Small Group Guide: Light or Darkness

Based on 1 John 1:1 - 2:2

Overview

The Apostle John wrote his first epistle to a church body being influenced by false teaching that claimed followers of Christ could live however they wanted without transformation or obedience. John's response was direct and loving: Jesus is real, Jesus is light, and walking with him changes everything. This guide will help your group wrestle honestly with what it means to walk in the light, pursue genuine fellowship, and receive the freedom Christ offers.

Key Takeaways

- John established the physical reality of Jesus -- he was heard, seen, and touched. He was fully God and fully man, not merely a spiritual being.
- True fellowship with God and with other believers flows from walking in the light, not from claiming the right words while living in darkness.
- Complete joy is available to those who remain in Christ and keep his commands, as Jesus himself promised in John 15:9-11.
- Confession is agreeing with God about the reality of sin, naming it, owning it, and turning back to him. It is the bridge from darkness into light.
- Our sins are not forgiven because we confess them. They are forgiven because Jesus bore our punishment and his blood covered them. Confession restores the closeness of our relationship with him.
- We are not defined as "just sinners." In Christ, we are saints who sometimes sin. The identity we claim shapes the life we live.
- Walking in the light is not about perfection. It is about direction -- consistently turning toward Jesus rather than away from him.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Getting Started)

These questions are meant to ease your group into the conversation. Keep them light and accessible.

1. Think of a time when someone described a person or place so vividly that you felt like you were almost there. What made their account so compelling? How does that connect to the way John opens his letter in 1 John 1:1-4?
2. The sermon described the unique bond that exists between believers -- a fellowship that can connect people who seem completely different on the surface. Have you experienced that kind of connection? What made it feel different from ordinary friendship?

Going Deeper (Engaging the Text)

These questions move into the heart of the sermon and the passage.

3. John says in verse 6 that if someone claims fellowship with God while walking entirely in darkness, they are lying and not practicing the truth. Why do you think someone might genuinely believe they are walking with Jesus while their life shows little to no evidence of transformation? What conditions make that kind of self-deception possible?
4. The sermon described a picture of two ladders -- one representing worldliness and one representing life with Christ -- and the danger of trying to keep one foot on each. Where have you seen that pattern in your own life or in others? What does it cost a person to stay in that in-between place long term?
5. Read 1 John 1:9 together. The sermon offered this definition of confession: agreeing with God about the reality of our sin, naming it, owning it, and turning to him rather than staying in the darkness. How does this definition differ from how you may have thought about confession before? What changes when confession is understood as turning toward God rather than simply listing wrongs?
6. The sermon made the point that our sins are not forgiven because we confess them -- they are forgiven because Jesus bore the punishment. Confession matters for the health of our relationship with him, not as the mechanism of our forgiveness. How does that distinction change the way you approach God after you sin? Does it bring relief, raise questions, or both?
7. The sermon challenged the phrase "I am just a sinner saved by grace" and suggested replacing it with "I am a saint who sometimes sins." What difference does that shift in language actually make in daily life? Is there any resistance in you to claiming the identity of "saint"? If so, where does that resistance come from?
8. John writes in 1 John 2:1 that he is writing so that his readers may not sin, but then immediately adds that if anyone does sin, we have an advocate in Jesus Christ. How do those two statements work together? What does it tell us about God's expectations and his character that he includes both in the same breath?

Getting Personal (Honest Reflection)

These questions invite vulnerability. Give your group permission to share only what they are comfortable sharing.

9. The sermon described a cycle of confessing sin, returning to it, and confessing again -- driven partly by a belief that we are just sinners who will never truly change. Have you ever been stuck in that cycle? What kept you there, and what, if anything, helped you move out of it?
10. The pastor shared a personal story about his wife naming something painful in their marriage in front of others, and his first instinct was self-protection rather than humility. When something true and uncomfortable is brought into the light about you, what is your most common first response? What would it look like to respond more like Christ in those moments?
11. The sermon said that what we speak over ourselves, we tend to follow. What are the most common things you say about yourself -- out loud or internally -- when you fail? Are those words consistent with what God says about you in his word?

Outward Focus

These questions connect the sermon to your group's witness in the world.

12. The sermon raised the image of someone outside the church watching believers and noticing that their lives look no different from anyone else's. Without naming anyone specifically, what do you think is the most common gap between what people in your community expect from followers of Jesus and what they actually observe? What is one thing your group could do to close that gap?
13. The sermon described how walking in the light is not just a personal matter -- it directly affects our ability to make disciples. If someone in your life is watching how you handle conflict, failure, or hardship, what story is your life currently telling them about Jesus?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

- **Examine your identity language.** Pay attention this week to how you talk about yourself -- in prayer, in conversation, and in your own thoughts. When you fall short, notice whether you reach for shame-based language or whether you return to what God says is true about you in Christ. Consider writing down one or two statements from scripture that reflect your identity in him and reading them daily.
- **Practice honest confession.** If the Holy Spirit has been drawing your attention to something in your life that you have been avoiding, take time this week to bring it before God specifically. Name it. Agree with him about it. Turn toward him. If it is something that needs to be shared with another person, ask God for the courage to take that step.
- **Pursue one act of fellowship.** Reach out this week to someone in your church community -- not for an event or an obligation, but simply to be present with them. Share

something God is doing in your life, and ask what he is doing in theirs. Practice talking about what God is doing, not only what you wish he were doing.

- **Pray for an unreached people group.** Using the bulletin insert or a resource like Joshua Project, spend five minutes this week praying for a people group with little to no access to the gospel. Ask God to send workers, to soften hearts, and to reveal himself to people who have never heard his name.
- **Have one honest conversation.** Think of a relationship -- a spouse, a close friend, a family member -- where something has been left unsaid that needs to come into the light. Ask God for the right moment and the right words, and take one step toward that conversation this week.

Closing Prayer Guide

Close your group time by praying together. You may use the following prompts to guide your prayer or pray freely.

- Thank God for the reality of Jesus -- that he came in the flesh, walked among us, and made a way for us to know him personally.
- Ask for the courage to walk honestly in the light, even when it is uncomfortable.
- Pray for anyone in your group who is in a season of darkness or struggling to believe that change is possible.
- Lift up your community and the people in your spheres of influence who do not yet know Jesus.
- Close by asking for complete joy -- the kind Jesus promised to those who remain in him and keep his commands.

"If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." -- 1 John 1:7