

COMMUNITY

1

THE FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY: WALKING IN THE LIGHT

1 John 1:1–2:2

By John Ebert
and
Beth Crawford

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”

Ephesians 2:14

“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Christian fellowship is not the sentimental and superficial attachment of a random collection of individuals, but the profoundly mutual relationship of those who remain ‘in Christ,’ and therefore belong to each other....”

James D. G. Dunn

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AIM OF THE STUDY

- To understand that Christian community is built on new life in Christ and walking in the light, confessing our sins to God and one another.

KEY VERSES

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:7, 9

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**How to Teach the Bible in Small Group**” and “**Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read through the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to provide resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for study.

OPENERS

[Beth Crawford contributed the following story.]

“Joe” was very cautious when his hometown friend invited him to visit church. Joe’s hard-knocks background—which included abuse, broken relationships and alcohol addiction—had made him suspicious of folks when he moved to the “big city.” When Joe met his friend’s home group leader after a service, he bluntly told him that he wouldn’t talk or read out loud at a meeting. Despite many reservations, Joe eventually visited the group. True to his word, Joe kept silent.

The group regularly gathered around a steel fire pit to roast marshmallows in the leader's back yard, and Joe began to bring firewood without being asked. The leader's home was obviously in need of a new paint job and many other repairs. When the leader had to temporarily move his family out to remove lead-based paint, Joe showed up on the front steps and announced his intention to help until the project was completed. He not only worked afternoons until midnight, but continued making many other repairs on the house. Additionally, Joe began to gather other members of the group to participate in work projects for people both within and outside the group. His comment was, "If you're friends, you help friends."

As Joe made repairs on the group leader's house, his life began to turn around because of the renovations Jesus was making inside him. Joe became close friends with the group leader and initiated an accountability agreement to help each other in certain areas of temptation. Joe began to confess his sin openly in group meetings, setting a pattern for the rest. Not long after that, another group member who had "blown it big time" went to Joe to confess his sin since he knew Joe would not judge or condemn him.

The Holy Spirit spoke to Joe during a church service about the influence he was exercising in the group. He felt convicted to exhort others to put feet to their faith. He challenged group members by his own example and directly when appropriate. Joe believes the community of Christians he joined helped save his life, but his group leader says he has learned more about community from Joe than anyone he's ever met.

When we use the term "Christian community," we mean the following:

Christian community is people united by a common calling from God; a common salvation in union with Jesus Christ; a common experience of the indwelling, transforming, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit; and a common mission to advance God's Kingdom. These people live out their lives together, mutually supporting each other in love and depending upon the Holy Spirit (Nathan and Crawford).

In this study, we'll look at how our relationship with Jesus leads us to healthy community with other Christians.

Pray and invite the Holy Spirit to come and teach you through this study.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is background information for leaders. You may decide how much to share with your group members.

1 John

Unlike most of the letters in the New Testament, the author is never identified in the letter. The book is named "First John" because it is traditionally attributed to the apostle John, the brother of James and one of Jesus' three closest disciples. He may have been a disciple of

John the Baptist before meeting Jesus, and therefore one of the first to follow Jesus (John 1:35–39). *First John* shares many characteristics with *The Gospel of John*, so most scholars believe the apostle wrote both. This letter may have been written around 60–90 A.D. (Marshall, p. 1096) and is mentioned by others sometime before 200 A.D. (Stott, p. 18).

While *First John* is included in the three “letters” or “epistles” of the apostle John, it might be more accurate to think of this “...as a written sermon” (Marshall, p. 1092). John is writing to correct some problems caused by false teachers who had divided the church and prompted some to leave (2:19). Some scholars think that the apostle is writing to Christians who are fighting two errors: one cult viewed Jesus as less than fully God and the other saw Him as God but not truly man. If Jesus was a mere mortal and not God, then either He lied to others or was self-deceived. We could not worship and follow a liar or a madman (Lewis, p. 56). On the other hand, if Jesus was Spirit but not fully human, then the historical facts of Jesus’ bodily death and resurrection could not be true (Dunn, p.7). In this case, the foundation of our salvation, Jesus’ blood sacrifice in our place, would not exist or be effective. With both groups in mind, John’s goal is to draw the majority back to the foundational truths of the gospel so that there won’t be division in the church. Thus throughout this letter, the apostle will refer to truth or light which leads to obedience, lies or darkness which leads to sin, and tests to know if we belong to God and His people or not.

John states several basic truths about God’s character: “God is **light**” (1:5) and “God is **love**” (4:8, 16). “The knowledge of God will therefore produce holiness resembling His and acts of love resembling His” (Bruce, p. 56). The language in the book is very simple. The words are short and most of the phrases are straightforward. However, these simple words contain rich meaning when we consider what they refer to. The challenge with John’s writing is not “syntax” (What does it **say**?) but “semantics” (What does it **mean**?).

STUDY THE PASSAGE: 1 John 1:1–2:2

- 1. Let’s read verses 1–4, 5–10, and 2:1–2 aloud. What important words do you see repeated? What ideas are contrasted?**

Note: don’t spend too much time here. This question should help familiarize your group with the passage if they have not read it beforehand.

REPETITIONS: [Here are a few important ones.]

References to our senses—seen, looked, eyes, heard, touched, hands.

Proclaim, testify, declare, write, and message.

Fellowship, which is sharing in or participating in something in common.

Life, lives.

God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Many pronouns: we, our, us, you, and he.

Word, word.

Sin, sins.

Purify, forgives.

CONTRASTS: [Here are a few important ones.]

Light vs. Darkness.

Truth vs. Claims or Lies.

Sin vs. Purity or Sin vs. Forgiveness.

2. As he begins, what is John proclaiming (vv. 1–3)?

The author refers to **life** three times in the first two verses: **the Word of life** (v. 1), **the life** (v. 2), and **the eternal life** (v. 2). While the text may seem awkward to us [and admittedly to most scholars], John builds up momentum during these first three verses until he says what it is they **proclaim** (Dunn, p. 5).

3. What does John tell us about this “life” (vv. 1–2)?

According to verse 1, this life existed from **the beginning**. This may remind readers of Genesis 1:1 or the Gospel of John 1:1, both of which talk about God’s existence “in the beginning” before human time. Certainly many phrases in this letter echo words and ideas from the *Gospel of John*. However, some believe that the apostle is referring to the “beginning” of the gospel—the arrival of God in human flesh at the birth of Jesus—which fits other references to “beginning” in this letter (1 John 2:4, 7, 24, cited in Bruce, pp. 34–35).

Verses 1, 2, and 3 indicate that this “life” could be heard with ears, seen with eyes and touched with hands. In other words, this “life” was something that was perceived with the senses, not just an abstract thought in someone’s head.

When John says, “we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,” he is writing about Jesus. Jesus was the light and life of humanity: “In Him was **life**, and the life was the **light** of men” (John 1:4). He was God who entered human experience where people could see, touch, and know Him. As God, He is the source of life for all creation, but He is also the key to eternal life. He laid down His life as payment for our sin, but He also took it up again (John 10:14–18). Through faith in His death on our behalf, He is also the means to receive “**eternal life**’ ...a spiritual quality of life, which God gives to every believer through Jesus his Son (cf. John 3:16; 17:2–3). Eternal life is not to be thought of as life prolonged to eternity, but as a sharing of living fellowship with the Father...” (Dunn, p. 10). After His death and resurrection, He became the center of the good news His followers proclaimed. In summary, Jesus is the gospel message that allows people to enter eternal life.

4. Why does the author say he was writing this message (vv. 3–4)?

- In verse 3, John says that he and other eyewitnesses are **proclaiming** the message about Christ “...so that you also may have **fellowship with us**.” Thus, the eternal life found in Jesus brings individuals into fellowship with other believers, too. John, fellow apostles, and other disciples who knew Jesus would have been the first to share this fellowship since one enters it by hearing and receiving the message of the Word of life. Now, they are inviting those who have or will respond

to the gospel message to join in Christian community. As Dunn puts it, the apostles have seen Jesus and are making a “...declaration *about* him...and an invitation to have fellowship *in* him” (p. 12).

- John makes clear that this relationship brings them into **fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ**. [We’ll discuss what *fellowship* means in a moment.] We might wonder why the author would point out that this fellowship was with God. That seems implied when we think of “Christian” fellowship. Perhaps the apostle wanted to correct those who had a defective view of Jesus Christ, by clarifying with whom it is that we are privileged to share relationship. Our fellowship is with God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord, Ruler and Owner of all. It is also with the God-man, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, who took on human form and uniquely revealed the Father to us (John 1:18). Through a faith response to the gospel, we are joined to Jesus and His Father and the Holy Spirit, of course.
- In verse 4, we read “we **write** this to make our/your **joy** complete.” [As the note in the NIV translation indicates, some Greek manuscripts have *your* in verse 4 instead of *our* (Burdick, p. 1908). The two words in Greek are even more alike than the ones in English. In Greek, the words have the same number of letters and they only have one letter that is different. Clearly, someone made a simple mistake while copying a manuscript. The only problem is that we’re not sure which one is the original text and which one contains the mistake.]

Thus, John hopes that sending this letter will result in: relationship with God and His Son, relationships between Christ’s followers, and complete **joy** (v. 4). Of course, relationship with God through faith in Jesus is the first step to living in community. That comes when we are born again and joined by God’s Spirit (I John 3:24, 4:13, cited in Bruce, pp. 38–40). Joy results when we are united in doctrine and relationships rather than torn apart by disagreements and interpersonal conflict.

Note: other purposes are stated in verses 1:5 and 2:1. You don’t have to cover those reasons at this point, but someone in your group may mention them.

- In verse 1:5 the author says that they have a message from **him** to **declare** about the nature of God: He is **light**. [We’ll discuss what that means soon.]
- In verse 2:1, John says that he writes so that the believers, called “my dear children,” will not sin. He wants them to clearly understand who God is, to experience more of His Person, and to more fully reflect Him in their behavior.

5. What does John mean when he talks about “fellowship” (v. 3)?

The Greek word *koinonia* that is translated “fellowship” had a secular meaning of “joint ownership, or partnership” (Dunn, p. 12). It could mean the relationship of business partners, fellow citizens who reside in the same town, and close friends

willing to share material possessions (Hauck, p. 798). In the New Testament, it is translated more than one way. *Koinonia* can indicate the “sharing in” a work partnership, the same nature, the sins of others, or avoiding taking part in sinful acts. Paul, who uses the word more frequently than any other New Testament writer, usually means the fellowship believers have with Christ, with other believers, and their part in the blessings of Christ (Hauck, p. 804). It may be translated “communion” but is more often used as an adjective describing, “sharing, participating in...” It describes a new community, a “...unity brought about by the Spirit” (Schattenmann, p. 642).

John uses it in *First John* to mean the bond created when a person exercises faith in Christ (Hauck, pp. 807–808). Neither in Paul or John does it mean “...a mystical fusion with Christ and God...” It is not becoming divine or being joined and lost in the divine oneness seen in some other religions. It means, “...a new relationship based on [*faith* in Christ for] the forgiveness of sins” (Schattenmann, pp. 643–644).

6. What is important to realize about the fellowship that can result from sharing and receiving this message (v. 3)?

John and his fellow eyewitnesses know that anyone who responds in faith to the gospel message is included in the relationships they have as followers of Christ. But what makes their relationships distinctive is that they are also in relationship with God the Father. Thus, certain things must be true about this fellowship since God is always holy, true, and loving. John will write further about what is expected in the fellowship of true believers: obedience to Christ’s commands and faithfulness to the doctrine or teaching of Christ’s followers (Bruce, p. 39). Because some in the church had left (2:19), John will provide “tests” to determine who is a true follower that can enjoy this fellowship and who is not and cannot.

7. What other message does John declare in this opening chapter (v. 5)?

In verse 5, John makes another major statement about the nature of God. Not only is He the source of life, but also “...God is **light**; in him there is no darkness at all.” In this verse, the word “we” seems to refer to the same group referred to in verses 1–4, that is, the people who experienced Jesus and are proclaiming him. *From him* refers to Jesus, who uniquely revealed the nature of God to humankind. Jesus not only taught us what God is like, but He also showed us what God is like in His attitudes and actions. He was the exact representation of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3) and told His disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father....it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:9b, 10b).

The statement that God is light relates to the life in Christ (vv. 1–4) and the fellowship we can have through Him. We will have to go on to verses 6–10 in order to understand how these truths relate to one another. In particular, verse 7 brings up fellowship between people and relates it to light and God, linking it to verse 5. It also contrasts fellowship, God, and light with sin, linking it to verses 6–10 and beyond. In verses 5–10, the message has to do with light and darkness. In John 1:4, John links

these two concepts: “In him was **life**, and that life was the **light** of men.” This may mean that God is both the source of all created life and the source for humanity’s uniqueness in our abilities to think and reflect on life, or in some capacities in which we reflect the image of God. Later in the *Gospel of John*, and in *First John*, “life” and “light” probably refer to **eternal life** and the way that life is **revealed** to us (Carson, pp. 118–119).

8. What does this passage mean by describing God as “light” (v. 5)? What importance does this have for Christian community?

“Light” is used symbolically throughout the Bible for truth and purity. It may refer to God’s person or to His truth. God is the source of truth; He is holy or pure; and He is righteous [always doing what is right in relationships with others]. There is no darkness, no lies, and no sin in Him. Jesus called Himself “...the light of the world” (John 8:12) and “...the truth...” (John 14:6). In *First John*, “light” is a metaphor for truth and righteousness. These two concepts are related—telling the truth is saying the right thing, and doing the truth is doing the right thing.

Jesus and others in the New Testament tell us that God is our Father, so we are His children (Matthew 5:16, 43–44, 48; 12:50; Romans 8:14–17; Ephesians 5:1). Consequently, we should be like Him, sharing His nature as “children of the light” (Ephesians 5:8). Just as children share the genes of their biological parents and many behaviors of those who raise them, so Christians share in God’s eternal nature and should reflect His holiness, truth, and love. If we do not continue to believe His truth or put it into practice, then we cannot have fellowship with God or each other, as verses 6–10 will explain. Without adhering to the basics of Biblical truth, we also will not have a foundation that keeps our community on solid ground. John wants “...to show that Christian belief and behavior belong inextricably together” (Dunn, p. 22).

9. According to verses 6 and 7, what two lifestyles can we choose? What does the author mean by “walk in the darkness” and “walk in the light”?

The Bible uses the verb “to walk” as a metaphor for how we live (Lincoln, p. 94).

In alternating verses, this passage offers two ways we can go. On one hand, we can **claim** to have fellowship with God even while we **walk in darkness** (v. 6). However, John says we are lying and not practicing the truth. This is hypocrisy, and many people have avoided or left the church because Christians say one thing but live differently. We can **claim** to be without sin, but that is deceiving ourselves and we aren’t people of truth or light, as He is (v. 8). No human but Jesus has lived a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). We can **claim** we have not sinned (v. 10), but that contradicts God’s Word and implies He is a liar. Notice that every one of these claims turns out to be a lie. Therefore, “walking in darkness” is **living a lie**, rejecting God’s truth by what we say and/or by how we live. It is participating in evil rather than turning our backs on sin. Following Jesus is not just a matter of knowing the right answers; it requires doing what is right.

In these verses (6, 8, 10), John is probably quoting some of the people who were dividing the church. Their statements reveal they thought they had advanced to a more spiritual state where they either denied they had sin or didn't believe it mattered because it had to do with the "fleshly" realm.

On the other hand, we can **walk in the light** (v. 7). The alternative to denying our sin is to step into the light with Jesus (v. 7), admitting that we are sinful, and confessing our sins (v. 9). This is part of the conversion process. To accept Him as the substitute who was judged and punished for our sin, we must admit our guilt and not hide in the darkness of lies. But living in the light also means following God's truth and putting it into practice on a daily basis. Moreover, since He is in the light, this also means that when we walk in the light we are walking with God. This fellowship with God gives us fellowship with one another. So we admit our sin, and God forgives us and purifies us from our sin and unrighteousness (vv. 7, 9). Thus we have fellowship with God, which leads to fellowship with one another. The fellowship we have with one another is fellowship with the Father and the Son (v. 3).

Whichever way we choose, the underlying facts remain the same: we are sinners and the darkness of our sins locks us out of fellowship with God and poisons our relationships with one another. In verses 6–10, we either acknowledge or deny our sin. We do not purify ourselves from sin; God does that.

10. How can we be purified from our sin and what difference does that make in community (vv. 7, 9, and 2:1–2)?

Through the blood of Jesus, God purifies us from our sin (vv. 7, 9). All the verbs are present tense, so all of this is ongoing activity. God has not finished purifying us, so we are not done confessing our sins. However, God has started purifying us, so we are not trapped in the darkness of sin and broken relationships, but are already walking in the light with God and with one another.

John explains that if we sin, God has provided someone to defend us from condemnation (v. 2:1). God loved us (John 3:16; Romans 5:8), so He **sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins** (2:2; Romans 3:25). Because God loved us, He wanted to remove the barrier between us created by our sin and rebellion.

An "atoning sacrifice" refers to the Jewish sacrificial system that symbolically dealt with human sin. Because God's law demanded death for offending His holy nature, and because "the life of a creature is in the blood," God permitted certain animals to substitute for humans (Leviticus 17:10–14). The animal's death and spilt blood symbolized that the death penalty had been carried out. Then the human was considered "forgiven" and **restored to relationship with God and the faith community**.

Jesus had to die because "...it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifices offered year after year actually reminded

God's people that they were still sinning and still guilty (Hebrews 10:1–3). Therefore, a perfect sacrifice was all that could remove our guilt once and for all. Only a perfect human could truly substitute for us, and thus remove the sentence of death over the whole human race (Crawford, "Isaiah 53:10–11").

John clearly states that one of his purposes in writing is that believers would not fall into the error of taking sin lightly or thinking it has no consequences: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin" (2:1a). However, he realizes that the Christian, even while trying to walk in the light, will fail at times. So John writes to reassure us that our relationship with God is not ended. In fact, God is such a loving Father that He has made provision for our failings: "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One" (2:1b).

11. Why don't we have to hide the fact that we sin (v. 9)?

If we deny or hide our sin (as Adam and Eve did in Genesis 3:8), we are lying (v. 6), we are deceiving ourselves (v. 8), and we are calling God a liar (v. 10). We are not living by the truth (v. 6) and the truth is not in us (v. 8). In other words, we cannot get rid of our sinfulness by denying it or acting as if it doesn't exist. God has established a moral universe, judged by His definition of right and wrong. If we contradict His truth or disobey His law, we are guilty of sin.

For sins we continue to commit, John urges us to **confess** them so that God can forgive us and purify us (v. 9). The main problem in our lives is that we do not want to admit our ongoing faults because we fear others will reject us. Additionally, our pride resists the pain of admitting to moral failures. So we hide our sins or struggles, and wear masks with each other. Without an atmosphere of **acceptance**—where others will relate to us in our best and worst moments—we will lack the ability to change and grow (Nathan, Rich, p. 1).

Christian community should be the most accepting experience for humans if we have fully grasped the love of God in the gospel. Since none of us have met God's standard of holiness, we are all in need of God's forgiveness (Romans 3:22–25). When we recognize that all people need to bow before the cross of Christ, both initially and daily, we will be less inclined to judge or condemn each other.

"Confession is a very risky business. It demands that we allow another person to know about the negative parts of our lives. Confession never happens in an atmosphere of judgment or condemnation" (Nathan, Rich, p. 1). When we have internalized God's love, especially through relationships with other people, we will be more inclined to acknowledge our sins by confessing them to at least one other person (Nathan, Rich, p. 1). This permits us to be forgiven and cleansed from our sin and strengthens our ties within the community of believers. See suggestions for confession in small groups in the last Application question below.

APPLICATION

***Why is Christian community more than just a group of friends who go to the same church or small group?**

***What truths do we have to agree on in order to have Christian community? What can we agree to disagree on and still have fellowship with each other?**

***Why do we need right relationships in our small group and church as a whole? What can we do to be sure our relationships with one another are on the right track?**

***When is it difficult for you to walk in the light? How could others in our group encourage you more in this area?**

***How do you think we could practice confession and forgiveness in our small group?**

Be sensitive to the responses you get to this question. Some people may react to the idea of “confession” because they’ve seen this performed regularly in other churches, but didn’t see real change in people’s lives. Remind them that the purpose of confession is to agree with God about what is true, that we all are sinners. Confession is a normal part of walking with God rather than rebelling against Him. For your group, keep confession of sins focused on specific sins and ensure that confession remains in a relational context: it is part of maintaining a loving relationship with our Perfect Father.

Confessing your sins is **not** the same as confessing your sinful nature. Confessing your sins means **specific sins**. For example, “I confess my pride” is confessing the sinful nature. Confession of sin means you examine exactly what “pride” *means* in this instance. What specific behavior/incident is pride linked to and where and/or when did that specific behavior/incident become apparent? **Confession is not about how you “feel.” It’s more about what you *did* in terms of specific behavior or thoughts when you violated Christ-like attitudes and behaviors.** All of us violate these attitudes and behaviors, but all of us also have the chance to confess our sin(s). When we confess our sins, we can *all* be forgiven and we can *all* move on from there, knowing Jesus still loves us and wants us to continue to press into our life with Him and with others (Christensen and Shreve).

Whenever people bring their sin into the light, God expects us to guard their dignity. Nothing confessed to either the group or one-on-one should ever be repeated or discussed, even with other group members. It’s possible that someone in your group has previously confessed or shared a sin struggle with others only to be hurt by them. This could make it very painful for that person if you ask the group to confess sins. First of all, it’s very important to emphasize the need for confidentiality and avoiding

anything that would expose another's sin, such as probing questions or insensitive remarks. If someone has a deep problem with trust, you may want to suggest he or she gets additional prayer or peer counseling to work through forgiveness and healing from any wound. Be wise about balancing the needs of one damaged person who may need more help at another time with the whole group's application of the teaching on confessing sin.

Some group members may feel more comfortable confessing sin to just one other person. Dietrich Bonhoeffer claims that we can confess our sin to one other brother or sister, because God has given this responsibility to the church, and that person can act on behalf of the church community (p. 113). By confessing sin to at least one other follower of Christ, we bring our sin out of the darkness and into the light of the gospel. This helps break the power of sin and the isolation experienced by many who are burdened by their sin (Bonhoeffer, pp. 112–113).

It's important for us to be loving and non-judgmental when another brother or sister "comes clean." Only those of us who recognize the depth of sin in our own hearts will not be surprised by the confession of others (Bonhoeffer, pp. 118–119). Our role is to listen, to show Jesus' unconditional love for them, and to pronounce them forgiven by His blood (1 John 1:9). For some who easily feel condemned, reassure them that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ (Romans 8:1, 31–39, cited in Nathan, Rich, p. 1).

In your ministry time, you may want to invite group members to join you in confessing specific sins to Jesus. You might have people pair up and confess to just one other person. [Of course, men should confess only to men, and women should confess only to women.] Take time to receive and extend His forgiveness and give thanks for His purifying touch. Assure people that no one is being forced to admit anything he or she is reluctant to make public. Again, be sensitive in case some believers are used to confession being transacted only with an ordained clergy person or have been hurt in prior experiences.

WRAPPING IT UP

This passage identifies a serious problem for humans. God is light and in Him there is no darkness. Because we are sinners, we are walking in darkness. Consequently, we cannot have fellowship with God. The solution was that 'Someone' who was in the beginning with God came to earth and was seen, heard, and even touched by people. This 'Someone' was Jesus, the divine-human person, the message sent from God to bring life and light to us. Through the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, we can be purified from our sin—if we will consistently confess our sins and walk in His light.

Just as our sin prevents us from having fellowship with God, it damages our relationships with one another. Likewise, Jesus' blood purifies us from sin and permits us fellowship with God, and the resulting forgiveness can bring healing in our relationships with other people. In the future, we will look at how to build those healthy relationships with other Christians.

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