

SESSION TWO

Walking in the Light

1 John 1:5-2:2

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that fellowship with the God who is light requires walking in honesty about sin rather than pretended sinlessness, that confession (*homologeō*) is God's appointed path to cleansing, and that Jesus remains our advocate and expiation when we fail.

Catholic Touchstone: The sacrament of Reconciliation. John's "if we confess our sins" (1:9) uses a concrete, spoken verb, and Catholic tradition has long heard it alongside John 20:21-23 and James 5:16: confession made audible within the Body that Christ authorized to absolve.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

"God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1:5) is the first of the letter's two great "God is" statements. In Scripture, light gathers up truth, holiness, and God's self-revelation (Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 2:5). The double negative, "no darkness at all," matters: God is not mostly light with manageable shadows. Fellowship with such a God cannot coexist with managed darkness in us. This is the first payoff of the sealed guess from Take-Home 1: have the group open only the first fold tonight. The second blank stays sealed until Session Eight, and part of your job is protecting that.

The passage is built as three false claims answered by three divine remedies. "If we say" appears at 1:6, 1:8, and 1:10: claiming fellowship while walking in darkness, claiming to have no sin, claiming never to have sinned. Between and after them come the remedies at 1:7, 1:9, and 2:1-2: the blood of Jesus cleanses, God forgives the one who confesses, and Jesus stands as advocate and expiation. John is not scolding; he is diagramming the two ways a soul can respond to light.

Homologeō, the verb behind "confess" in 1:9, means literally to say the same thing, to acknowledge. The verb by itself does not specify a hearer, but its biblical usage runs strongly toward open, spoken acknowledgment (Leviticus 5:5; Matthew 3:6; Acts 19:18). It is not a synonym for feeling sorry. That is why the Church's sacramental practice of audible confession is not an add-on to this verse but a natural home for it: a development the text invites, not a requirement the dictionary settles.

Hilasmos (2:2), translated "expiation," is Day of Atonement vocabulary. The Greek Old Testament uses this word family for the mercy seat, the *kapporet*, where sacrificial blood met the presence of God

(Leviticus 16; Exodus 25:17). John is not describing an angry Father placated by a victim; the Father himself provides the expiation in his Son. The direction of the gift is downward, from God to us.

Paraklētos (2:1), "advocate," is courtroom language: counsel for the defense. It is the only place in the New Testament where the word is applied to Jesus himself, though John's Gospel calls the Holy Spirit "another Counselor" (John 14:16), which quietly implies Jesus was the first.

Hold the pastoral balance of 2:1 for your group: "I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin..." John refuses both laxism (sin does not matter) and despair (sin is final). That single verse is the whole Catholic moral and sacramental posture in miniature.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 1:3-4. God's first recorded words are "Let there be light," and God separates light from darkness. John's moral universe runs on that first separation: walking in the light or walking in darkness, with no twilight commuting between them.

Proverbs 28:13. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." The logic of 1:9 is already fully formed in Israel's wisdom: concealment forfeits mercy, confession obtains it. This is tonight's key live discovery.

Leviticus 16 and Exodus 25:17. The Day of Atonement and the mercy seat stand behind *hilasmos*. Once a year, blood was carried into the presence of God to cover the sins of the whole people. John announces that the meeting place of blood and presence is now a living person, and his reach is "the whole world" (2:2).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Homily 1*

Augustine presses John's paradox: the one who admits he is a sinner is the one who has the truth in him, for the first thing God's light shows a man is himself. Begin with confession, he preaches, for the confession of sins is where walking in the light begins, and the one who excuses himself shuts the door on the physician.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose *On Penance, Book I*

Against rigorists who claimed the Church could not absolve grave sin after baptism, Ambrose insists that the Lord left his Church both water and tears: the water of baptism and the tears of penance. The power to forgive is God's alone, but he willed to exercise it through the ministry he established, and a mercy the Church may not dispense is a mercy denied to the weakest.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Lapsed*

Writing to Christians who had failed under persecution, Cyprian urges them to confess while confession can still be heard and satisfaction still be made. He praises those who confess even the hidden sins of thought to God's priests, unburdening the conscience honestly and finding in that honesty the remedy, small though the wound may seem.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1847 joins Augustine's famous line, "God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us," directly to 1 John 1:8-9: receiving his mercy requires admitting our faults.

CCC 1422-1424 gives the sacrament its five names: conversion, penance, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Each name is a facet of what 1:9 describes.

CCC 1440-1445 grounds the Church's ministry of absolution: only God forgives sins, and the risen Christ, by the gift of John 20:21-23, willed that his Church be the sign and instrument of that forgiveness.

THREAD WATCH

The God Is thread, first payoff. Open the first fold of the sealed guess at Build 1. Celebrate correct guesses, enjoy wrong ones, and then re-seal: the second blank waits until Session Eight. Expect someone to guess "love" for the first blank; smile and say nothing.

The Knowing thread. Next session opens with "by this we may be sure that we know him" (2:3), the thread's first full flowering. Tonight, simply note that walking, not merely feeling or claiming, is how John talks about the life of faith.

Advocate and expiation vocabulary returns later in the letter at a moment that will land harder for having been learned tonight. Do not flag the reference (4:10); just make sure *hilasmos* is genuinely understood now.

SESSION GOALS

1.

Resolve the first half of the sealed guess and reinforce the thread discipline.

2.

Discover the claim-and-remedy architecture of 1:5-2:2 from the text itself.

3.

Understand *homologeō* and *hilasmos* well enough to explain each in one sentence.

4.

Connect 1:9 to sacramental confession through live discovery of John 20:21-23, honoring the Protestant reading at full strength first.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, cut Build question 9 and the Dig Deeper box. Do not cut the steelman chain at Build 6 and 7; it is the doctrinal heart of the session.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Father of lights, in you there is no darkness at all. We come as we are, not as we pretend to be. Shine your light on us gently and thoroughly, and let us not flinch from what it shows. Give us honest hearts tonight, and the joy of the cleansed. Through Christ our Lord, our advocate. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

Are you a person who turns on every light in the house, or do you live happily in lamp-lit corners? What is your honest relationship with bright light?

2.

Why do you think it is easier to be honest about our worst stuff in the dark, to a stranger, or on the internet than face to face with someone who knows us?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

Before we read: everyone take out Take-Home 1 and open only the first fold. Now have someone read 1 John 1:5. Who guessed it? And what does it actually mean to say God *is* light, not just that God gives light or likes light?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

God is light: the first of John's two great "God is" sentences. In Scripture, light means truth, holiness, and God's own self-revelation: "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1); "let us walk in the light of the LORD" (Isaiah 2:5).

The stinger is the double negative: "in him is no darkness at all." God is not mostly light. There is nothing hidden, false, or compromised in him, which immediately raises the question the rest of the passage answers: what happens when creatures with darkness in them want fellowship with a God who has none? Re-seal the second blank; it stays closed for a while yet.

2.

Read 1:6-10. Hunt for the pattern: find the three claims that each begin "if we say." What does each claim assert, and what does John say each one costs us?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Verse 6: claiming fellowship with God while walking in darkness; we lie and do not live according to the truth. Verse 8: claiming to have no sin; we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Verse 10: claiming never to have sinned; we make *him* a liar, and his word is not in us.

Notice the escalation: lying to others, deceiving ourselves, calling God a liar. Pretended sinlessness is not a harmless self-esteem strategy. It ends in contradiction of God himself, since his whole saving action presumes we need saving.

3.

Now find the remedy verses woven between the claims: 1:7, 1:9, and 2:1-2. In each one, who acts, and what is the human part?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

In 1:7, walking in the light brings fellowship with one another, and "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." In 1:9, if we confess, "he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In 2:1-2, when we do sin, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," who is himself "the expiation for our sins."

Every remedy is God's action. Our part is never to achieve sinlessness; it is to stop hiding. Honesty is the door mercy walks through. Honest confession is never words alone; it carries contrition and the intention to turn from the sin inside it, which is exactly what Proverbs will call confessing and forsaking in the next question. What God does not require is that we get clean before we come.

4.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read Proverbs 28:13. How does this proverb already contain the whole logic of 1 John 1:9?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Concealment forfeits mercy; confession with amendment obtains it. Israel's wisdom knew this centuries before John wrote.

The consistent biblical claim is startling in its gentleness: God does not require that we arrive sinless. He requires that we arrive truthful. The unconfessed sin is the dangerous one, not the confessed one.

5.

The verb translated "confess" in 1:9 is *homologeō*, literally "to say the same thing," to acknowledge out loud. What does John's word choice suggest confession involves, beyond privately feeling bad?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

To confess is to say about my sin what God says about it, with my actual voice: no euphemism, no "mistakes were made." Biblical confession is spoken and concrete. Israel confessed aloud (Leviticus 5:5; Nehemiah 9), crowds confessed at the Jordan (Matthew 3:6), and the Ephesians confessed openly (Acts 19:18).

Feeling contrition matters enormously, but John's verb is a speech act. Something changes when the hidden thing is said. Every therapist, every sponsor at a twelve-step meeting, and every confessor knows this.

6.

Time to steelman. A Protestant friend reads 1:9 and says: "This settles it. Confession is between me and God. If we confess, he forgives; the verse mentions no priest, and adding one adds to Scripture." Before anyone answers: what is *right* about that reading? Make the case as strongly as he would.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Concede the real strengths. Only God forgives sins; Scripture and the Catechism say so in almost the same breath (Mark 2:7; CCC 1441). The verse names no priest. Nothing in the verb *homologeō* by itself requires a human hearer. Every Christian should confess directly to God daily, and the Church builds exactly that into her own life, in the Confiteor at Mass and in the nightly examination of conscience she commends to everyone. If a Catholic's picture is that God cannot or will not forgive outside a confessional, this friend is right to object.

Having honored all of that, hold the question open: John says confess. He does not yet say to whom, or how Christ arranged for confession to be heard. For that we let the same apostle speak from his own Gospel.

7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read John 20:21-23, then a second reader take James 5:16. In John 20, who is speaking, to whom, and what exactly is handed over? And what do these passages do to the "me and God only" reading?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The risen Jesus, on Easter evening, breathes the Holy Spirit on the apostles and says: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Notice what kind of power this is: not blanket forgiveness but a discretion to forgive or to retain. Catholic tradition draws the natural inference that a judgment between the two presupposes knowing the sins, which is why the Church has read this verse as the charter of sacramental confession. The verse itself does not prescribe the manner; the note on development below is where that honesty belongs. And James, from the same apostolic circle, writes "confess your sins to one another." Steelman these texts too. Many Protestants read John 20:23 as authority to declare the forgiveness God gives through the preached gospel, and they point out that James says one another, mutual rather than priestly. Take both readings seriously; then notice what they leave unexplained. The power John records is discretionary, to forgive or to retain, and a discretionary judgment presupposes something concrete to judge. That is the hinge on which the

Catholic reading turns.

So the New Testament holds both: confession to God, and confession made audible within the Body Christ authorized. These are not rivals. The sacrament is where 1:9 becomes flesh: spoken words, a human ear Christ chose to stand behind, and absolution you can hear with the same senses John's prologue celebrated. Be honest with the group about development: the outward form of the sacrament changed considerably over the centuries, from public canonical penance to private confession (CCC 1447 says so plainly). What did not change is the apostolic authority underneath it.

DIG DEEPER · The mercy seat becomes a person

The Greek Old Testament uses the *hilasmos* word family for the mercy seat (*kapporet*), the gold cover of the ark where atoning blood met the presence of God (Exodus 25:17; Leviticus 16). St. Paul reaches for the same word: God put Jesus forward as the *hilastērion* (Romans 3:25), the term the Greek Old Testament uses for the mercy seat itself, and readers ancient and modern have heard that very object in his phrase. The one place on earth where blood and Presence met is no longer a place. It is a person, and 2:2 says his reach is the whole world.

8.

Look closely at 2:1-2. John writes "so that you may not sin," and in the same breath provides for failure. How do the two titles he gives Jesus, *paraklētos* (advocate) and *hilasmos* (expiation), each answer a different fear we carry about our sin?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The advocate answers the fear of accusation: when the enemy's voice says your failure defines you, there is counsel for the defense standing "with the Father," and he is "Jesus Christ the righteous." Our representation is not a legal fiction; it is the sinless one himself.

The expiation answers the fear of an unpaid debt: the sense that something real must be dealt with, not waved away. It has been dealt with, at the true mercy seat, "and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." John refuses laxism and despair in a single sentence: aim at holiness, and when you fall, run toward the light, not away from it.

9.

Verse 7 slips in something easy to miss: walking in the light gives us fellowship "with one another," not only with God. Why would honesty about sin create community, and pretended perfection destroy it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Pretending is isolating: a room full of people managing their images is a room full of strangers. Confession, honesty about what we actually are, is the only ground on which real *koinonia* can stand, which links tonight directly back to Session One.

This is also why parishes and small groups feel thin when everyone performs wellness at each other. The communion of saints is a communion of forgiven sinners, and it only works if we walk in the light together.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

Without sharing it aloud, name to yourself the one thing you have been managing in the dark rather than confessing in the light. What is one step toward saying it, to God, and in the sacrament?

2.

What would change in your closest relationships if you treated honesty about your failures as walking toward the light rather than admitting defeat?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Go to confession this week, or put a specific date and time on your calendar right now. Bring the one thing you have concealed longest.

2.

Each night before bed, pray a two-minute examination of conscience and end it by praying 1 John 1:9 out loud.

3.

Read Psalm 32 once this week and mark every line about silence versus acknowledgment. Notice what David says happened to him physically while he kept quiet.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, righteous advocate, true mercy seat, we stop hiding. We confess that we are sinners, and we take you at your word: you are faithful and just, and you cleanse. Lead each of us to the light this week, and to the sacrament where your forgiveness is spoken out loud. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Two, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in sections through the Build

Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 2:5

Leader background at Build 1: light as salvation and walking

Proverbs 28:13

Live discovery, Build 4: conceal versus confess

Leviticus 5:5; Matthew 3:6; Acts 19:18

Leader background, Build 5: confession spoken aloud

John 20:21-23

Live discovery, Build 7: authority to forgive and retain

James 5:16

Live discovery, Build 7: confess to one another

Mark 2:7

Leader background, Build 6: only God forgives

Exodus 25:17; Leviticus 16; Romans 3:25

Dig Deeper: mercy seat and *hilastērion*

Psalm 32

Live It This Week, practice 3

CCC 1847; 1422-1424; 1440- 1445; 1447

Catechism Connection and Build 7 honesty note