

Real Jesus, Real Love



1 John 1:1-4; 4:7-12



This week marks the start of our Little Letters series, as we open 1 to 3 John to find out what it means to follow the *real* Jesus in a world chasing ‘hidden truths’. John’s letters show that faith isn’t about secret insight but about the truth revealed in Jesus. As we explore 1 John chapters 1 and 4, we’ll see how God’s love makes him visible and think about how we can live out that love every day.

You will need:

- Paper and pens/pencils
- Two signs: ‘Hidden Truths – The Matrix Worldview’ and ‘Visible Love – John’s teaching about Jesus’



Beat

Leader’s notes:

This series tackles some challenging topics that require deep thinking. It’s OK (and normal) if the young people (or their leaders) don’t have all the answers, but these activities aim to develop discernment skills and encourage critical thinking. These are two qualities John encourages in his letters and are important skills for our young people to develop.

Say:

In 1999 a groundbreaking film was released that changed the face of world cinema. Nothing like it had been seen before. It transformed the average action movie into something that not only got adrenaline pumping but also got brains thinking. This film may have been released long before most of you were born, but it’s still part of our cultural imagination; people still quote it, reference it, and use its ideas to explain life and faith.

The Matrix tells the story of Neo, who works at an ordinary job but feels like something isn’t quite right with the world. He meets a mysterious group of rebels who tell him that everything

he sees around him – the buildings, people, sky, even his own life – is part of an enormous computer system called the Matrix. Humans are trapped inside this artificial world without knowing it, while machines control their minds. Neo is given a choice:

- Take the blue pill and stay within the comfortable illusion he already knows, or
- Take the red pill and wake up to the truth, a harsh, unfamiliar world where he'll finally see things as they really are.

We're going to watch a well-known clip from the film where Neo is given a choice. He can choose the blue pill and stay within the life he knows or take the red pill and face the full reality of the Matrix.

Watch:

Blue Pill or Red Pill – *The Matrix* (2/9) Movie Clip (1999) HD (stop at 2:11)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE7PKRjrid4>

Ask:

- How would you describe the choice that Neo is being asked to make?
- If you were in his position, which pill do you think you'd take? Explain your choice.

Say:

When *The Matrix* first came out, lots of Christian speakers and writers used this very clip as an illustration of what it means to become a Christian. At first glance, the red pill seems like a perfect symbol of faith as it portrays the idea of waking up, seeing clearly and stepping into reality.

Ask:

- We are going to explore this in more detail throughout this session, but what are your initial thoughts?
- Do you think the clip really shows what following Jesus means, or is it something that just sounds familiar?

 Bridge**Say:**

In the clip, Neo was offered secret knowledge that most people would never have access to. He had a chance to see what others couldn't. That same idea shows up again and again in modern stories. Think about it: lots of films and series are built around someone discovering a hidden world or secret truth that changes everything. The main character 'wakes up' and sees what everyone else has missed.

Ask:

Why do you think this kind of story is so popular?

 Amplify**Say:**

In our Beat activity, we got to explore the way in which ideas that sound spiritual or true can sometimes be misleading, and how important it is to think critically about what we believe.

As we start our 'Little Letters' series we'll see that these issues are not new for Christian believers. Even in the very first century, followers of Jesus were struggling to tell truth from imitation. That's where John's letters come in. They were written to help early Christians stay rooted in what was real – the real Jesus, real faith, and real love.

Leader's notes:

Although the letters don't actually name their author, most Bible scholars believe they were written by John, one of Jesus' closest friends, because the language, themes and tone are so similar to his Gospel.

Say:

Before we read John's words, we're going to watch a short video that explains what was happening when he wrote these letters.

Watch:

1 John, 2 John, and 3 John: Historical Background & Why John Wrote Them (stop at 4:44)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cGSHvIQxSI

Ask:

- After watching the clip, what kinds of problems were the early Christians facing?
- What were some people starting to say about Jesus that wasn't true?
- Why was it dangerous for people to claim that they had 'exclusive' or 'secret' truth?
- How did John respond when he heard these false ideas spreading?

Say:

The early Christians had to decide which voices to trust, just as we do. John opens his letter by reminding them of the evidence they can rely on – what he and the other disciples had actually seen, heard, and touched.

Read:

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

– (1 John 1:1-4)

Ask:

- How many different senses does John mention? Why do you think he lists them?
- Why do you think it was important for John to say that Jesus was touched and seen rather than just 'spiritually' known or experienced?
- How does John's description of Jesus challenge the idea that faith is about secret knowledge?
- How do these verses correct the false teachers who said that Jesus wasn't really human?

Say:

In the first few verses of his letter, John dispels the myth that there is any 'secret knowledge' to be discovered about Jesus. He's seen and heard the truth for himself and proclaims it so that everyone can share in fellowship with God and with one another. The Christian message isn't a myth, a theory, or a secret to be revealed; it's about a real person, Jesus, who entered our world.

Over the next few chapters John keeps returning to that theme, adding new layers each time. When we reach chapter 4 he draws everything together, explaining that the clearest evidence of knowing the real Jesus is how we love one another.

Read:

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

— (1 John 4:7-12)

Say:

At the start of his letter John reminded his readers what he had seen and heard, the real Jesus who entered our world as both man and Son of God. Now, in this passage, he shows what that truth produces: real love. We make the invisible God visible, not through secret revelations or special knowledge, but through outward actions of love that reflect the life of Jesus.

Ask:

- How does this passage help us to see the connection between truth and love?

Say:

In 1 John 1:1-4, John shows that Jesus is real, and that reality is open to everyone. In 1 John 4:7-12 he explains that this reality, God's love made visible in Jesus, continues through us when we live lives filled with love for God and others.

Bridge

Ask:

How is John showing his deep love and care for the Church in this letter?

Sound Check

Say:

At the start of this session we watched a clip from *The Matrix* in which Neo is offered a choice: take the blue pill and stay in a comfortable illusion, or take the red pill and wake up to a hidden truth.

SPOILER ALERT: At the end of the film Neo can see the code of the world. He's awakened to a secret that most people will never know. That sounds powerful, but John's message is completely different. For followers of Jesus, truth isn't something we unlock; it's something God has already revealed. The real test of faith isn't how much secret knowledge we have, it's whether people can see God's love in us.

Read:

¹² **No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.**

— (1 John 4:12)

Say:

We're going to spend time reflecting on what this verse means for us in our Sound Check section today.

Leader's notes:

The group has covered some heavy biblical and theological content today. This activity will help them to move, interact, and apply the teaching from today's session to their own faith journey.

Make sure there's plenty of space for movement.

Label two sides (or corners) of the room with these signs:

- Hidden Truths – *The Matrix* worldview
- Visible Love – John's teaching about Jesus

Explain to the group that you will read a series of statements. If they think a statement reflects 'Hidden Truths', the idea that truth or power belongs only to a few, they should move to that side of the room.

If it reflects 'Visible Love', the idea that God's truth is revealed through love and open to everyone, they should move to the other side.

After each statement, invite a few people to share why they chose their side.

Statements

1. If you follow the right influencer, you'll learn the secret to happiness. (Hidden Truths)
2. Truth is something you find by looking inside yourself. (Hidden Truths)
3. Love isn't always about saying the right thing; it's about showing up and doing the right thing. (Visible Love)
4. If someone disagrees with you, they're just blind to the truth. (Hidden Truths)
5. When we forgive, we show the world what God's love looks like in real life. (Visible Love)
6. You don't need organised religion to find God – just your own version of spirituality. (Hidden Truths)
7. The truth about the world is being hidden by powerful people. Only a few know what's going on. (Hidden Truths)
8. Our love for others is evidence that Jesus is who he says he is. (Visible Love)
9. Everyone has to find their own truth. That's what really matters. (Hidden Truths)
10. God's love isn't meant to be hidden, it's meant to be shared. (Visible Love)

Ask:

- Which statements could you easily choose a side for? Which made you stop and think?
- Why do you think 'Hidden Truth' ideas sound so appealing?
- How does John's message in 1 John 4:12 give us a different kind of 'awakening'?
- What would it look like this week for you to make the invisible God visible through love?



Ask:

Would you recommend using the 'red pill, blue pill' clip to demonstrate what it means to believe in Jesus? Explain your response.

Selah

Say:

We've spent this session exploring what's real. We've seen the real Jesus, real truth, and real love.

We've seen that truth isn't a secret that only a few people can unlock; it's a gift that God has already revealed to everyone through Jesus.

1 John 4:12 tells us, 'No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.' That means the invisible God becomes visible every time we choose to love.

Leader's notes:

For the time of Selah, the group are going to listen to the song 'Love Has a Name'. As they listen, ask them to reflect on everything they have explored in today's session. Where have they been chasing hidden truths instead of focusing on the visible love of Jesus?

Watch:

'Love Has A Name' – Jesus Culture Studio Version ft. Kim Walker-Smith (4:20)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgfVCAPFDfY>

Coda

Say:

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from this session about making God's love visible in the world?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.

