THE SECOND LETTER OF JOHN

The King's Truth

2 John, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King's Truth: The Second Letter of John, Unfiltered

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Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

If you've read the earlier books in this series, you know the saying by now: "If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all." It's been in every book. Second John is for people who think truth and love are opposites. Spoiler: they're not.

Second John is one of the shortest books in the Bible. In Greek, it's about 245 words, short enough to fit on a single sheet of papyrus. You can read it in under two minutes. It's basically a postcard. But this little postcard tackles one of the biggest questions you'll ever face: how do you love people and stand for the truth at the same time?

Our culture often makes you pick one. Some people say that if you really loved others, you'd never tell anyone they're wrong. Others are so focused on being right that they forget how to be kind. John, an old man who had spent his life following Jesus, says you need both. Truth without love becomes harsh. Love without truth becomes empty.

This letter also has a warning about teachers who spread a fake version of Jesus. John's readers had to decide which traveling preachers to welcome into their homes. You have to decide which voices to welcome into your phone, your feed, and your head. The question is the same.

So read it like a postcard from a wise old friend who loves you enough to tell you the truth. Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through 2 John in three short chapters, one for each section of the letter: the greeting and truth (verses 1–3), love and obedience (verses 4–6), and deceivers and hospitality (verses 7–13). Each one explains what John is saying in plain language and adds background about the early church and the world of the first readers.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who the elder was, who the lady and her children might be, how this letter connects with 1 John, and what life was like in the house churches and for the traveling teachers who visited them. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

Since 2 John has only one chapter, verses are cited by number alone, like verse 5 or verses 7–11. This book quotes 2 John sparingly and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each section of the letter first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, Hebrews, James, Peter's letters, and 1 John, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Because 2 John is so short, I've divided it into three brief chapters and filled out the book with background that I hope is genuinely useful: ancient letter-writing, house churches, traveling teachers, the early Christian manual called the Didache, and the relationship between this letter and 1 John. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV).

I've presented the main views of who the elder was and whether the lady chosen by God is a church or an individual woman, without forcing a verdict.

Verses 10–11, which tell the readers not to welcome a false teacher into their house, can easily be misread as permission to be unkind to people who believe differently. I've explained them in context, as instructions about officially hosting and endorsing traveling teachers in a house church, and I've stressed that John's command

to love one another, and Jesus' command to love our neighbors and even our enemies, still apply to everyone.

The letter's call to hold truth and love together is applied to teens' lives, including discernment about online influencers and how to disagree with people kindly.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will learn to love the truth, and to speak it in love.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE LETTER

Setting the Scene

A Postcard from the Elder

Second John is one of the shortest books in the Bible. Only 3 John, the very next book, is shorter in Greek words. Second John has just thirteen verses, about 245 words in Greek. A standard sheet of papyrus, the paper of the ancient world, was about the size of a sheet of printer paper, and this letter would have fit on one side of it. Near the end, the writer mentions paper and ink (verse 12). He's using the ancient version of a quick note, and he says he'd rather talk in person.

But short doesn't mean unimportant. Some of the most important messages are short. Think of a text that says I'm sorry, or I love you, or Don't go there, it's not safe. Second John is a little like that. It's brief, but it's urgent.

How Ancient Letters Worked

Thousands of ordinary letters from the ancient world have been found, especially in the dry sands of Egypt, where papyrus can survive for centuries. They show that letters followed a standard pattern, a bit like the way emails today start with Hi and end with Thanks. First came the sender's name, then the recipient's name, then a greeting, often a wish for good health. Then came the body of the letter, the main message. At the end, there were greetings from other people and a farewell.

Second John follows this pattern closely. It opens with the sender, the elder, and the recipients, the lady and her children, followed by a greeting of grace, mercy, and peace. The body has a word of joy, a reminder about love, and a warning about deceivers. It ends with a hope to visit and greetings from the lady's sister's children. Christians took the ordinary letter format of their day and filled it with the good news about Jesus.

Paper and Ink

Writing a letter in the first century wasn't as simple as sending a text. Papyrus was made from the papyrus plant, which grew along the Nile River in Egypt. The stalks were cut into thin strips, laid in two layers at right angles, pressed together, dried, and polished. It wasn't cheap. Ink was usually made from soot mixed with gum and water, and writers used a reed pen cut to a point. Many people couldn't write well, so they used a trained secretary. There was no postal service for ordinary people, so letters had to be carried by friends, travelers, or paid messengers. That's why the arrival of a letter was a big deal, and why ancient writers often said, as John does, that they'd rather see you face to face.

Who Was the Elder?

The writer doesn't give his name. He calls himself simply the elder. In Greek, the word is presbyteros, which can mean an older man or a leader in the church. Our word presbyterian comes from it. The way he uses it, the elder, suggests that everyone knew exactly who he was, like a family calling their grandfather Grandpa instead of using his name.

From early times, Christians believed that the elder was John the apostle, who, according to tradition, lived to an old age in Ephesus

and wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters of John. Peter also called himself an elder (1 Peter 5:1), so an apostle could use the title. But an early writer named Papias, around AD 100–130, mentions both the apostle John and someone he calls the elder John. Some scholars think 2 and 3 John were written by this John the Elder, perhaps a disciple of Jesus who wasn't one of the Twelve. Others think the writer was a respected leader in John's circle of churches. The style and themes of 2 John are so close to 1 John that most scholars think they come from the same writer. In this book, as in my book on 1 John, I call him John, or the elder.

Who Was the Lady?

The letter is addressed to a lady whom God has chosen, and to her children. Who was she? There are two main views.

Many interpreters think the lady is a church, and her children are its members. In the Bible, God's people are often pictured as a woman: Israel as Daughter Zion (Isaiah 62:11), and the church as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25–32; Revelation 21:2). Peter sends greetings from she who is in Babylon, which most take to mean the church in Rome (1 Peter 5:13). Several details in 2 John fit this view. The elder says that all who know the truth love her (verse 1), which sounds more like a well-known congregation than a private person. In verses 6, 8, 10, and 12, the word you is plural in Greek, as if he's speaking to a group. The command to love one another (verse 5) makes sense for a community. And in the last verse, the children of her sister, also chosen by God, send greetings (verse 13), which would mean the members of a sister church where the elder was staying. Writing in code may also have protected the church if the letter fell into the wrong hands.

Others think the lady was a real woman, probably a respected Christian leader in whose home a church met, and her children were her actual children, or perhaps the believers who gathered in her house. The New Testament mentions several women who hosted churches, like Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40), Nympha (Colossians 4:15), and Priscilla, with her husband Aquila (Romans 16:3–5). If so, 2 John is a personal letter to a woman of faith and influence.

Kyria and Electa

The Greek word for lady is kyria, the feminine form of kyrios, which means lord or master. It was also used as a personal name, and it appears as a name in some ancient papyrus documents. So some have suggested that the letter is addressed to a woman named Kyria, and should be translated to the chosen Kyria. In the early third century, Clement of Alexandria suggested a different idea: that the word for chosen, eklekte, was her name, and that the letter was written to a woman named Electa. But that creates a problem, because verse 13 uses the same word for her sister. Two sisters both named Electa seems unlikely. Most modern translations, including the NIV, take the words as a description, not a name. Whichever view is right, the message is the same.

The Link to 1 John

If you've read 1 John, much of 2 John will sound familiar. Both talk about truth and love, about a command that the readers have had from the beginning, about loving one another, about walking in the truth and in obedience to God's commands, and about joy being made complete. Both warn about deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and both call them antichrists (1 John 2:22;

4:2–3; 2 John 7). It's almost as if 2 John is a short summary of 1 John, written to one particular congregation.

Scholars aren't sure which came first. Some think 2 John was written before 1 John, as a quick warning to one church. Others think it was sent along with 1 John, as a cover letter. Most think it was written after 1 John, applying its teaching to a specific situation: the false teachers who had left John's church were now traveling around, trying to get a hearing in other congregations. Second John is a warning to one of those congregations not to give them a platform.

Churches in Houses

When you hear the word church, you might picture a building with a steeple, pews, or a stage. The first Christians didn't have any of that. For about two hundred years, they mostly met in homes. The oldest known building used as a church, found at Dura-Europos in modern Syria, was a house remodeled for Christian worship in the 240s AD.

The New Testament mentions several house churches (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). A typical house church might have twenty to forty people, crowded into the largest room of a home, or into a courtyard. They shared a meal together, sang, prayed, read Scripture and letters from apostles, listened to teaching, and celebrated the Lord's Supper. The host was often a wealthier believer with a bigger house, and played an important role. They decided who came in, who got to speak, and who was welcomed as a teacher. That matters for understanding 2 John.

Traveling Teachers

In the early church, many Christian leaders traveled from town to town. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers carried the message about Jesus and visited churches to teach and encourage them. Paul spent years on the road. So did Peter (1 Corinthians 9:5), Apollos (Acts 18:24–28), and many others. Inns in the ancient world were often dirty, dangerous, and connected with immorality, so Christians traveling on the Lord's work relied on the hospitality of other believers. Jesus told His disciples to stay in the homes of people who welcomed them (Matthew 10:11–14). Paul asked the church in Rome to welcome Phoebe and give her whatever help she needed (Romans 16:1–2). Third John praises a believer named Gaius for welcoming traveling teachers, even strangers, and sending them on their way in a manner worthy of God (3 John 5–8).

But this system could be abused. Anyone could show up, claim to be a teacher sent by God, enjoy free food and housing, and spread whatever ideas they wanted. A second-century Greek writer named Lucian of Samosata wrote a satire about a con man named Peregrinus who joined the Christians, became a leader, and lived off their generosity, until they caught on. Lucian mocked the Christians as easy marks. Churches needed a way to tell the real teachers from the fakes.

The Didache's Tests

One of the most interesting documents from the early church is a short handbook called the Didache, which means the Teaching. It was probably written in the late first or early second century, around the same time as John's letters, and it was lost for centuries until a copy was rediscovered in 1873. It gives instructions about

baptism, prayer, fasting, the Lord's Supper, and church leaders. It also gives practical tests for traveling teachers and prophets.

The Didache says that a traveling apostle should be welcomed as the Lord. But he should stay only a day, or two if necessary. If he stays three days, he's a false prophet. When he leaves, he should take only enough bread to get to his next stop. If he asks for money, he's a false prophet. A prophet who claims to speak by the Spirit and orders a meal to be prepared for himself, and then eats it, is a false prophet. A teacher who teaches things that contradict the faith should not be listened to. Anyone who comes in the Lord's name should be welcomed, and then tested. If a traveler wants to settle down in the community, he should work for his food. If he refuses, the Didache uses a memorable word for him: he's a Christ-monger, someone who makes a business out of Christ.

The Didache's tests focus on three things: what a teacher teaches, how he lives, and whether he's in it for the money. Second John focuses on the first, what a teacher says about Jesus. Together, they show that the early church took discernment seriously.

Why 2 John Matters

Second John speaks to a world that often treats truth and love as enemies. Some people think that loving others means never disagreeing with anyone about anything. Others treat being right as more important than being kind. John holds them together. Truth matters, especially the truth about who Jesus is. Love matters, too, because it's what Jesus commanded. And this little letter also speaks to a world full of voices competing for our attention. Every day, we decide which teachers, influencers, and messages to welcome into

our lives. John's warning is still relevant: be careful who you give a platform to.

The Map

Chapter 1 (verses 1–3): The elder, the lady and her children, and truth that lasts forever.

Chapter 2 (verses 4–6): Walking in the truth, and the old command to love one another.

Chapter 3 (verses 7–13): Deceivers, staying in the teaching of Christ, not giving false teachers a platform, and the joy of meeting face to face.

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CHAPTER 1

Truth That Lasts

2 John 1–3

The letter opens with three words that tell us a lot: from the elder. The writer doesn't give his name, his credentials, or his title. He doesn't need to. His readers know him, trust him, and respect him. He's the elder, the older leader who has walked with Jesus longer than almost anyone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Power of a Good Name**

John didn't need to introduce himself, because his life had already done it for him. His readers knew his character, his faithfulness, and his love. That's worth thinking about. What will people know about you when they hear your name? A good reputation isn't built in a day. It's built by thousands of small choices: telling the truth when it's hard, keeping your promises, being kind when no one's watching. Proverbs says a good name is more desirable than great riches (Proverbs 22:1). You're building yours right now.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Respect Your Elders?**

In John's world, age was respected. Older people were seen as wise, experienced, and worth listening to. Our culture often celebrates youth and treats older people as out of touch. The Bible honors both. Paul told Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because he was young (1 Timothy 4:12). But the Bible also says that gray hair is a crown of glory when it's earned by a righteous life (Proverbs 16:31). John had spent around seventy years following Jesus. He'd seen a lot, made mistakes, and learned from them. Do

you have older believers in your life you can learn from? Their experience is a gift.

He writes to the chosen lady and her children, whom he loves in the truth. And it's not only him. Everyone who knows the truth loves them too, because the truth has made its home in us and will stay with us for good.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Church or a Woman?**

As Setting the Scene explained, the lady might be a church, with her children as its members, or an individual Christian woman, perhaps one who hosted a church in her home, with her actual children. Either way, notice how John describes her. She's chosen by God. She's loved, not just by John, but by everyone who knows the truth. If she's a church, this is a beautiful picture of how God sees His people: not as a building or an organization, but as a lady He loves and has chosen. If she's a woman, it shows how much the early church valued women who served faithfully. Both views remind us that the church is a family, held together by love and truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Chosen**

John calls the lady chosen, or elect. It's a word the Bible uses for God's people again and again (1 Peter 2:9; Colossians 3:12). Being chosen by God isn't about being better than anyone else. Israel wasn't chosen because they were impressive (Deuteronomy 7:7–8). It's about God's love and grace. If you belong to Jesus, you're chosen too. Not because you earned it, but because God loves you. In a world where you might not get picked for the team, the group, or the friendship circle, that's worth remembering.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Loving in the Truth**

John says he loves them in the truth. That could mean he loves them truly, sincerely, not fake. It could also mean he loves them because they share the same truth about Jesus. Both are probably included. Some love is fake. It flatters, uses people, or only lasts as long as it's convenient. John's love is real. And it's rooted in something solid: the truth about Jesus that they share.

Friendships built on a shared commitment to Jesus have a foundation that can weather storms.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Is Truth?**

The word truth appears five times in the first four verses of 2 John. Truth is one of John's favorite words. In his Gospel, Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). When Pilate questioned Jesus before the crucifixion, he asked, cynically, What is truth? (John 18:38), while Truth Himself stood in front of him. For John, truth isn't just a set of correct facts. It's a person, Jesus, and a way of life that matches who He is. Truth is something you know, something you believe, something you do, and Someone you follow.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Is Truth Real?**

You'll hear people say things like, That's true for you, but not for me, or, There's no such thing as absolute truth. There's something to this. People see things from different perspectives, and we should be humble about what we don't know. Your favorite music or food really is true for you. But some things are true for everyone, whether or not they believe them. Gravity works whether you believe in it or not. Two plus two is four everywhere. John believes that the truth about Jesus is like that: true for everyone. Christians believe Jesus really lived, really died, and really rose from the dead, and that if it's true, it's the most important truth in the world. That doesn't mean Christians have all the answers. It means we believe truth exists, and we can know it.

John says that this truth has moved in to stay, and it will never leave us. It's not something that changes with the times, goes out of style, or gets replaced by a newer version.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Truth That Lives in You**

Notice that John says truth lives in us. That sounds a lot like how Jesus talked about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who lives with you and will be in you (John 14:17). Truth isn't just information stored in your brain. When you

belong to Jesus, His Spirit lives in you and keeps teaching you the truth. And it lasts forever. Trends come and go. Ideas that seem cutting-edge today will look dated in ten years. Some will be forgotten. God's truth doesn't expire.

Then John gives his greeting. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, he says. Their source is God the Father, and Jesus Christ, who is the Father's own Son. And they'll stay with us, wrapped in truth and love.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Grace, Mercy, and Peace**

Most of Paul's letters begin with grace and peace. Here, as in Paul's letters to Timothy, mercy is added. Grace is God's kindness to people who don't deserve it. Mercy is God's compassion for people who are hurting and helpless, holding back the punishment we deserve. Peace is the result: wholeness, a restored relationship with God, and calm in our hearts. Notice that John doesn't say may grace, mercy, and peace be with you, like a wish. He says they will be with us. It's a promise.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Father's Son**

John carefully describes Jesus as the Father's Son. That's important, because the false teachers he's about to warn against were denying the truth about Jesus. Some apparently said that Jesus was just a man, or that the divine Christ only came on Him temporarily, or that He didn't really have a body. John says: Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father. Grace, mercy, and peace come from both of them, equally. You can't have the Father without the Son.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Truth and Love**

The greeting ends with two words that summarize the whole letter: truth and love. John uses them together again and again. They're like two wings of a bird, two rails of a train track, or two oars of a rowboat. If you only row with one oar, you go in circles. Truth without love becomes harsh, cold, and judgmental. It can be used as a weapon to hurt people. Love without truth becomes soft, shallow, and confused. It can let people walk off a cliff without

warning them. Jesus was full of both grace and truth (John 1:14). That's who we're called to be.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Which Way Do You Lean?**

Most people naturally lean one way or the other. Some are truth people. They care about being right, getting the facts straight, and calling out what's wrong. Their danger is becoming harsh, argumentative, or proud. Others are love people. They care about relationships, harmony, and making people feel accepted. Their danger is avoiding hard conversations and going along with things that aren't right, just to keep the peace. Which way do you lean? Ask God to help you grow in the other direction. Truth people need more gentleness. Love people need more courage.

KEY VERSE

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

2 John 3 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think John didn't need to give his name?
2. Do you think the lady is more likely a church or an individual woman? Why?
3. How would you respond to someone who says there's no such thing as truth?
4. Do you lean more toward truth or toward love? How could you grow in the other?

TRY THIS *Ask two people who know you well whether you lean more toward truth or love. Then pick one way to grow in the other this week. If you*

lean toward truth, do something kind for someone you disagree with. If you lean toward love, have one honest conversation you've been avoiding, gently.

CHAPTER 2

The Oldest New Command

2 John 4–6

After his greeting, John shares some good news. He's thrilled, he says, because he's found some of the lady's children living by the truth, exactly as the Father instructed us.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Some of Your Children**

Notice the word some. John found some of her children walking in the truth. That might be simple: John had met some of them, maybe while they were traveling, and was happy with what he saw. But it might also hint at something sadder: not all of them were walking in the truth. Maybe some had followed the false teachers. If the lady is a church, it might mean that the congregation was divided. If she's a mother, she might have been worried about some of her kids. Either way, John focuses on the good news first. That's a good model. When you need to warn or correct someone, start by noticing what they're doing right.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Walking in the Truth**

John says they're walking in the truth. Walking is a common Bible picture for how you live your life, step by step, day by day. It's not about one big leap. It's about the direction you're heading and the steps you take. Walking in the truth means that your life matches what you believe. You don't just know the truth. You live it. You can know all the right answers about Jesus and still walk in a completely different direction. John is happy because these believers aren't just believing the truth. They're living it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **No Greater Joy**

In 3 John, the elder says something similar: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 4). Think about the people who've invested in your faith: parents, grandparents, pastors, youth leaders, teachers, coaches. One of the best gifts you can give them is to keep walking with Jesus. You might never know how much joy it brings them. And someday, you might feel that joy yourself, when you see someone you've invested in walking in the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Encouragement**

John's joy shows how much encouragement matters. When was the last time you told someone you were proud of them for following Jesus, standing up for what's right, or being kind? Encouragement is powerful. It can keep someone going when they're ready to quit. Hebrews tells us to encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3:13). Try sending a text this week to a friend, a younger kid, or even a leader, just to tell them you've noticed their faith.

Then John makes a request. And now, dear lady, he says, I'm not giving you a brand-new command. It's the same one we've had since the start. I'm asking that we love each other.

BACKGROUND CHECK **An Old Command**

John doesn't claim to be saying anything new. He's reminding them of something they've heard from the very beginning of their faith: love one another. Jesus gave this command at the Last Supper, the night before He died: love one another, just as I have loved you (John 13:34). He said it was how people would recognize His disciples (John 13:35). It's not new, but it never gets old. Some people are always looking for the next new spiritual idea, the hidden secret, or a deeper truth. John says that the deepest truth is the one you heard at the start. You'll never outgrow the command to love.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Old and New**

In 1 John, John says this command is both old and new (1 John 2:7–8). It's old because it goes back to the Old Testament, which tells us to love our neighbor

as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18), and because the readers had heard it from the start. It's new because Jesus gave it a new standard, as I have loved you, and because a new era has begun with His coming. Here in 2 John, he emphasizes that it's old. The false teachers were probably claiming to offer new, advanced teaching. John says: we're sticking with the original.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Love One Another**

Love one another sounds simple, but it's hard. John is especially talking about loving fellow believers, the people in your church, your youth group, your Christian friends. That includes people you don't naturally click with: the awkward kid, the know-it-all, the person who annoys you, the one who's different from you. It includes people who have hurt you. Loving them doesn't mean pretending everything's fine or letting them treat you badly. It means wanting what's best for them, treating them with kindness and respect, forgiving them, and helping them when they're in need. In a divided church, this command was urgent. It still is.

Then John defines love. Love means living in obedience to God's commands. And His command, as you've heard from the beginning, is that you live a life of love.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Circle**

John's definition of love seems to go in a circle. Love means obeying God's commands, and God's command is to love. Which comes first? The answer is that love and obedience go together. You can't really love God without obeying Him. Jesus said, if you love Me, keep My commands (John 14:15). And you can't really obey God without loving people, because love is His central command. Paul says love fulfills the whole law (Romans 13:8–10). Love isn't a vague feeling. It has shape, and God's commands give it that shape.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Love Has Boundaries**

Our culture often defines love as accepting everything someone does or wants. If you love me, you'll support whatever I choose. But real love sometimes says no. A parent who loves their child doesn't let them play in

traffic or eat candy for every meal. A friend who loves you will tell you if you're making a dangerous choice. God's love includes His commands, because He knows what's good for us and what will harm us. When John says love means obeying God's commands, he's saying love isn't just about feelings. It's about doing what's truly good for others, even when it's hard.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Love Is a Choice**

Feelings come and go. Some days, you'll feel warm and loving toward people. Other days, you won't. John's definition of love doesn't depend on feelings. It's about how you walk, the choices you make, the way you treat people. You can choose to love someone even when you don't feel like it. And often, when you choose to act lovingly, the feelings eventually follow. That doesn't mean faking it. It means being faithful.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Love Looks Like at School**

What does walking in love look like for a teenager? It might mean sitting with someone who's eating alone. Refusing to laugh at a joke that mocks someone. Standing up for a kid who's being bullied. Helping a classmate understand homework. Including someone in a group chat or game. Apologizing when you've been wrong. Listening to a friend who's going through a hard time. Being patient with your siblings. It doesn't have to be dramatic. Love usually looks like small, faithful choices made every day.

KEY VERSE

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

2 John 6 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Who are the people who have invested in your faith? How could you encourage them this week?
2. Why do you think John emphasizes that the command to love is old, not new?
3. How would you explain the connection between love and obedience?
4. Who is the hardest person in your church or youth group for you to love? What would walking in love toward them look like?

TRY THIS *Send a message this week to someone who has invested in your faith. Thank them, and tell them one specific way they've helped you. Then send another message to someone younger in the faith, encouraging them to keep walking in the truth.*

CHAPTER 3

Who Gets a Platform?

2 John 7–13

Then John explains why he's writing. Many deceivers have spread out into the world, he says. They refuse to admit that Jesus Christ came in a real human body. Anyone like that is the deceiver, the antichrist.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Coming in the Flesh**

The false teachers denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. As in 1 John, this probably means they believed Jesus didn't really have a physical human body, or that the divine Christ wasn't truly united with the human Jesus. Some people in the ancient world believed that the physical world was bad, and that God couldn't possibly become a real human being who ate, slept, sweated, bled, and died. John says this isn't a minor disagreement. It strikes at the heart of the gospel. If Jesus wasn't really human, He couldn't really die for us. If He didn't really die, He couldn't really rise. The good news is that God really became one of us.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Coming or Came?**

In 1 John 4:2, John says Jesus has come in the flesh. Here, the Greek wording is slightly different, and literally means coming in the flesh. Most interpreters think John means the same thing: Jesus' incarnation, God becoming human. Some think the present tense might also point to His future return in a body, or emphasize that Jesus remains fully human even now, at the Father's right hand. Either way, John insists on a real, physical Jesus.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Deceiver and the Antichrist**

John uses strong words: deceiver and antichrist. As in 1 John, he isn't talking about a single end-times figure, but about anyone who denies the truth about Jesus and replaces the real Jesus with a fake one (1 John 2:18–22). John's language is direct, but notice what he's focused on: not people who struggle with doubts or ask honest questions, but teachers actively spreading a false message about Jesus and trying to lead believers away. Having doubts doesn't make you an antichrist. Questions are welcome. John is warning about deception.

Be careful, John says, so that you don't lose what we've worked for, but receive your full reward. The NIV footnote mentions that some manuscripts say what you have worked for.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Don't Lose What You've Built**

John warns that following false teachers could cause the readers to lose what they had worked so hard for. Christians understand this in different ways. Some think John means losing rewards, the recognition God will give for faithful service. Others think he means the danger that the elder's and the church's work among them would be wasted if they abandoned the truth. Others see a warning about the danger of falling away. All agree that faithfulness matters, and that drifting from the truth has real consequences. Think of it like building a house. It takes months to build, but a fire can destroy it in an hour. Guard what God has built in your life.

Anyone who goes too far, John says, and doesn't stay in the teaching about Christ, doesn't have God. But whoever stays in that teaching has the Father, and the Son as well.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Running Ahead**

The NIV translates John's phrase as running ahead. The false teachers apparently saw themselves as progressive, advanced, cutting-edge. They thought they had moved beyond the simple teaching about Jesus to something deeper and more sophisticated. John says that if you move

beyond Jesus, you don't end up ahead. You end up lost. There's nothing wrong with learning more, asking hard questions, or growing in your understanding. Christians should be curious and thoughtful. But growth means going deeper into the truth about Jesus, not leaving it behind. Be careful of anyone who says, the Bible's view of Jesus is outdated, we've moved past that.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Teaching of Christ**

The phrase the teaching of Christ could mean the teaching about Christ, what the apostles taught about who Jesus is, or the teaching Christ gave, what Jesus Himself taught. Both are true and connected. Jesus taught about Himself, and the apostles passed on His teaching and the truth about Him. Christians have summarized this teaching in ancient creeds, like the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, which say that Jesus is the Son of God, truly God and truly human, born of the virgin Mary, crucified, risen, ascended, and coming again. These creeds have united Christians across traditions for more than sixteen hundred years.

Then comes the most debated instruction in the letter. "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them." Anyone who welcomes them, John adds, becomes a partner in their evil work.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What John Is Not Saying**

This instruction has sometimes been misused to justify being cold, rude, or unkind to people who believe differently. That's not what John means. Remember who wrote this letter: the apostle of love, who just told his readers to love one another. Jesus told us to love our neighbors, and even our enemies (Matthew 5:43–48). He ate with sinners and tax collectors, talked with a Samaritan woman whose people had a different religion, and welcomed people everyone else rejected. Paul told Christians to be kind to everyone and to live at peace with everyone, as far as it depends on them (Romans 12:18). Peter told believers to explain their hope with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). John isn't saying you should refuse to be friends

with non-Christians, refuse to invite a classmate of another faith over for dinner, slam the door on people who knock with a different message, or treat anyone with contempt.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What John Is Saying**

To understand verse 10, remember what Setting the Scene explained about house churches and traveling teachers. Churches met in homes. Traveling teachers depended on believers for food, a place to stay, and a chance to teach. Welcoming a traveling teacher into your house church meant giving them a platform to teach the congregation, endorsing them as a genuine Christian teacher, and supporting their ministry with food, shelter, and supplies for their next trip. The word for welcome refers to a formal greeting that signaled acceptance and approval. John is saying: don't give these false teachers an official welcome, a platform, or support. Don't help them spread a message that denies who Jesus is. If you do, you're helping them do damage. It's like a school principal deciding not to invite a speaker who would teach students something harmful. It's not about refusing to be kind to a person. It's about refusing to give their harmful message a microphone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Partners in Their Work**

John says that anyone who welcomes these false teachers shares in their wicked work. That sounds harsh, but think about it. If you give someone a platform, pay their expenses, and introduce them to your friends, you're helping them do what they do. If what they do is spread lies that pull people away from Jesus, you've become part of the problem. That's why it matters who churches invite to speak, which ministries we support, and what we share with others. Supporting someone's message, financially or publicly, makes you a partner in it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Discernment and Influencers**

In John's day, the question was which traveling teachers to welcome into the house church. In your day, the question might be which influencers to follow, which podcasts to listen to, which videos to share, and which voices to let into your head. Every follow, like, share, and view is a kind of welcome. It

gives someone a bigger platform and helps them spread their message. That doesn't mean you can only listen to Christians or people you agree with. Understanding other views can be valuable. But be thoughtful. Use tests like the ones from John and the Didache. What does this person say about Jesus? How do they live? Are they in it for the money or the fame? Do they make you more loving and truthful, or more angry, proud, and cynical? Do they point you to Jesus, or to themselves? You don't have to give every voice a platform in your life.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Spiritual Influencers**

Some of the most popular online voices talk about faith, God, or spirituality. Some are faithful, wise, and helpful. Others mix truth with error, promise easy blessings, sell expensive products, or slowly lead people away from the real Jesus. Some Christian influencers have later been exposed for abuse, fraud, or hypocrisy. Here are some questions to ask about any spiritual voice you follow. Do they teach that Jesus is truly God and truly human, who died and rose again? Do they handle the Bible carefully, or twist it to support their own ideas? Are they accountable to a church or other leaders? Do they live with integrity? Do they ask for money in manipulative ways? Do they welcome questions, or demand total loyalty? Talk with a parent, pastor, or youth leader about the voices you're listening to. A second opinion is always wise.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Disagreeing Kindly**

How can you hold firm to the truth while still being kind to people who disagree? Here are a few ideas. Listen first, and try to understand what the other person actually believes and why. Don't mock or insult anyone, online or in person. Ask questions instead of only making statements. Remember that you were once wrong about things too. Focus on the most important issues, like who Jesus is, rather than arguing about everything. Be honest about what you believe, gently and respectfully. Know when to walk away from an argument that's going nowhere. And keep loving people, whether or not they ever agree with you. Truth and love can go together.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Primary and Secondary Issues**

Not every disagreement among Christians is as serious as the one in 2 John. Christians disagree about many things: how to baptize, how churches should be led, what worship music should sound like, how to understand the end times, and more. These are important, but sincere followers of Jesus disagree about them. The issue in 2 John was the very heart of the faith: who Jesus is. An old saying, often quoted by Christians, puts it this way: in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity, which means love. Learning the difference between essential and non-essential issues will help you stand firm on what matters most without fighting over everything.

Finally, John says he has a lot more to tell them, but he'd rather not put it in writing. He hopes to visit soon and talk face to face, so their joy will be complete. And your chosen sister's children, he adds, send you their greetings.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Face to Face**

John had more to say, but he preferred to say it in person. Some things are better said face to face than in writing. Think about how easily texts and messages are misunderstood. Tone gets lost. Sarcasm reads as cruelty. Silence feels like anger. Hard conversations especially are usually better in person, where people can see your face, hear your voice, and know you care. And there's a joy in being together that a screen can't replace. John says that meeting face to face would make their joy complete. Make time for real, in-person friendships. Put the phone down at dinner. Show up.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Your Sister's Children**

John's final greeting comes from the children of the lady's sister, also chosen by God. If the lady is a church, her sister is probably the church where John was living, perhaps in Ephesus, sending greetings to a sister church. That's a beautiful picture: churches in different places, part of one family, caring for each other. Christians around the world today are still one family. When you pray for believers in other countries, support missionaries, or welcome Christians from other cultures, you're living out what John describes.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Small Letter with a Big Message**

Second John is tiny, but it covers a lot of ground. It shows us that truth and love belong together, that following Jesus means walking in obedience and love, that the truth about who Jesus is matters, that we should be careful who we give a platform to, and that being together face to face is a gift. You could read this letter in two minutes and spend a lifetime learning to live it.

KEY VERSE

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

2 John 9 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think John took the false teachers' message about Jesus so seriously?
2. What's the difference between refusing to give someone a platform and refusing to be kind to them?
3. Which influencers or voices have the biggest platform in your life? Do they point you toward Jesus or away from Him?
4. Why are some conversations better face to face than by text?

TRY THIS *Go through the accounts you follow on social media and the creators you watch or listen to. For each one, ask: What does this voice say about Jesus, truth, and love? Is it making me more like Jesus or less? Unfollow at least one voice that's pulling you away, and follow one that's helping you grow. Then have one conversation this week face to face that you would normally have by text.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just read 2 John, a short letter about truth and love. The truth at the center of it all is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, really came in the flesh. And the love at the center of it all is God's love for you.

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than you can imagine. He wants you to know Him.

> *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (NIV)**

2 We've all turned away.

We've all gone our own way instead of God's. John says that if we claim to have no sin, we're fooling ourselves. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus came for you.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. God didn't wait for us to love Him first.

> *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You for loving me first. Thank You that Jesus died for me and rose again. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me and make me clean. I trust Jesus*

as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King. Help me hold on to the truth, love other people the way You love me, and walk in Your commands. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 2 John straight through. Then read 3 John, its short companion, about welcoming people who serve the truth.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Love someone. John says love is the proof that we know God. This week, show God's love to someone in a practical way.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. John wrote down what he saw and touched so you could check it out for yourself. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if John is right, Jesus really came in the flesh, and the truth about Him is worth knowing.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)