

LIFE MATTERS 1: A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN
1 JOHN 1:1-3
JANUARY 8, 2016

Growing up, I was the third child and almost always hungry. Not because my parents didn't feed me. They did. I just was constantly hungry. I wasn't picky and I loved to eat. I remember family and extended family joking, "Give it to Gabe. He'll eat anything." They were of course mimicking that famous Life Cereal commercial with Mikey. Remember the little boy that eats the Life Cereal, Mikey. Life Cereal debuted as a healthy cereal of all whole grains, something you believed a kid wouldn't like. The litmus test for Life Cereal in the commercial is Mikey. His older brothers don't want it because it's too healthy, so they say, "Give it to Mikey. He'll eat anything," and he does and he likes it. Does anyone else remember this? Well, you're wrong, and I am wrong. That's not what it says. Here is the commercial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLQ0LZSnJFE>

It's actually just the opposite. Give it to Mikey. He hates everything, and he likes it. Which actually makes more sense from a marketing perspective. Mikey is a picky eater and even he likes this healthy cereal. The strange thing was, I remember them saying, "Mikey will eat everything." Lots of people on the internet do too. This wasn't a commercial that ran once, it ran regularly for almost 12 years from 1972-1984, yet I, and many others like me, completely misremembered this.

It turns out, this isn't just reserved for me or Life Cereal. In the last couple years, many articles have been written about something called the Mandela effect, which is collective misremembrance in which entire swaths of the planet independently misremember something. I think the phenomenon is only becoming studied and talked about because we have the connectivity and research capability of the web. The Mandela effect phrase was coined because a large group of people were shocked when Nelson Mandela died recently, because they swore he died in prison decades ago. A couple of other easy examples of this

are, 1) from the Star Wars movies, we all love to quote that explosive line, “Luke, I am your Father.” Except he doesn’t say that. He says, “No, I am your father.” The children’s books, the Berenstein bears are actually the Bearenstain bears. Yet, people swear otherwise. It’s not one person; it’s collective miserembrace that leads to large groups of people missing the point.

Some people call it the Mandela effect, but a more clinical concept might be confabulation. The bottom line is there is something strange that happens when more than one person can misremember. The mistake then grows into fact. The wobbly jelly settles into concrete, and a lot of people are heading in the wrong direction. When it comes to Life Cereal and Star Wars movies, who really cares? But I am quite certain it is much bigger than that.

About this time every year when a new year is upon us, we take time to assess where we’ve been and where we are going. We think about our life and what it means and how it can be better. Many times, these considerations do not move far past the ideas of losing some weight or getting better with our budgets or going outside more or watching less TV. But sometimes, we really start to think, what am I really doing? What really matters? That is when we can start to spot the Mandela effect writ large. Whole swaths of the population have remembered their purpose in life is better homes, better stuff and more. People who have remembered their focus in life is more money, better vacations and bigger collections. Occasionally someone pops their head up and says, “I don’t think that’s it.” We all remember that. We’ve all been saying that, but there is a good chance that isn’t the point. There is a good chance that shouldn’t be the focus. I know everyone else is saying that, but I don’t think it’s true.

That’s why every year, we start off at SFC with our *Life Matters* series, so we can talk about what really matters and to make things as simple as possible. Life gets really complicated the more we go on. It gets busier and more stressful, which often keeps us from asking, “What am I really doing? What really matters?” So we spend our first seven weeks of the year saying that life matters. The word life we are using we have pulled from the Greek word *zoe*. *Zoe* is that intangible portion of life. The Greek word *bio* also means life, but it is

the nuts and bolts and logistics of it all, breathing, eating, sleeping and working. *Zoe* is something else. It is *the* life, abundant life, the life that matters. It's the word Jesus uses repeatedly.

John 3:16

John 10:10

John 14:6

He's not talking about merely the biology of life. He's talking about life we all want. That thing that sometimes keeps us up late at night or that thought that seeps in when we are staring at the screen in our cubicle. Is this really life? We often have a hankering for something more, and that something more is *zoe*. The Jesus life, living, loving, serving like Jesus.

Every year, we talk about life. We do this because a lot of churches (rightfully) talk about life after death, eternal life. We think it is just as viable to talk about life before death. What do you do with the life you have been given? How do you live a life of meaning, fulfillment and purpose?

Here at SFC, we think it's actually quite simple to live the Jesus life. We think there are three things to practice to follow Jesus and get *zoe*. Life in God. Life with Others and Life for Others. Life in God is intentional Christ-centered worship. It is spending time with God considering his goodness and reflecting on who he is. This is done through reading scripture, gathering corporately, seeing God in nature and experiencing him in many facets throughout this world. Life with Others is practicing your faith in Christian community. It is the profound acknowledgment that you were not meant to do life alone. You were designed for community, and there is no such thing as individual faith. It must be lived out with others to be vital. This means sharing your story with others, sharing your pain with others, sharing your triumph with others. This means praying with others and caring for others. The final piece is Life for Others, which is serving and sharing in Jesus' name. We think this is a primary calling for every Christian. What you know must translate into what

you do, and true life is found when you give yourself away, when you take on the towel and the basin and the position of a servant.

Life in God. Life with Others. Life for Others. There may be more you can add but there is not less. These are the essential elements of *zoe* life. The problem, of course, is that we can easily lose track of these in our busy world, or we can do one or two of them and not the other. Each January, we remind ourselves of these *Life Matters*, using different books of the Bible. Last year it was Ecclesiastes, before that James and before that Deuteronomy. These three themes are in every book of the Bible. They are essential to the *zoe* life, but we can get bogged down. We can forget, and sometimes we can misremember.

That happens. It's human nature. You need to look no further than our beloved tradition of New Year's resolutions:

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/24/54/79/2454798a7264818df9402726a036e994.jpg>

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/e9/e7/96/e9e79600eae17d9bbff9596810dc65d7.jpg>

<http://www.dumpaday.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Funny-new-years-resolutions-cake.jpg>

Recent studies suggest only 8-9% of people actually make and achieve their resolutions, and most resolutions don't last longer than one month. So how do we achieve this *zoe* life? How do we push ahead and not get bogged down? Not forget? Not misremember? I think we will find answers in 1 John.

For the next seven weeks, we will be studying 1 John. John, who was one of the twelve disciples, who wrote the Gospel of John is pastoring a church likely in Ephesus towards the close of the 1st century AD. They are only 40-50 years removed from the life of Jesus and

John is probably nearing the end of his life when he is exiled to Patmos. This community is suffering from a serious Mandela effect. Many of the community have veered off course and are questioning. Many have abandoned the idea of Jesus' fully human and fully divine nature.

Today we are introducing this letter and this big idea of pursuing *zoe* life. In order to understand the context for 1 John, you need to understand one major piece of context. John is pastoring in Ephesus, which is a thoroughly Hellenistic community, with little rooting in the historical faith. They have been more submersed in Greek philosophy and religion and it shows. By all accounts, it seems the Greeks have taken philosophical dualism, which is a forerunner to Gnosticism, and mixed it with Christianity.

Let me give you the briefest of introductions on dualism which is the major context of this book. Let me remind you of why this is important. Every letter in the New Testament is occasional, meaning it was written to a certain people at a certain time with a certain problem. In a sense, when you read a New Testament letter, which is more than half of the New Testament, you are listening to one side of a phone conversation. Each letter is addressing something different. The Galatians were obsessed with circumcision and keeping the law, so Paul tells them they are free in Christ and keeping the law won't save them. He writes to the Corinthians who were quite libertine and divided in their behavior to make efforts to pursue sanctification and unity.

With John coming in at the end of the first century, you can pick up bits and pieces of evidence and realize that philosophical dualism is causing problems for people's understanding of Christ. They are buying into the lies, and it is creating a Mandela effect because they are changing the story of Jesus.

Quite simply, dualism is bifurcating the human into flesh and spirit, material and mind. The spirit or the mind is what matters; the body is just the meat and bones carrying around the important part of you. From this philosophy, came the important concept that if the mind is what matters, then it doesn't really matter what you do with the body or that the body is

evil. Spirit matters, body does not. Mind is holy and material is not. This led to two major problems. 1) Many separated Jesus from the Christ. If the body was evil or meaningless, they discounted the fleshly incarnation of Jesus. Some thought he was born and the Spirit of God descended upon him at his baptism and departed from him at his crucifixion. They could not believe that our evil human flesh could house something divine, so they separated Jesus from his flesh. 2) If you bifurcate body and soul, these people in Ephesus didn't think sin was a big deal. These two major fallacies led to two major applications. 1) Since the mind or spirit is all that matters, then the only worthwhile spiritual pursuit is getting more knowledge. 2) Since the body doesn't matter, they don't care for their own or that of one another. They say they love one another, but they are doing nothing tangibly for one another.

John writes this letter and without that context it will seem sometimes redundant. It will seem meandering, but if you know that context, you'll realize why John keeps reminding them that Jesus came in the flesh, and reminding them that they are called to keep the commandments. The commandment he keeps coming back to is the tangible love for one another. Let's read the brief introduction to the book today:

1 John 1:1-3

John begins with personal testimony to refute the Mandela effect. There is a collective misremembrance going on because these people at one time understood the story of Jesus, fully man and fully God, but they have drifted and now many of them have switched their understanding or thought somehow that was their understanding all along. John stops them, "Let me tell you about the beginning, the thing we have heard, the thing we have seen, the thing we have touched."

He's doing two things here. 1) He is reminding them of the fleshly literal incarnation of Christ and 2) he is refuting their misremembrance by invoking his role as a witness. Some of them must have experienced Jesus first hand as well. He says remember what we have

heard, seen and touched. That is the life you are remembering and the life you are being offered. That word life, of course, is *zoe*.

Some experts have written about the Mandela effect or confabulation and say that people sometimes do this because we fill in the details in a way that projects our wants and desires. Maybe I always heard, "Give it to Mikey. He eats everything." Because that's how I was. Mikey had the same appetite that I did. You can imagine that it's possible that the Ephesians collectively misremembered or simply rearranged their theology to reflect their appetites.

Ephesus famously has a place called the Library of Celsus including a tunnel out of the back that was purported to connect to a brothel. An early 1st century Ephesian could proudly tell his wife in good conscience he was going to the library and be literally telling the truth. These early churches were small, usually 50 to 100 people, and in Ephesus, they were surrounded by close to 300,000 people who did not think or act like them. You can imagine the allure and the draw.

Not unlike being in the Bay Area with a small Christian population surrounded by millions of people with different plans, pursuits and philosophies. You can feel out of touch or left behind, and it's easy to begin shaping Jesus into who you need him to be. The call of *zoe* life is to come back to the original story, to check the facts, to come back to a messiah who says to love your enemies, to a carpenter who says give it all away, to a king who dies for his subjects.

It's a strange story that we have to remind ourselves of every year or we can begin to make Jesus in our image. He votes like us, fights like us, buys and collects like us. We can add and add until the memory is nothing like the original.

Life Cereal began as all grains and wheat. Over time, it has added sugar, fake coloring and preservatives. Not only that, Cinnamon Life Cereal is the best selling Life Cereal now. Life is

like that, you keep adding, sweetening, changing. Something that started so simple can look nothing like the original.

In order to keep things simple for this series, we are going to focus on John's main calling for this letter, to love one another. Part of loving one another is knowing each other's stories, so over the next seven weeks, we are going to hear stories from people in this church. People you might not know who have struggled or had problems. We are going to grow a little deeper into what it means to love.

Kurt Kroesche video