



I Am Writing to You

Bible verses: 1 John 2:12-17

I am writing to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven for his name's sake.

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one.

I write 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 remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one.

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever.

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Context:

“The Beloved Disciple” is generally considered to be youngest in the group that followed Jesus. Because of that, it can be difficult to imagine him as an old man. Yet, the language that is used indicates that the one writing letter is an elder figure. Most scholars place the date of composition to be as early as AD 85 and as late as AD 110. It would hold that John the Apostle is writing this in the tone of a grandfatherly figure.

There is an interesting structure to this section. There is an order: 1) children 2) fathers 3) young men/people. To each of these groups, he says, “I am writing to you.” Then he repeats the pattern of who is being addressed and says, “I write to you.” There is a mix between gentleness and firm authority. Using the phrases “I am writing to you” and “I write to you” is a literary device that is meant to bring some weight to what is being said. But he begins by calling them an affectionate term, “children.” He is acting as the perfect grandfather. One who is gentle, but one who also means business.

He addresses then tenderly, as we will see in the interpretation, but he also is dealing with very heavy subjects. He uses language of power, of combat, and sinfulness, but also the gentle language of a kind, wise elder.

After explaining the context, ask some to read the passage to the group again. When the reader has finished, go back through and highlight the key words and phrases found below.

Key Words and Phrases:

- *Children*: Found in verse 12, the Greek word is “teknia” (TEK-nee-ah). It is not just a word to mean “children,” but it is a term of affection comparable to “darlings.”
- *Young men*: Found in verses 13 and 14, the Greek word is “neaniskoi” (neh-AHN-ees-koy). It is translated as “young men,” but it should be understood as “all young people,” not just young males.
- *Conquered*: Found in verses 13 and 14, the Greek word is from the verb “nikan” (NEE-kahn). It means to defeat, overcome, or subdue through a fight or battle.
- *Evil One*: Found in verses 13 and 14, the Greek word is “ton ponēron” (FOHS). It means one that is “malicious,” “one who is intentionally destructive.”
- *Strong*: Found in verse 14, the Greek word is “ischyroi” (iss-KOO-roy). It means “powerful,” “forceful” and “formidable.”
- *World*: Found in verses 15, 16, and 17, the Greek root is “kosmo” (AH-fee). This means “harmonious arrangement” as in a government. It also means “adornment” or “earthly affairs.”

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation:

This old pastor is talking to both the young people in his community and to those who are parents. Even though he is now old, it seems that he remembers what it was like to follow Jesus at a very young age. He is giving them encouragement in their own walk with God in a way that meets the concerns that young people had then and still have today.

Are our sins really forgiven?

Why am I so tempted to do this I shouldn't?

I feel weak in my faith.

I feel like there are things that are pulling me away from my faith.

In classical Christian language, there are three things that work against a person's growth in Christ: 1) the world, 2) the flesh, and 3) the devil. St. Paul talks a lot about “the flesh,” but this is not in reference to our bodies, because our bodies are good. Instead, St. Paul is talking about that part of us that is resistance to following God more closely.

While John doesn't talk about “the flesh,” he does talk about “the world” and the “Evil One,” also known as the devil. He addresses concerns about the devil first.

Facing the devil can seem extremely frightening and even impossible. But John is calling him the “Evil One” and, in this way, reminds the young people in his community that he is just malicious. He just wants to destroy. He first reminds them who the Evil One is and then he seems to be saying how to overcome him. First, remember that your sins are forgiven. Second, John wants them to know that they already have overcome him and that they shouldn’t be afraid. Third, he tells them that THEY are the ones who are formidable, not the Evil One. They are strong because the Word of God is in them. That is what you are doing now: studying the Word of God and becoming stronger.

After encouraging them in their struggle with the devil, he addresses the “world.” This word is not to be understood as the earth, as a planet. Just as St. Paul’s use of the word “flesh” should not make us think of our body, the word “world” shouldn’t make us think of the earth. Instead, it is the “adornments” of the world that can pull us away. For John, that especially is riches.

Now you may lead a discussion using the following guide.

Application to Real Life:

- Many teenagers have confessed to having a rather guilty conscience. Do you find it difficult to forgive yourself if you have done something wrong? Do you ever feel like God hasn’t forgiven you for something, yet, and that He is still holding on to something?
- John is telling the young people to have the Word of God in them. Is there a scripture passage that you like that helps you through tough times?
- John was thinking specifically about “riches” as being something of the world that pulled young people away from God. If John was here today, what do you think he would name? Are there things in the world that you feel can pull you away from God?
- What do you need prayers for right now in light of this passage?

Closing Prayer:

Ask someone else to read the passage for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

Father of strength, we thank you that you have made us strong to overcome the work of the Evil One. When we are tempted, help us to remember that we are powerful and strong in Christ. By your Word, help us to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. We ask this through Christ who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.