

August 22  
Lesson 12 (NIV)

## A CONQUERING FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: [John 14:15-24](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [1 John 4-5](#)

### 1 JOHN 4:2-3, 13-17

<sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

.....

<sup>13</sup> This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. <sup>16</sup> And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup> This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

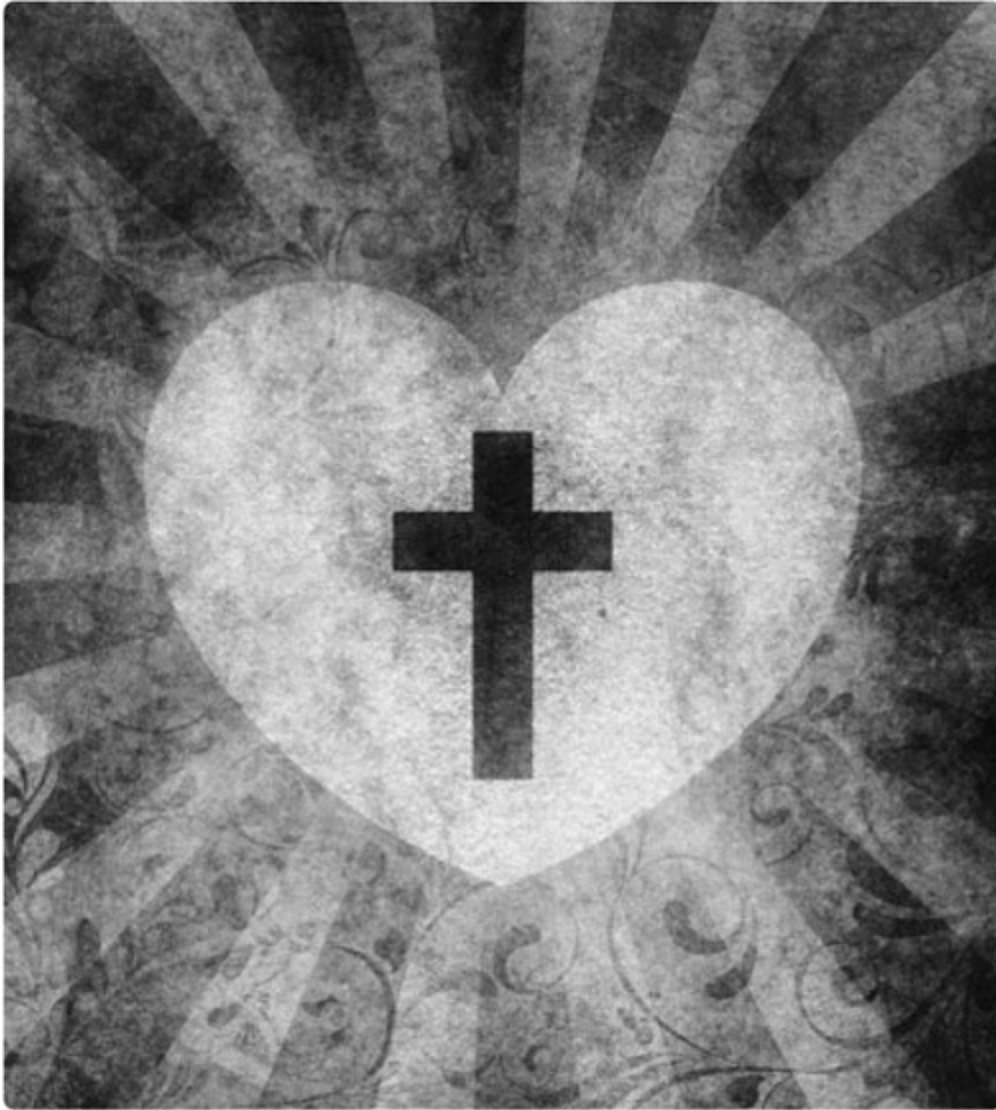


Illustration © Getty Images

## 1 JOHN 5:4-5

**4** For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. **5** Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

### KEY VERSE

*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. —1 John 4:16b*

## CONFIDENT HOPE

## Unit 3: Faith Gives Us Hope

### LESSONS 10–13

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Tell how to recognize “the Spirit of God.”
2. Define the differing senses and references of the words *Spirit* and *spirit*.
3. List three ways he or she can better model God’s love.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. On Incarnation and Reincarnation
- B. Lesson Context

- I. The Condition (1 John 4:2–3)
  - A. Recognition (v. 2)
  - B. Reality (v. 3)
- II. The Encouragement (1 John 4:13–17)
  - A. Holy Spirit (v. 13)
  - B. Confession (vv. 14–15)
    - Divine Intervention*
  - C. Relationship (v. 16)
  - D. Judgment (v. 17)
- III. The Faith (1 John 5:4–5)
  - A. Continual (v. 4)
  - B. Foundational (v. 5)
    - Keeping the Fire Alive*

#### Conclusion

- A. Victory
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### HOW TO SAY IT

Augustus    Aw-gus-tus.

Ephesus	<i>Ef-uh-sus.</i>
epistles	<i>ee-pis-uls.</i>
gnosticism	<i><b>nahss</b>-tih-sizz-um.</i>
gnostics	<i>nahss-ticks.</i>
heresy	<i>hair-uh-see.</i>
heretic	<i>heh-ruh-tick.</i>
Thessalonians	<i>Thess-uh-<b>low</b>-nee-unz (th as in thin).</i>

## Introduction

### A. On Incarnation and Reincarnation

One topic given particular attention during studies at Bible colleges is that of the incarnation. That topic addresses the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the Son of God putting on flesh to become the person Jesus of Nazareth. Today’s text is considered in such studies.

A teacher of such a course was surprised one day when a student (who claimed to be a Christian) announced that she was the reincarnation of someone who had lived about 100 years earlier. The teacher’s response noted the lack of support for this view in historic Christian thought, the pagan origins of reincarnation theory, and a consideration of [Hebrews 9:27](#): “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” The dialogue further included considerations of reincarnation in terms of what the Bible says about each person’s responsibility before God.

In the end, however, the student remained adamant in her belief. Her rejoinder included the exact phrase “regardless of what the Bible says”!

As wrong as the reincarnation theory is, things gets more bizarre still when a cult leader announces himself to be the reincarnation of Christ. For example, the leader of Divine Love Path in Australia claims to be the reincarnated Jesus and says his partner is Mary Magdalene.

Although Scripture refutes reincarnation, it’s possible to go too far the other way and deny the incarnation of Christ in the process. This is seen in early Christianity’s having its hands full at times dealing with heretics who denied the one real incarnation, which took place in the person of Jesus. How successful we will be in resisting and opposing such heresy may very well depend on how firmly we grasp the truths of today’s lesson.

### B. Lesson Context

Five of the books of the New Testament are attributed to the apostle John, one of the orig-

inal 12 disciples (see [Matthew 4:21–22](#); [10:1–4](#)). His five books are the Gospel of John; the letters (also called epistles) that we designate as 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John; and the book of Revelation.

History strongly associates John in his later years with the church in Ephesus. Tradition says he died in the AD 90s. His three letters were probably written in the region of Ephesus for churches in the area, and thus would date from the AD 80s or 90s. John would have been an elderly man at that time. The dignity of his age peeks through in 1 John, where he addressed his readers as his “dear children” numerous times.

The idea of overcoming, or being victorious, is a favorite theme of John’s. In [1 John 2:13–14](#) he discussed victory over Satan. In [1 John 4–5](#), he wrote about overcoming the pressures of the world. As we consider this in today’s study, we must be careful to distinguish among three ways the Bible speaks of “the world”:

- As planet Earth in its physical sense (examples: [Acts 17:24](#); [Romans 10:18](#))
- As the world’s human inhabitants (examples: [Luke 2:1](#); [John 3:16](#))
- As a system of values opposed to God’s (examples: [John 14:17](#); [Colossians 2:20](#))

In his first letter John wrote of Satan’s system for opposing the work of God on earth ([1 John 2:15–17](#)). In this sense, a person of the world lives for the pleasures of the flesh, but a dedicated Christian lives for the joys of the Spirit.

When John wrote his first epistle, Christianity had existed for more than 50 years. His audience faced the pressures of heretical ideas and uncertainty about their salvation. The ideas that would become full-blown gnosticism in the second century AD were already threatening Christianity. One of gnosticism’s heretical beliefs was that salvation came through knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*, from which we have our word *diagnosis*). They also believed that Christ was a spirit who didn’t exist in bodily form. The spiritual was viewed as always good, and the physical was viewed as always evil.

## I. The Condition

([1 JOHN 4:2–3](#))

### A. Recognition (v. 2)

2. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

This statement immediately follows John’s stress on the need for discernment ([1 John 4:1](#)).

One vital doctrine of Christianity is that of the divine-human nature of Jesus ([John 1:1–18](#)), and the situation in John’s day called for the need to emphasize the fact that *Jesus came in the flesh* (see [Lesson Context](#) and [2 John 7](#)).

But why was Jesus’ having had a real, physical body important? Until the destruction of the temple in AD 70, animals were sacrificed yearly there on the Day of Atonement to remind the Jews that the shedding of blood was necessary to atone for their sins ([Leviticus 16](#); compare [Hebrews 9:22](#)). Those sacrifices pointed to the sacrifice that Jesus would one day offer as he gave himself on the cross ([Matthew 26:28](#)). If Jesus did not come in the flesh, then he didn’t have a body to sacrifice or blood to shed. Thus, it was essential that Jesus be not only fully God but also fully human in order to make salvation possible ([1 Timothy 3:16](#)).

Thus John provides a method by which to identify false prophets in this regard: *Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God*. This test complements Jesus’ own words in [Matthew 7:15–17](#) and [24:23–26](#) regarding the need to identify false prophets.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How would you answer someone who claims that [1 John 4:2](#) contradicts [Matthew 7:1](#), which says we are not to judge?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What passages in addition to [1 Corinthians 5:9–13](#) and [2 John 10–11](#) help frame your answer?

## B. Reality (v. 3)

### **3a. but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.**

As the church was born, the believers were devoted to “the apostles’ teaching” ([Acts 2:42](#)). But several decades later when John wrote his letters, certain people were disseminating false teaching about Christ and departing from the apostolic faith (see [Lesson Context](#)).

### **3b. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming**

The word *antichrist* occurs only four times in the New Testament, and only in John’s letters (here and [1 John 2:18a, 22](#); and [2 John 7](#)). Bible students often try to identify this opponent as a singular individual, possibly the “man of lawlessness ... the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God, ... proclaiming himself to be God” in [2 Thessalonians 2:3–4](#) and/or as the (op) poser mentioned in [Revelation 20:10](#).

However, these identifications run into great difficulty, given the fact that John also speaks of antichrist in the plural as he states that “even now many antichrists have come.... They went out from us” ([1 John 2:18b–19](#)). As we consider how that fact dovetails with the

verse before us, we should note that the Greek word behind the translation *spirit* occurs about 380 times in the New Testament. As such, it can refer to different things depending on context. Here, the word *spirit* refers to those who claim to have the inside track on divine communication (see also [2 Thessalonians 2:2](#)).

### **3c. and even now is already in the world.**

The spirit that was *already* at work in John’s time thrives yet today. The Lesson Context explains the differing senses that phrase *the world* can take throughout the New Testament. But we want to zero in on how John uses the term, given that about half the occurrences of the phrase *the world* in the New Testament are in John’s inspired books, which themselves constitute only about 14 percent of the New Testament.

*The world* to John usually refers to sinful humanity. In this sense, the world (that is, humanity) is largely opposed to God ([John 3:19](#)). This is the world that has strayed far from its Creator.

## **II. The Encouragement**

([1 JOHN 4:13–17](#))

### **A. Holy Spirit (v. 13)**

#### **13. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.**

A careful reading here might surprise us, because John wrote not only of the *Spirit* dwelling in the heart of the believer (*he in us*) but also *that we live in him*. God gives his Spirit not only to dwell in our hearts but also to make it possible that we dwell in the heart of the Father.

This is similar to Jesus’ saying, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you” ([John 15:4](#)). Our relationship with God is not a one-way street. As God gives us his Spirit, we give God ourselves—we dwell in him. Paul, in addressing the Athenians, quoted a pagan philosopher as saying correctly that “in him we live and move and have our being” ([Acts 17:28](#)).

When a person is guided by the Holy Spirit, he or she produces the fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22–26](#)). Thus that becomes a test (contrast [Matthew 7:15–20](#)).

### **B. Confession (vv. 14–15)**

#### **14. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.**

The *we* refers to the apostles, whom Christ chose as his special messengers ([1 John 1:1](#)). Of the original apostolic band, John was likely the only one still living when he wrote in the AD 80s or 90s. He knew that his time was short, so he felt compelled to *testify* yet again before the

grave took him as well.

Jesus revealed the Father to sinful humanity as a loving God who has never given up on his lost children, *the world* in rebellion against him ([John 3:17](#); [1 John 4:3](#), above). There was nothing accidental or incidental about Jesus' mission; he was *sent* to save. Nothing was more important or central than that for John.

**15. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.**

A purpose running throughout this letter is to answer the implied question, “How do I know I am in a true, saving fellowship with God?” (see [1 John 2:5, 6](#)). John answers this in several ways, and the verse before us provides one of those answers. The confession *Jesus is the Son of God* reflects belief. Even so, we realize that John is not suggesting that confession based on belief is the whole plan of salvation—even demons can make such a confession (see [Matthew 8:29](#); compare [James 2:19](#)).

What John is talking about, rather, is embracing Jesus as the authoritative Lord of one's life while rejecting any influence the “spirit of the antichrist” ([1 John 4:3](#), above) might have to offer. To confess Jesus in this sense is to follow him exclusively in a trusting relationship of faith and service. Such a person lives in the presence of God and allows God's Spirit to live in his or her life at the deepest level (compare [John 20:31](#)). Other things follow confession in the plan of salvation (see [Acts 2:38–39](#); etc.), but confession is foundational.

### ***A DIVINE INTERVENTION***

In my role as a minister, I've observed a few addiction interventions. One intervention was called because the addict had been driving drunk on several occasions. He denied that he had an addiction. He'd never been arrested or involved in an accident, so his behavior couldn't be too bad—or so he thought.

Members of the man's family told him how his increasingly erratic behavior was affecting them. One by one, they declared their love for him and in vivid terms expressed the emotional pain his behavior was causing. But it was the threat of losing everyone and everything he held dear that finally brought him to acknowledge reluctantly his need for treatment.

Human sin called for an intervention, a vivid demonstration of God's love and holiness. The mission of Jesus was that divine intervention, as it demonstrated both God's love and his holy nature. God warns of the judgment that awaits if we do not respond to his loving and holy Son. Will you remain in denial of your own sin or seek treatment from “the great physician”?

—C. R. B.





Visual for Lesson 12. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual and turning its statement into an application question of “How?”

### C. Relationship (v. 16)

**16. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.**

**God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.**

John is often called “the apostle of love,” and with good reason: he uses the word *love* by proportion more than any other writer of the New Testament. More than 30 such uses are found in this epistle of 1 John—that’s more than once every hundred words! He alone uses the phrase *God is love* (here and in [1 John 4:8](#)). His intent is to assure us of our standing with God as his *love* dwells within us. Here the word *we* includes all who believe in the Son. We become stronger as the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit ([Romans 5:5](#)).

In the verse before us, *the love God has for us* explains more fully how we dwell in him. This is a description of relationship. When we understand and accept that love, our relationship is

determined. It is a relationship of loving trust, so much so that John can say we live in God and he in us. As we love Jesus, we will keep his commands ([John 14:15](#); [15:10](#); [1 John 5:3](#)). Love for Jesus is not based on emotion but on commitment. An indication of this commitment is our love for fellow Christians ([1 John 4:19–21](#)). A person can't love Christians without loving God and can't love God without loving the family of God.

This fact cannot be separated from the thought of [1 John 4:15](#), our previous verse, which conditions our relationship to God with our acknowledgment of Christ as his Son. We cannot accept Jesus as the Son of God without understanding the loving sacrifice his cross represents, a defining expression of God's love for us. When we understand and receive the love of God, it makes us into persons of love as well.

#### *What Do You Think?*

In your prayer life, how should you balance the fact of God's love with the fact that he is holy?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How do passages such as [Hebrews 7:26](#); [1 Peter 1:15](#); and [Revelation 3:7](#); [4:8](#) help frame your response?

### D. Judgment (v. 17)

**17. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.**

Christians have nothing to fear about *the day of judgment* because the judge has already proven his love for us. Those who have reason to fear that day are Satan and anyone—from any era and any nation—who follows the spirit of antichrist ([1 John 4:3](#), above; [Revelation 21:7–8](#)).

God will not reverse course and punish those upon whom he has lavished his love. We can have confidence in this fact as we experience the love of God and express that love to others (compare [1 John 2:28](#); [3:3](#), [19–21](#); [4:18](#), not in our printed text).

## III. The Faith

([1 JOHN 5:4–5](#))

### A. Continual (v. 4)

**4. For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.**

The Christian life begins with *faith* and ends with faith ([Romans 1:17](#)). But faith is more

than just emotions or intellectual assent (see [James 2:14–26](#)). The person having only an emotional or intellectual experience of faith has a dead faith. Such a person knows the right words, but does not back up those words with actions that *overcome the world*. The faithful mind understands the truth; the faithful heart desires the truth; and the faithful will acts on the truth. John describes this faith as being *born of God* (see [1 John 5:1–2, 18–19](#)).

To overcome is to work actively against the flawed principles by which the world lives ([Colossians 2:8, 20–23](#); see [1 John 4:3](#), above). The outworking of such principles may be expressed in many categories (see [Mark 7:20–23](#); [Romans 1:29–31](#); [Galatians 5:19–21](#); [1 Peter 2:1](#)). We can sum these up by saying that the world’s values are polar opposites to God’s command to love one another. When we practice love, we join with Jesus in saying, “I have overcome the world” ([John 16:33](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

What are some ways to encourage a person of dead faith to embrace Christ anew?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How do you do so without resorting to a legalistic list of dos and don’ts?

## B. Foundational (v. 5)

### **5. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.**

*Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, both of which mean “savior.” In several places in addition to the verse before us, John stresses the fact that the Savior *is the Son of God* ([1 John 1:7; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 15](#)). The designation *Son of God* refers to Jesus’ “one and only” status in relation to the heavenly Father ([John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18](#)).

This claim directly opposed those of the first-century Roman world who considered Emperor Augustus and other emperors to be sons of a god. Jewish leaders of the day didn’t like Jesus’ claim any more than their Roman counterparts did. So they demanded that Jesus should die for blasphemy in that regard ([Matthew 26:62–66](#); compare [John 10:31–36](#)).

On what it means to overcome *the world*, see again the [Lesson Context](#) and commentary on [1 John 5:4](#). Both this physical world and its unholy value systems will pass away. But the person who obeys God will live forever ([1 John 2:17](#)). John further describes the victory to come in [Revelation 3:5, 12, 21](#). Those who believe the truth about Jesus and act on that truth share in that victory.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What is a small way to engage with the world this week instead of retreating from it?

### *Digging Deeper*

Would you describe this as being “in the world” but not “of the world” ([John 17:11–18](#))? Why, or why not?

## **REKINDLING THE FIRE**

Newlyweds often want to be together continuously. When issues of everyday life begin to intrude, however, distance can result. For example, if children enter the picture, caring for them can shift the nature of the marital relationship. A couple may decide they no longer love each other because of such shifts.

If they are wise, however, they will seek the guidance of a trusted counselor who will help them to “rekindle the fire.” The counseling may result in both parties realizing they should act in loving ways even when (or especially when) they don’t feel like it. This is wise. Since hearts, minds, and bodies work together, then acting in a loving manner (as we know we should) can pull our hearts and minds along the same path.

This applies to the church as well regarding interactions among all Christians. When we find ourselves not “feeling our faith,” then acting in the loving ways that we know a faithful Christian should can rekindle the fires of faith. When we focus our attention on living the faith, we will find ourselves overcoming the pull of the world that would draw us away from Christ.

When was the last time you experienced this kind of victory?

—C. R. B.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Victory**

We can have victory and overcome the world only through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We can overcome as we allow the Holy Spirit, sent after Jesus’ ascension, to empower us to do so. God put this plan into action even though those created in his image rejected him time after time ([John 1:10–11](#); [3:16](#)).

Despite this rejection, God still seeks to save people from a fate of eternal death ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). God’s plan for this still centers on the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of his beloved Son, Jesus. The plan remains the same today as in the first century AD; it has not changed. In his life, Jesus proved his identity; in his death, Jesus paid the penalty for sin; in his resurrection, Jesus defeated the power of death; in his ascension, he reigns forevermore.

At his second coming, Jesus will rid the world of sin and welcome his children home. Hal-

lelujah! What a Savior we have! Those facts allow us to have confidence as we face the challenges of the world. And as we obey Jesus, we can assist others to do so as well.

*What Do You Think?*

Which part of today's lesson do you struggle with most? Why?

*Digging Deeper*

What action will you take this week to remedy this problem?

## **B. Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love expressed in sending your Son to die for the sins of the world! Empower us to overcome the world and model your love to others. As we do, may we look ever forward to the day of your Son's return, when we will share in his glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **C. Thought to Remember**

The only way to overcome the world is through faith in Jesus.

# **INVOLVEMENT LEARNING**

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## **Into the Lesson**

Write "LOVE" in large letters on the board. Divide the class into pairs or triads. Distribute handouts (you create) on which are printed both of the following tasks. Allow the groups to decide which one of the two they want to complete.

- The ordinary person who has shown me the most love is \_\_\_\_\_ . Each group member takes one minute to respond to this prompt with the others in their group. After all have shared, group members may ask each other questions for more information about the persons described.
- Love is a force today. Group members use smartphones to look for recent examples of outstanding love. Each group member analyzes motives for the expressions.

After volunteers report results in whole-class discussion, making the following transi-

tional statement: “The greatest motivator for love in our world is the love demonstrated by Jesus Christ. But that love also involves some negative angles. Let’s see how and why.”

## Into the Word

Distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following questions. Have students work in the above groups to answer, using today’s Scripture text. Some answers are directly in the text; others require specific application of a general principle or command.

- 1–What are some ways to test spirits to see whether they are from God?
- 2–When we do that testing, aren’t we violating Jesus’ command “Do not judge” in [Matthew 7:1](#)?
- 3–How can we know we’re dwelling in God?
- 4–How is it that our love can be made perfect?
- 5–What should be the Christian’s attitude toward the world?
- 6–What qualities are necessary for us to have the right attitude toward the world around us?

Allow up to eight minutes for this activity, and then ask volunteers to share discoveries. Responses should be based on the following references: 1–[1 John 4:2](#); 2–[Matthew 7:1](#) is not a blanket statement against all discerning and evaluating; see also [Matthew 7:15–20](#); [1 Corinthians 5:11–13](#); etc.; 3–[1 John 4:13, 16–17](#); 4–[1 John 4:17](#); 5–[1 John 5:4](#); 6–[1 John 5:4–5](#).

*Option.* Ask class members, in the same groups, to create a one-sentence devotional message from this text on the theme “The Christian and the World.” After six minutes, ask volunteers to share their sentences with the class as a whole.

## Into Life

Give each participant a slip of paper on which you have printed the following issues, one per slip:

*serious illness / job loss / parent-child conflict / marital stress / neighborhood issues / financial setback / personal sin*

If you desire small-group discussion, give each group one slip; if you desire whole-class discussion, give each learner one slip. Then write this question on the board:

*What are three ways you could model God’s love to someone who is mired in the situation on your slip of paper?*

If you chose small-group consideration, allow several minutes. (*Option.* Extend this consideration by distributing copies of the “Love ≠ Apathy” exercise on the activity page, which you can download. After several minutes of discussion in pairs, or one minute of individual work, call

for volunteers to share in whole-class discovery.)

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Overcoming the World” exercise on the activity page. Have participants work individually to complete it as indicated in one minute. In the ensuing discussion, also discuss the different senses of what it means to love the world as depicted in [John 3:16](#) and [1 John 2:16](#).