In the Israelite culture, murder was a big deal because, according to the Bible, people are made in the image of God. This was true about everyone—even the vilest offender. The murder of innocent people was even worse. As you know, King David was prohibited from building the temple in Jerusalem. Why? Because he had killed so many innocent people (1 Chronicles 22:8).

The phrase “innocent blood” appears in the Bible 17 times, with only one of those occurrences in the New Testament (Matthew 27:4). It is a reference to murder. Let’s be honest, we don’t often get the opportunity to talk people out of murdering someone. So, what’s the point of this lesson?

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. | 1 John 3:15

There are some things people do that have the same effect as murder. Similarly, there are things people refuse to do that result in the spiritual death of innocent people. We all have opportunities to influence many people. When we fail to influence people toward God or when we influence people toward things other than God, we are guilty of the sin of hating them—we are guilty of murder.

The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that’s the essence of inhumanity. | George Bernard Shaw

The little letter of 1 John was written to encourage believers to connect their religious beliefs with their everyday lives. It always has been easy for us to nod our heads in agreement with every word spoken at church and then live as if we didn’t believe a word of it.

John said that our lives—not our words—reveal the true state of our relationship with God. If our faith is limited to our words, we are little more than politicians making empty promises, and that’s something we all dislike.

- What does your daily life—words, actions, attitudes—say about the authenticity of your relationship with God?

- In what areas of life do you show indifference toward people?

The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible. | Dwight L. Moody

The background of the early church was painted by the Pharisees. That’s why the writers of the New Testament spent so much time insisting that believers let their faith influence more than just their words. The Pharisees were very religious, yet they hated people who weren’t part of their “club.” They paraded their piety for everyone to see. They called attention to themselves, criticized anyone who challenged them, and used intimidation to get their way. They thought they owned God. They believed God needed them. They were wrong.

We don’t have to sin (1 John 2:1-2). Sin is a choice. Whenever we sin, it is because we choose to sin. That might not be the most radical theological truth you’ve every heard, but it is very significant in the lives of believers. How can we keep from sinning? We must focus more on our relationship with God than on defeating sin. When we are in an intimate, growing relationship with God, we will be better able to resist many temptations.

But, when we do sin, we have a defense attorney—Jesus. Sin is a weak foe because it already has been defeated. Jesus paid the price for every sin we have committed as well as every sin we will ever commit. So, why don’t we live any way we want? If all of our sins have been paid, there is no penalty for doing whatever feels right at the time, right?
If you think that, you misunderstand what it means to be a follower of Christ. Sin costs us our spiritual vitality. It takes us away from God’s best for our lives. When we sin, we exchange the possibility of an abundant life for a life of slavery and the consequences of sin. Sure, all sins are forgiven, but all sins have unavoidable consequences. Choosing to sin also makes us guilty of the third deadly sin—we are responsible for the shedding of Jesus’ blood.

- What is your initial reaction to the statement, “We don’t have to sin”?

- What does our deliberate sin say about our understanding of Jesus’ sacrificial death?

Our lives bear the validation of our relationship with Christ. When Jesus is alive in our lives, we are changed. In fact, everything is changed. If we claim to be followers of Christ yet hold to our old ways of life, our relationship with God should be questioned. It’s one thing to join a religious organization; following Christ is different.

**Undeniable proof** (1 John 2:3-6). We live in a time when proving our identity is a common exercise. Typically, we reach for a picture ID (which features a picture that looks more like an alien than a human) and allow the questioning person to decide for himself or herself. We do this all the time.

- What are some situations in which you have to prove your identity?

We don’t often think about it, but we also have a spiritual picture ID. It’s not our baptism certificate. It’s not a membership card from the church. It’s far more obvious than that.

In verse 3, John makes a simple statement using a small but powerful word—if. Take a close look at verse 3. The authenticity of our relationship with God is made obvious through our response to God’s commands. Be careful here, because some people will interpret this as a works-based salvation. That’s not what this verse says. The order of the words is important—the relationship with God comes first, the proof of the relationship follows.

This is a troubling verse for many believers because they want the evidence of their relationship with God to exist apart from their daily lives. They want their salvation to have little or no effect on their daily lives.

The truth is exactly the opposite: evidence of your relationship with God comes only from your daily life. It doesn’t matter what you say, how many times you attend church, how much you give, where you serve, or your position of leadership. John said that we KNOW that we know God IF we obey His Word. It’s that simple.

The Bible never paints a good picture of liars. Verse 4 reminds us of that fact. Claiming knowledge of God and exhibiting attitudes, actions, and lifestyles that are contrary to God’s truth sets up a dilemma. We can’t know God and live like the world. So, which one is true? Our attitudes, actions, and lifestyles tell the real story.

Is it possible for someone to be in the church for a long time and still be lost? Yep! Doesn’t someone’s serving, giving, and going earn them an exception? Nope! Are there people in our church—maybe in your group—who go through religious motions and live with total disregard for God’s truth and His Word? You bet there are!

There are three reasons people obey God’s Word—they have to, they need to, or they want to. Slaves must obey their master. If a slave doesn’t obey, he or she will be punished. Many employees obey because they need to...they obey their bosses because they need a paycheck. Believers are to obey because they want to. It’s our relationship with God that makes obeying Him our utmost desire. Baby Christians need to be constantly reminded to obey through threats and congratulated with rewards for doing what is expected. Mature believers obey God out of their love for Him.

- What is your motivation for obeying God? Are you a baby Christian or a mature believer?

- What would others say about you in response to the questions above?
In verse 6, John sums up the expectation God has of anyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ—walk as Jesus did. “Walking” is a reference to the entirety of one’s life. This is the goal—though it is unattainable in this lifetime, we are challenged to become more and more like Christ. This is the simplified process of spiritual growth.

No matter where we are, we are to do what Jesus would do in that situation. Why is this so hard for many believers? Honestly, they made a decision to accept God’s offer of salvation but haven’t grown in their relationship with Him. They are more influenced by social media than God’s Word. They spend more time talking about television and movies than about God’s love. They read the latest fad books but their Bibles have been in lost and found for three months. These aren’t the habits of the spiritually mature!

Think about how you invest your discretionary time each day. Considering your time allocation, what is the most significant influence on your thought life? Is that leading you closer to God or away from Him?

You’ve heard this before (1 John 2:7-8). If you’ve raised kids, you know what it’s like to give the same instructions over and over. In exasperation, you might have said, “How many times do I have to tell you this?” John has one of those moments in verse 7.

In verse 7, “from the beginning” is a reference to the start of one’s relationship with God. John’s readers had heard this message, but apparently had not applied it to their lives. Therefore, it warranted being repeated.

But, there was something new about the old message (verse 8). The light of God’s truth shines from the hearts of those who love Him and have an authentic relationship with Him. When God moves into our lives, ungodliness moves out. Our attitudes change. Our desires change. The things we used to love, we put away. The things we used to hate—living to glorify God and honoring Him in everything we do—we now love. If that hasn’t happened in your life, you need to take an honest look at your relationship with God.

How is God’s love being revealed through your life?

The shedding of innocent blood (1 John 2:9-11). Hate is a strong emotion. It also is a gateway attitude. Jesus viewed anger and hatred as prerequisites for murder. In other words, if you never get angry or hate someone, you likely will not commit murder.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” | Matthew 5:21-22a

We shed innocent blood when we fail to love others the way God loves us—unconditionally. Our love for others is the litmus test of our relationship with God.

It’s easy to practice solitary Christianity. This happens when we attend classes, sing songs, use Bible words, and close our eyes while others pray. To the casual observer, we appear to be believers. To keep from blowing our cover, we isolate ourselves from relationships. We don’t talk about what’s really happening in our lives. In a crowd of people, we are very alone.

We can do all the right religious things and still resist God’s command to love others. When we do that, we reveal our true identity. In the words of John, we show the world that we are living in darkness, not light.

We can’t lead others if we are living in darkness. We are, in fact, the blind leading the blind. When we don’t love others the way God loves them, we murder them; we shed innocent blood. Few people reading this lesson will be tempted to commit murder, but based on John’s words, we all are guilty of shedding innocent blood.

When we are in a right relationship with God, three things will happen:

1. We will live in fellowship with God and other believers.
2. We will not become a stumbling block to others.
3. We will grow spiritually and become more like Christ.
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being “I’m doing what God expects”, rate yourself in each of the following areas of life.

- What is the strength of your fellowship with God?
- What is the strength of your fellowship with others?
- What is your effect on the spiritual vitality of others?
- How have you grown spiritually over the last six months?

We don’t often think of ourselves as murderers. However, we all are guilty of being less than great representatives of Jesus. It’s easy to be rude to people. It’s easy to assert our intelligence while pointing out the stupidity of others. It’s easy to act like everyone else acts. According to Scripture, these are examples of hating others. And when we hate, we murder.

We must compare our lives to God’s expectation. He calls us to be like Christ. It doesn’t matter what everyone else does. The only way we become like Christ is by spending more time with Him. That might require us to reevaluate how we invest our discretionary moments. We can’t create more time, but we can reassign the time we use.

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A Weak Foe
- Read and discuss 1 John 2:1-2. Use some or all of the following questions in your discussion:
  - What is your initial reaction to the statement, “We don’t have to sin”?
  - What does our deliberate sin say about our understanding of Jesus’ sacrificial death?

A Big Little Word
- Read and discuss 1 John 2:3-6. Use some or all of the following questions in your discussion:
  - What are some situations in which you have to prove your identity?
  - What is your motivation for obeying God? Are you a baby Christian or a mature believer?
  - What would others say about you in response to the questions above?
  - Think about how you invest your discretionary time each day. Considering your time allocation, what is the most significant influence on your thought life? Is that leading you closer to God or away from Him?

This Isn’t New
- Read and discuss 1 John 2:7-8. Use some or all of the following questions in your discussion:
  - How is God’s love being revealed through your life?
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being “I’m doing what God expects”, rate yourself in each of the following areas of life:
    - What is the strength of your fellowship with God?
    - What is the strength of your fellowship with others?
    - What is your effect on the spiritual vitality of others?
    - How have you grown spiritually over the last six months?
Now what?
You probably haven’t committed murder—in the technical sense. However, in the biblical sense, we’ve all shed innocent blood by not responding to others the way God expects us to respond. The example is Jesus. If we want to know what God expects of us, we need to focus on Jesus’ life.

Jesus was kind and considerate. However, He never compromised on God’s truth. Jesus challenged the professional religious people and showed compassion on those society ignored. Jesus wasn’t worried about what others thought because He knew that God’s evaluation was all that mattered. Jesus was the only Person who never deserved to die. But, He died…for you and me. Our lives should exhibit our gratitude to Him. If we aren’t living with gratitude to God, we have missed out on the essence of the abundant life. As you close the session, discuss the following questions:

- What attitudes toward others do you need to change?
- What adjustments to your life are needed so you can focus more on your relationship with God?