



Sermon Growth Guide

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Walk in the Light, 1 John 1:1-10

December 21, 2025

Key Verse: (1 John 1:5) "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

Big Idea: Christmas is about the entry of God's light into our darkened souls

Foundations

This week we continue in our theme of Everlasting Light. We've looked at darkness, at Isaiah's prophecy, and at the relationship of light and dark. Today we focus on the idea of Jesus being the light.

John was one of Jesus' close friends, and as such, he wanted others to know the truth about Jesus. He was fighting for the truth, just as any one of us would do for our close friend. John had been with Jesus – had eaten with Him, walked with Him, laughed with Him. John could give witness to the humanity of Jesus. John had also seen the transformation occur for those who encountered Jesus. He could give witness to the incredible, precious, holy time that they'd had together.

Since John had witnessed the light, he's even more passionate to not return to darkness. He'd seen the juxtaposition. John has seen what darkness is – even the tricky darkness. John refuses to let anyone else think that they are good and sinless, for that erases the miracle of who God is. John wants us to be honest with ourselves – admitting and confessing our sin and need of a Savior, as Pastor Tim mentioned.

The rest of this letter implores the reader to remember the light – to stay the course. We're called to stay the course of righteousness and of operating as a child of God. We're asked to go out into the world with Love, and to remember the one who is Love.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read 1 John 1:1-10 1

John was written by John, one of Jesus' inner circle, and the 'disciple whom Jesus loved.' How does that enhance your understanding of vs. 2? John sets the tone for this letter by reminding the believers that God is light. Skimming the book, what darkness does John warn against?

Applying God's Word

Think back to something historic that you were part of. As you tell an outsider about it, don't you want to try to convey everything you witnessed? What is John trying to impress upon us? What would it look like to be a part of a group, like the disciples were, where Light was common? Have you witnessed something like this?

Are you in darkness right now? How does "the entry of God's light into our darkened soul(s)," as Pastor Tim said, sound to you? How can you turn toward Jesus, who is light?

Witnessing God's Word

Pastor Tim talked of the lie that the early church most needed to combat – that Jesus was not fully human. There was an assumption that He was God, due to His multitude of miracles. Our culture, on the other hand, wants to see Jesus as only a good man – a good teacher. How does Jesus being the Light of the World – fully God and fully man – shape our worldview and our conversations?

Humans do some remarkable things. One is that we stand upright on two legs. Then we have this tendency to lean forward, to the point of falling, then, at the last minute stick out a foot and catch ourselves. Then we immediately do it again, and again, and again. This is walking. Most animals propel themselves along the surface of the earth keeping at least two points of contact with the ground at all times. Not us. We risk it all, baby! We go full commitment, a commitment we only truly understand when something goes wrong. You don't see a lot of deer falling flat on their faces, do you? Not even reindeer. Walking. Utter commitment. Faith. Trust. Walking. It's a practice best done in the light.

Nobody likes walking in the dark. If you tried it, you want to avoid it. It is not a pleasant experience. But that's what we do with our spiritual lives so often. We stumble along in the dark as if there were no light on offer. We fumble forward as if there were no guidance, nothing to trust, no spiritual light. This Christmas, we want to be wiser than that. Christmas is about more than the nativity scene, the baby in the manger and the shepherds in the fields. John, the author of this letter, sees it as the very outbreking of God's light over the darkened landscape of a fallen world, the entry of God's light into our darkened souls. Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is the Everlasting Light. Isaiah foretold; John now reveals, and he encourages us as he encouraged his church in this letter, Walk in the Light.

John wrote this note to his home church in Ephesus while he was in exile on Patmos. We don't know for sure whether he wrote the Gospel of John before or after these letters, but they sure have a lot in common. Something of cosmic implications happened when Jesus came to earth. "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. 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." (1 John 1:1-2) The Word appeared. The Light appeared. The Life appeared. We saw him. We touched him. We held hands with him. He was real, a man among us. Jesus. You know, the earliest controversy about Jesus was not people who said, "There's no way Jesus was divine. That's outrageous." It was actually people saying, "There's no way Jesus was a man. That's outrageous! He did too many supernatural, powerful, god-like things to be a man." No. He was a man. He was also God, but he was a man. John says, we touched him. Don't forget. We saw him. He's real. The Word appeared. The Light appeared. The Life appeared. That's actually what we call today Christmas. Jesus is God in the flesh.

Verse five is the foundation for all John will say in this passage. It's a simple statement, but a profound one. "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) God is light. God is not a conglomeration of competing values, partly dark, a little shady, mostly light. That's how we are, but that's not how God is. John likes to be clear about this. He's the one who also says, "God is love." No hate, all love. No darkness, all light. God is good, all the time. Even when we don't think so. It isn't God that's confused. It isn't God that can't tell light from dark. God is light. No darkness at all. You and me? It's complicated.

"If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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." (1 John 1:6-7) Two ways. John says walking in the light grants fellowship, koinonia, true companionship and loving relationship, with God and with others. That's the light. Darkness leaves us isolated. Still, some claim to have fellowship with God and yet, as it says, "walk in the darkness." What does that mean? Have you ever sat down with friends or family around the holidays to play a game? Somebody says they remember the rules. Was this you last

night? Someone gives the rules, but then someone else says they have a different rule that makes it more fun. Still a third says, the way they always played it was like this. And along it goes. You play a round, and according to everything that was said and explained, the rules on the table, you won! But then someone says, "Oh yeah; I forgot to say, if you do that, you lose. So, you lose."

Walking in the light means God sets the rules. Walking in the dark means I set the rules. God sets the rules. God determines right and wrong. God defines sin and righteousness, virtue and vice. Not us. Not me. Walking in the dark is "I set the rules; I have enough light to see right and wrong." Do you? Walking in the light means letting God be God. God says. I will see reality as God sees reality; I will know life as God knows life. If God says it is sin, it is sin. No more rules to add. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20)

But do you know what the good news is? Walking in the light does not require perfect steps, it only requires honest and humble hearts. In the light, we have the purifying blood of Jesus. John didn't want the church discouraged. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9) Nobody is going to keep the rules perfectly. But here is how to turn back to the dark: deny that your sin is sin. Pretend your sin is holiness. Pretend you have light to see when you are actually in the dark. Claim to be without sin. "I don't need your Jesus. I'm sorry you feel so bad about yourself. I don't. I feel great about myself. You should too." It's not about feeling bad about yourself; it's about being honest before God. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23) to jump to another Scripture. That's all of us. We all fall short. But the good news is this: Jesus came

and lived a perfect and righteous life, and his blood shed on the cross was the only penalty that needed to be paid to gain forgiveness, purifying grace. Only be honest and humble. Walk in the light. "Here it is, Jesus. Here's what I did. Here's the mess." "My child, this too is covered by my grace. It's already covered. It's already paid."

The gift of Christmas is that the light has come into the world. Light is available. It's not like these strings of twinkle lights. They do seem to die in the box over the summer, like Pastor John said two weeks ago, don't they? They don't last much. It's not like a candle burning down; only a little left. The gift of Christmas is the light everlasting, never ending, inexhaustible. "I stumbled again. I did it again. I'm stuck in it. My boots are sinking in the mud like a swamp." God's grace is enough. Don't be tempted to turn to dark paths. Don't be tempted to deny God's rules—God's Word. Stay in the light, where the cross of Christ is ever visible before you with all the grace and forgiveness you need. Walk in the light.

It's one or the other. Darkness or light. "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:10) This is harsh language, intentionally harsh. It is life or death. We all deny our sinfulness. We all judge ourselves by our good intentions and others by their substandard results. We all see ourselves as misunderstood and others as arrogantly sinful. That's how it works. This Scripture calls us to a true account. "I have sinned. God sets the rules. According to those rules, I am not playing the game perfectly. I am not keeping all the rules. I have sinned. I have fallen short." Some say, "It is so unfortunate that you have taken up religion and it makes you feel so bad about yourself." It's not about feeling bad. It's about true diagnosis. And once that diagnosis is in, God can deal with the cure. But, John says, if we claim sinlessness, it is more than a misdiagnosis; it is more than a personal error in judgment. It is blasphemy. It is calling God a liar.

It's one or the other. Darkness or light. God doesn't expect perfection out of us. That's why he sent his Son, Jesus. God calls us to strive for a holy life knowing that we will not attain it in this lifetime. If we pretend we have no faults, no sins, we remain lost in them. If we open up our lives to his light with honesty and humility, the blood of Jesus purifies us. To walk in the light does not mean you never stumble; it means turning quickly to your Savior over and over again with trust and faith, knowing that his grace is as inexhaustible as his light is everlasting.

It's one or the other. Light or darkness. Psalm 36 says, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." (Psalms 36:9) It is kind of a closed loop, you see. What light do we use to judge or measure God's light? There is none. You are either in God's light or out of God's light. So, how do I get in? I'd like to creep in slowly. I'd like to dip a toe, then pull it out, then dip again. I'd like to wade in steadily, measuring my comfort level with each advance. It's one or the other, light or dark. You have to jump in. It's not like a wading pool. It's more like one of those tunnel plunges you see where you have to dive all the way in and swim through the dark to get to the cave pool underneath. It is a faith plunge. A leap of faith. Not a blind leap, but a leap. There is only so far your rational, logical light can take you. To jump in, you have to jump in. In your light, we see light. Walk in the light.

On November 22, 2013, marking the fiftieth anniversary of his death, C. S. Lewis was honored with the unveiling of a memorial stone at the base of a pillar in what is called Poet's Corner within the great cathedral of Westminster Abbey, in London. Lewis, the author of the Narnia Chronicles and Mere Christianity, was an atheist as a young man and professor at Oxford and Cambridge, but he was not satisfied. Through some Christian friends, and his own explorations and investigations, he came to the Lord. The lights went on. He became one of the

strongest advocates for Christian faith the UK has ever seen, and one of the brightest in the world. Around his memorial stone are engraved these words: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else." In his light we see light. In or out?

Are you walking in the light? Are you honest with God, letting God be God? Are you honest with yourself, admitting and confessing your sin and need of a Savior? Are you open with others, Christian brothers and sisters, to keep you accountable as you try to apply what you know of Holy Scripture to your life? No more dark. Walking in light. It begins with the great interruption, the rising of the sun, the entry of the Son of God into your life, Jesus, the Everlasting Light. That happens when you pray, when you speak to God, acknowledge God, open your mind and heart to knowing God in Christ. To give you an opportunity, I want to lead us in prayer once again as we close. Follow me in prayer: Heavenly Father, Everlasting Lord, in your light I see light. Turn me from the darkness, take me into your light. I acknowledge I am just as much a sinner as everyone else. Forgive me. Thank you for giving your life for me; now I give you mine. In Jesus name. Amen.