4. What changes should I expect as I follow Jesus?

According to 1 John 5:1, ‘Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.’ Our faith makes us different; a change has taken place and we have a new identity as one of God’s children (John 1:12). How do you tend to respond to someone who asks you to tell them a bit about yourself? Often we tend to define ourselves by what we do, or by our relationship with others. What roles or relationships do you talk about? How important would it be for you to talk about being a Christian and your relationship with God? Is the image of being a ‘child of God’ helpful when it comes to explaining what being a Christian is like? If you are a follower of Jesus, what difference does being a child of God make to you?

1 John 5:2-3 refers to loving God and obeying his commandments, and the commandments John has in mind are set out in 1 John 3:23 and 4:21. Putting this all together, what different reasons does John give as to why we should love one another as children of God?

What does loving each other look like, in practice? In Romans 12:9-21, Paul heads up a list of practical exhortations with a call to ‘Let love be genuine.’ From the following list, what jumps out at you as an important, practical expression of love for one another? What’s missing from this list?

Looking at 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, can you think of times when love has been expressed to you in a way that conforms to this list? Are there times when you have treated others in a way that is not consistent with love? It may be good to spend some time in thanksgiving and repentance as you think about these questions. Remember that God is love: this list also shows how he feels about you and how he is committed to treating you. If this is how God loves us, this is also how we are called to love each other (1 John 4:7-12). If such love came to us automatically or easily, John would not have to emphasise the need for it so much in his letter. What do you think John means when he talks about God’s love being perfected, or made complete in us (1 John 4:12)?

John asserts that God’s commandments are not burdensome or hard to bear (1 John 5:3): why should that be the case? How and why does ‘the world’ hinder or deter us from keeping God’s commandments, and what do you think John means when he talks about conquering or overcoming the world (5:4)? What does ‘the world’ mean here?

John declares that or faith gives us the victory over the world: in what different ways is there a clash or a conflict between your faith and the world? Is it helpful to think of this as if it were a battle that you have to fight and which you will win? Why is the outcome assured (John 16:33)? Because Jesus warns us that we will have tribulation, suffering or persecution in the world, we should not be taken by surprise if following him brings trouble our way. When and how has that been your experience? Were you ready and prepared for this? Why, or if not, why not? Christ promises peace to those who are in him. Have you ever found that peace in the midst of conflict? Are there practical steps we can take that can help us to access and secure the promised peace of Christ? Turning back to 1 John 5:4, to what extent would it be true to say that our faith overcomes the world as we put our trust in Christ who has already won the battle on our behalf? Is faith just a matter of relying on what Christ has done for us, or are there practical ways in which our faith should find expression?

1 John 5:5 puts this passage on repeat, as it leads us from 5:4 back to look at 5:1 again: can you see how it does this? This is a literary technique that invites us to reread the passage. Why not read 1 John 5:1-5 again, slowly and prayerfully, two or three times, asking God to speak to you through it? Has anything new come to you through doing this?

Of the issues raised in this study, what for you is the most significant change the following Jesus has made, or should make, in your life?

Kindle, O Lord, in our hearts, we pray,

The flame of that love which never ceases,

That it may burn in us and give light to others.

May we shine forever in your temple,

Set on fire with that eternal light of yours w

Which puts to flight the darkness of this world;

In the name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

*The SPCK Book of Christian Prayer*