



EXCERPT



Live in the Light
Radiating the Hope of the Letters of John
A Six-Week Bible Study Experience



July 16, 2024 | \$18, 176 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0682-5

"In a world full of chaos, confusion, and contention, we desperately need to accept 'An Invitation to Light.' Tara Beth leads us into a deep dive of the letters of John, where we discover how to be light and hope in the midst of darkness and despair."

—Christine Caine, founder of A21 and Propel Women

New IVP Bible Study from Tara Beth Leach

Not too long ago, I was driving my boys to school on the most beautiful fall day. Leaves were starting to turn, I had a pumpkin flavored coffee in my hand, I had just finished a fulfilling workout, and my boys were happily chatting in the back seat. I had nothing but joy in my heart and my mind, and I found myself thanking God for the gift of my children and the gift of the day. I hugged and kissed my boys goodbye and watched them saunter into the school as they chatted with their friends, when suddenly, fear darkened my heart.

What if . . .

Another horrific mass shooting had happened and the thought of such a scene dampened my joy.

It's the "What if?" questions that lurk around the corners of every joyful day. What-if situations exist for all of us, and they can be downright frightening. On that day, for me, it was a school shooting. Your what-if fear could be job loss, illness, or loneliness. Sometimes, darkness seems to overcome, drown, and penetrate. Click on the news, and despair comes knocking on the doors of our emotions. Even as Christians we wonder, What do we do? What is God going to do? Is there any hope? Will the light eventually win?

At the heart of Scripture is a robust call for the people of God to bear witness to the light of God amid a weary, groaning, and dark world. To be a witness means we are called to be ambassadors of the kingdom of God. To be a witness means we are called to mirror the things of God—the goodness of God, the light of God, and the love of God. Bearing witness means that we are to resemble the characteristics of God, so that when people look at us, they will see what God is like. At the heart of the letters of John in the New Testament is a vision for such a witness—that is, to live light and hope when darkness seems to be looming. In the end, light wins. In the present, light is here. In the now, we are called to live the light.

The apostle John, the author of these three letters—who also authored the fourth Gospel earlier in his life and the book of Revelation later in his life—is referred to as "the beloved disciple" of Jesus. John followed in the footsteps of his rabbi Jesus. He witnessed Jesus turning water into wine; he stood by as Jesus healed the invalid near the waters of Bethesda; he witnessed the wonder of Jesus feeding five thousand with only a few loaves and fishes; he was there at the transfiguration; he followed Jesus to the cross and cared for Jesus' mother, Mary; and he was one of the first to hear the news of the empty tomb. In the book of Acts, we see that John became one of the first leaders of the early Christian church.

Some years later, John wrote letters to turbulent churches rife with leadership failures, divisions over theology and practice, church splits, and even an infamous "antichrist" who convinced faithful Christians to revolt.



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Tara Beth Leach is a pastor at Good Shepherd Church in Naperville, Illinois. She previously served at First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena (“PazNaz”) in Southern California and Christ Church of Oak Brook in the western suburbs of Chicago. She is a graduate of Olivet Nazarene University and Northern Theological Seminary. Tara Beth is a regular writer for Missio Alliance and writes and speaks widely about women in ministry and church leadership. She is the author of *Emboldened*, *Radiant Church*, and *Forty Days on Being a Six*.

Maybe that sounds eerily similar. It does to me. It seems as though the church is melting under the heat wave of national politics and conspiracy theories, divisions over race and justice, wars raging in the back yards of innocent civilians (sometimes in the name of Christianity!), and hunger raging in the bellies of infants. Where do we stand as a church? Does the world see the light and hope in us amid the darkness?

As a pastor, I feel the weightiness of John’s letters. He writes as one who knows division, church splits, struggle, and ongoing conflict. At the same time, John writes because he believes in Jesus and he believes in the church. John believed the words of Jesus when he said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). We do have trouble in our world today, but Jesus has indeed overcome the world.

For John, the future of the church is not a lost cause. He does not believe his words will be in vain, but instead he recognizes the authority given to him as an apostle, a pastor, a church planter, and an elder. He gives a vision for radiance—that is, as the light of Jesus fills our lives, it exudes and beams out of us and cuts through the darkness. It’s the kind of radiance that flows out of our relationship with God and one another—one that is wrapped in light, in which God is the source of all these things.

When I think of things such as these, I can’t help but imagine what could happen if Jesus’ people took John’s clarion call to heart. To live a radiant Christian life is to reflect and emit the truth, light, love, and freedom of Jesus—it is to glow in darkness. Thus, the invitation John gives to the reader is an invitation to a life of beaming light.

Over the next six weeks, listen for John’s invitations to the earliest Christians and the invitations for us today. The backdrop of the world in which we live is full of bitterness, war, strife, abuse, and misery. We are surrounded by the despairing, hurting, and hopeless. The world needs Jesus, and the world needs to know that Jesus’ family is like Jesus. When the church is truly light, others are drawn into the love and truth of Jesus through our fellowship.

This is a six-week study with weekly teachings and group discussions and five days of individual study per week. It walks through the letters of John and also includes other books of the Bible, especially written from John the apostle. It is recommended that group time is a minimum of sixty to ninety minutes so that groups can have plenty of time for prayer requests and fellowship as well as the video teaching and group discussion. Plan to pick five days a week for individual study that should take about fifteen to twenty minutes per day. Days one through four include readings and written reflections, and day five is a guided prayer practice.

My prayer for you is that over the next six weeks, the light of Jesus and his truth would bathe you in his love, light, and forgiveness. I don’t know where you find yourself these days; whether you’re new in your Christian journey or a mature Christian, I pray that this study would grow you. May the Lord meet with you in every moment, and may Jesus embolden you to truth; may the Spirit empower you to freedom; may the Lord propel you to love; and may the Father impel you to light.

—taken from the introduction, “An Invitation to Light”



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