write and because. We glance over it because we're getting at the content of what John is writing to. But it's important to notice. I'm writing because.

I'm writing because. I'm writing because. Six times. He's writing words. And this letter's words are not just John's words.

[32:41] They're God's words. Words of life that penetrate our minds in the haze of this world. In our own sinful hearts. And he's writing because. He's writing these words because.

Not just because these things are theoretically true. But because they are true of us. He wants these true words to sink in such that they abide and dwell and reside in us.

The part of this sermon is not to make you feel like you need to read your Bible more. I'm just going to say that from the beginning here. But.

You and I get spiritual amnesia. If the word of God is not taking up active residence in our hearts and minds. What does that mean? What does it mean for the word of God to abide in us?

I think it means this. I think it means that God's word is not only in our intellect. But also in our affections. Bear with me for a bit of a silly analogy.

[33:39] But. I think it'll be helpful. It means that we not only have the shelves of our minds well stocked. With the truths of God's word. Which is necessary. But that we're constantly taking those truths off the shelves of our intellect.

And into the shopping cart of our affections. We take that home with us. We take the time and energy to. To take them into our kitchen. Take them into the kitchen of our hearts. To do some work with them. To consume them. And to savor them. This is what I mean practically speaking. This afternoon. This evening. Tomorrow morning.

Whatever your next devotional time is. Open your Bible to this passage. 1 John 2. 12 to 14. Ask God to help you absorb what he's saying to you.

And then read the passage like three or five times out loud. And whatever starts to stick in your intellect. Whatever starts to stand out to you. Take it off the shelf of your intellect.

[34:37] Put it in the shopping cart of your affections. Repeat it out loud. Summarize it with your own words. Pray it back to God in gratitude. Take it off the shelf. And take it home with you.

Take it to the kitchen of your heart. And stew on it. Savor its aroma. Savor its flavor. Let it work its way into the affections of your heart. I think that's how we remember.

Not just stalking our intellect. But letting God's truth get absorbed to the very core of who we are. There's a reason John wrote this. God's people then and now needed not only to hear and understand this.

But to take it to heart. To remember who they are. And to act accordingly. You might be hearing God's word this morning. And you know you've forgotten who you are in some way. The Holy Spirit's reminding you of who you are in Christ.

It might be a gentle nudge away from anxiety. Or temptation to sin. It might be a tender wooing of your heart. From setting your affection on something other than the one who made you and died for you.

[35:47] It might be a whack of a two by four right between the eyes. That's getting your attention off of the world. Off of yourself and onto Jesus. Like D'Avandi.

We need to remember who we are. We need to remember. And we need to respond. So as I pray. And as Matt leads us in the song of gratitude to Jesus. Let's respond well.

Let's trust. Let's obey. And let's remember. Let's remember. Father. Father. Thank you for gripping us by the shoulders.

Looking into our eyes. And reminding us of who we are in Christ. As your beloved children. Thank you for reminding us of our true identity.

Thank you for reminding us. That we have known you for a long time. And it is right for us to continue. To know you and delight in you. Thank you for reminding us that we're in a battle.

[36:46] And we need to take courage. Because you have already won it. Lord strengthen and minister to your people now. In Jesus name. Amen.