

## Get into the Study



5 MINUTES

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Item 1: No Doubt** poster to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.

### No Doubt: Six Things We Can Know for Sure

- ▶ **SURE OF FORGIVENESS**  
1 John 1:5–2:2
- ▶ **SURE OF A RELATIONSHIP**  
1 John 2:3–11, 15–17
- ▶ **SURE OF THE TRUTH**  
1 John 2:18–29
- ▶ **SURE OF VICTORY**  
1 John 3:19–4:4
- ▶ **SURE OF GOD'S LOVE**  
1 John 4:7–13, 19–21
- ▶ **SURE OF SALVATION**  
1 John 5:1–5, 11–13, 18–21

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 14 of the PSG: “**What are some sure things you can count on in life?**”



**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 15 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of forgiveness by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

## SESSION 1

# Sure of Forgiveness

### THE POINT

We are forgiven when we confess our sin and walk with Christ.

### LIFE CONNECTION

We are sinful, rebellious human beings, and we feel the result: guilt. Despite our best efforts, we can't break free of our sin, and guilt can hound us relentlessly. Too many people are driven into despair and hopelessness because of the shame and guilt they feel over sin. Freedom from guilt is possible.

### THE PASSAGE

1 John 1:5–2:2

### THE SETTING

Near the end of the first Christian century (in the AD 90s), most eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry had either died of natural causes or been killed by persecution. Domitian (AD 81–96) is considered by some to be the first Roman emperor to institute an empire-wide persecution of Christians. John, the Beloved Disciple, was likely the last of the original twelve apostles. He used his latter years to write his Gospel account, three letters, and “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

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## 1 JOHN 1:5-7

**5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.**

**6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:**

**7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.**

**1 ▶ Verse 5.** In his opening paragraph (1 John 1:1-4), John established his authority to write by citing his role as an eyewitness, using such terms as “seen,” “heard,” and “handled.” First John provides assurance of salvation and eternal life (5:13). This assurance is expressed in the title for our study: “No Doubt: Six Things We Can Know for Sure” and in the titles of each session.

Verse 5 begins the first major section of this epistle (letter): 1 John 1:5–2:2. This section begins with the truth stated positively as **God is light** and negatively as **in him is no darkness at all**. In the remainder of our Scripture for this session, John presented three false claims (introduced in Greek, the original language of the New Testament, by words translated **if we say**, 1:6,8,10) countered by three truths (introduced by **if**, with the concept, *but if*, 1:7,9; 2:1).

Verse 5 presents a **message** about and from God. This word only appears twice in the Greek New Testament (also 1 John 3:11). We get our English word *angel* from this Greek root. John also stated that he had heard this **message ... of him**, likely referring to Jesus during His earthly ministry but possibly to God the Father. This message John heard was the one he declared to his audience. We should follow John’s example in passing along God’s truth to those who can hear us.

The message John declared was this: **God is light**. In the Bible, particularly in John’s writings, the word *light* is used figuratively to represent righteousness. As John opened his Gospel account, he discussed Jesus as the light (John 1:4-9). John also used the word *darkness* to represent sin. Therefore, in saying **in him is no darkness at all**, John was declaring the sinlessness of God (Father, Son, and Spirit).

**RECAP:** God desires for every believer to have assurance of salvation. Sadly, many Christians struggle daily with doubt as it pertains to their eternal destiny. Some even believe it’s impossible to know with certainty that a person is eternally saved. At other times, believers who are not sure of their salvation find themselves plunged into the depths of doubt and despair, uncertain of whether or not God has truly forgiven them. Others allow their own self-condemnation to smother the assurance God desires for them to have. But we can be assured of assurance!

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” on page 15 of the PSG: “We are forgiven when we confess our sin and walk with Christ.”

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance**, bring some cleaning wipes to your gathering. Pass the cleaning wipes around the group and encourage volunteers to clean up any dirt, scuffs, or marks present in your meeting space. Transition into the main portion of your discussion by reinforcing “The Point,” making the connection between forgiveness and being spiritually cleansed of our sin. Then lead the group in prayer.

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God to help the group understand the need for confession and walking with Christ. Thank Him for the forgiveness He secured for us through Christ.

## Study the Bible

### 1 John 1:5-7



10 MINUTES

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make copies of **Item 2: Book of 1 John** handout and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to help group members understand the background and context for this study.



**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 1:5-7 on page 16 of the PSG.

**Verse 6.** John presented the first of three false claims in verse 6. Likely, these false claims originated with the evil teachers whom John was writing to refute. John's rationale was that how you live demonstrates the truth of your claim. Some were claiming to be Christians (**we have fellowship with him**) yet were living **in darkness** (sin). Instead of this claim being true, John responded that those who claimed to have fellowship with God but whose actions did not reflect that claim **lie, and do not the truth**. Our actions demonstrate the truth of our claims. The Greek grammar of this verse helps us understand that these ongoing actions (**say, walk, and lie/do not the truth**) reveal a pattern of inconsistency with the truth. John revealed the real test is *not* what we say; rather it *is* what type of life we live. John then moved from the false claim (v. 6) to the truth of God's Word (v. 7).

**Verse 7.** John began verse 7 with a strong contrast, **if** or "*but if,*" to the false claim of verse 6. The truth, John said, is to live like Jesus. In both the Old and New Testaments, the word translated **walk** describes how a person lives. Therefore, **if we walk in the light, as he is in the light** means we must live like Jesus. Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). **Light** refers to righteousness, to living like God's nature. Our living reflects whom we serve. That **He is in the light** reveals the extent of the obedience God requires: the same level of obedience Jesus demonstrated. Since we can never measure up to this standard, we must depend on Jesus' righteousness—and only Jesus' righteousness—to satisfy God's demands.

John listed two results of living like Jesus: fellowship and cleansing. First, the Greek word translated **fellowship** means sharing, having in common. Our sharing **one with another** results from our walking in the light: living like Jesus. If we are having problems in our Christian fellowship, perhaps we should examine the extent we live in the light. Fellowship with one another is the result of God's working in our lives.

The second result of living in the light is cleansing from sin. In the Bible, blood represents life. When we lose our blood, we lose our lives. Jesus' blood loss on the cross resulted in His physical death, but it also resulted in eternal life for believers. No other sacrifice could ever cleanse us from our sin. Without Jesus' blood, sinful humans (all of us) could never share in God's nature,

experience salvation, or receive eternal life. Jesus' blood cleanses believers from **all sin**. Of the words used in the Bible for *sin*, this particular word refers to missing the mark or falling short (like an archer who misses the target). Every human being has sinned (Rom. 3:23). Only those who depend on Jesus' blood receive cleansing. The word translated **cleanseth** refers to making a person or an object clean. The gratitude we have for our sins being forgiven results in more fellowship with one another and with God. We are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness. ◀

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## 1 JOHN 1:8-10

**8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

**9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

**10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.**

**KEY WORD: Confess** (1:9)—To confess means “to say the same thing,” “to agree.” In this verse, to confess specifically means to agree with God about our sin.

**2 ▶ Verse 8.** The truth that we are forgiven when we confess our sin is our focus in these three verses. John began this section with the second of three false claims followed by three affirmations of God's truth.

The words **If we say** introduce the second false claim. These words reflect what the false teachers were affirming and John was combating. Scholars debate how the words **we have no sin** should be understood. Some believe the false teachers claimed we have no responsibility for our sin—that social, economic, hereditary, or other circumstances are to blame. How familiar is that in our society today? Others believe the false teachers asserted that **we have no sin** means sin has no effect upon us; Jesus already paid the price, so what we do does not matter.

Whichever approach to understanding these false words is correct, God's judgment is clear: **we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us**. Likely John intended both of these clauses as one truth expressed in two ways. A central element of Hebrew writing was

**DISCUSS: Question #2** on page 18 of the PSG: **“How should we understand the images of light and darkness in these verses?”**

*Alternate: What does it mean to walk in the light?*

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **1** on pages 17-19 to help explain John's use of light and darkness.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from pages 16-17 of the PSG. We are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. John underscored this by looking at this truth from two sides.

1. **Darkness.** *The idea of walking refers to a person's way of life. If anyone lives a life of continual, unrepentant sin and claims to be forgiven or to have fellowship with God, he is tragically mistaken. The way he lives points to the reality that he is not in fellowship with God.*

2. **Light.** *When we turn from darkness and walk with Christ, we are assured of forgiveness. To walk in the light is to live a life consistent with the will of God. Of course, this does not mean we are perfect, but that the trajectory and the purpose of our lives has become the pursuit of God.*

**RECAP:** If your life pattern is turning from darkness and pursuing holiness, then don't doubt God's forgiveness toward you. We are forgiven when we confess our sins and walk with Christ.

**TRANSITION:** We are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. In the next verses, we see that we are forgiven when we confess our sin.

## Study the Bible

### 1 John 1:8-10



10 MINUTES

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 1:8-10 on page 18 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **2** on pages 19-21 to help explain why it cannot be that we have no sin.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 19 of the PSG: **“What have you found challenging about accepting forgiveness?”**

parallelism, saying the same thing in different ways. The word translated **deceive** means “to lead astray” or “to be led into error” and appears thirty-nine times in the Greek New Testament. Our English term *seduce* comes from the Latin word in that translation of this verse. God inspired John to reinforce this truth by also writing **and the truth is not in us**. The false teachers John addressed professed to place much value on having the truth. John provided the answer, the solution to this false teaching, in verse 9.

**Verse 9.** To counter the false claim in verse 8, John expressed the truth in verse 9. The Greek grammar helps us understand the writer's intent. When the first part of the verse is completed (confession), then the second part (forgiveness) is guaranteed.

The Greek word usually translated **if** could also be translated “when.” **Confess** translates a compound word in Greek. The first part of this word means “same” and the second part means “say.” Therefore, to confess means “to say the same thing.” To put it another way, to confess means “to agree,” so we are to agree with God about our sin, our missing God's mark of righteousness. This Greek word is used twenty-six times in the New Testament. According to God's Word, the prerequisite for forgiveness is confession.

When we agree with God about our sin, we acknowledge that God is **faithful** and **just**. These two words are similar in meaning; each expands the meaning of the other. The word translated **faithful** means “believing” and “trusting” and appears sixty-seven times in the Greek New Testament. God is always faithful to His nature and character. The word translated **just** means “upright,” “holy,” and “right.” It occurs seventy-nine times in the Greek New Testament. These words express the character and nature of God Himself as well as of the people who live according to God's commands.

John further specified one of God's activities that reflect His faithfulness and justness: our forgiveness. Contrary to what much of our society believes, forgiveness is not merely ignoring sin; that is indulgence. Forgiveness involves treating another person with love even after that person has hurt us. **Forgive** means “sending away,” “letting go” or “freeing” and is used 143 times in the Greek New Testament. God forgives us because of our sins against Him. John elaborated on God's forgiveness by adding an additional phrase: **to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**. God's

forgiveness and His cleansing work together, like two sides of the same coin. Rather than two distinct actions, these two words describe the extraordinary measure God takes to make us acceptable to Him. John revealed the extent of God's cleansing in the last three words of verse 9: **from all unrighteousness**. God never acts partially; He always acts completely—He finishes what He starts. We would do well to imitate God as commanded in Ephesians 5:1. This leads us back to our focus in these verses: we are forgiven when we confess our sins.

**Verse 10.** Most scholars believe that the Catholic archbishop Stephen Langton divided the Bible into chapters before his death in AD 1228. (This is the same man who led barons in the development of England's Magna Carta.) Although the chapter divisions (and verse divisions added in 1551) are helpful in locating a specific text in the Bible, they were not a part of the Bible as God originally inspired it. At times, chapter or verse divisions divide the text of the Bible awkwardly. The separation of 1 John 1:10 from 1 John 2:1 is one such place. The division between chapters 1 and 2 interrupts the completion of the third false claim (1:10) and the third stating of God's truth (2:1).

The false teachers' claim in 1 John 1:10 is similar to their claim in verse 8, but more far reaching. The Greek grammar of verse 8 indicates the false teachers were describing *presently* sinning. The grammar of verse 10 indicates the false teachers were claiming to have *never* sinned. Further, the result of the false claim in verse 8 is deceiving ourselves (bad); the result of the false claim in verse 10 is that we make God a **liar** (worse). John put it another way, God's **word is not in us**. The claim is a direct denial of Romans 3:23 that *all* have sinned. God's **word**, whether that means *the Bible* or *Jesus Himself*, cannot be in a person who claims to have no sin or to have never sinned. God's truth countering this false claim is found in 1 John 2:1. We are forgiven when we confess our sin. ◀

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## 1 JOHN 2:1-2

**1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:**

**2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.**

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from pages 18-19 of the PSG. In verses 8-10, the apostle used a negative/positive pattern:

1. **Deception.** *Failure to admit sin is a mistake of the highest order. Why would a person fail to recognize and confess sin?*

- **Self-righteousness.** *A self-righteous attitude says, "I'm not that bad; as a matter of fact, I'm pretty good compared to some people. Therefore, I have nothing to confess."*

- **Self-deception.** *We can convince ourselves that our sins are no big deal, but we'd be woefully wrong. People deceive themselves when they try to justify and make excuses for their sins. One day the deception of the self-deceived will come tragically upon their own heads. Worst of all, to deny one's sin is to call God a liar.*

2. **Confession.** *The opposite of deception is confession. Humble confession leads to forgiveness. We are forgiven when we look at our sin in light of Christ's righteousness and willingly confess our sin for what it is: wickedness against God Himself.*

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 20 of the PSG: “How has God’s forgiveness impacted your life?”

*Alternate: In what ways do we sometimes deceive ourselves about our own sin?*

**DO:** Direct group members to complete “Engage” on page 22 of the PSG to help group members express thanks for God’s gift of forgiveness.

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that we are forgiven when we depend on Jesus as our Advocate.

## Study the Bible

### 1 John 2:1-2



15 MINUTES

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 2:1-2 on page 20 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **3** on pages 22-24 to help explain Jesus’ role as our advocate.

**KEY WORDS:** **Advocate** (2:1)—An advocate is a person who “helps,” who “provides aid.” Jesus is a legal counsel to defend Christians, particularly from His position in heaven.

**Propitiation** (2:2)—The word means that God has provided His grace through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross so that people can be accepted by God.

**3** ▶ **Verse 1.** Being forgiven requires we depend on Jesus as our Advocate. In 1 John 2:1-6, John wanted hearers to resist sin. John had a balanced approach—not too lenient nor too severe. He did not *condone* sin; in fact, he urged believers not to sin. But John did not *condemn* the sinner; he pointed out the only way to forgiveness: Jesus Christ, our Advocate. First John 2:1-2 is the truth that corresponds to the false claim expressed in 1 John 1:10.

John opened verse 1 with a change of audience. Instead of the false teachers he addressed in 1 John 1:6,8,10, John addressed Christians with an endearing term, **my little children**, revealing the love he had for them. Next, John clearly stated his purpose: **these things write I unto you, that ye sin not**. John had already addressed those who claimed not to have sinned (1:8,10).

John’s love for these Christians led him to answer the question, “But what happens when Christians sin?” John expressed the answer this way: **we have an advocate with the Father**. The Greek word translated *advocate* is used only five times in the Greek New Testament; it refers to Jesus in this verse, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, and the Holy Spirit in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7. Putting the Greek word into English produces the compound word *paraclete* made up of the preposition meaning “alongside of” and the verb “called,” together meaning “to help,” “to provide aid.” Jesus is legal counsel to defend believers. The New Testament teaches that Jesus helps believers by interceding for them (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). John revealed that Jesus’ defense of Christians happens in heaven before **the Father**. Therefore, our focus in these two verses is that we are forgiven when we depend on Jesus as our Advocate to do for us what we are not qualified to do for ourselves.

John further identified the Advocate as **Jesus Christ the righteous**. The name *Jesus* is built on the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament and means “salvation.” The title *Christ* derives from the Greek form of the Hebrew word rendered “messiah;” it is translated into

English as “anointed one.” This word pictures the Holy Spirit’s anointing of priests, prophets, and kings with oil in the Old Testament. The Greek word for the **righteous**, used seventy-nine times in the New Testament, is also translated as “just” or “right.” It is used of one whose feelings, thoughts, and actions are totally committed to God. What do we need to change in our lives so others can say that about us? This word also describes a person who is approved by God and is guiltless or faultless before God (such as Simeon in Luke 2:25). This is the third time John has evoked the concept of forgiveness (1 John 1:7,9; 2:1). We have nothing to plead before God, but Jesus intercedes for us. In 1:9 God is called righteous (translated as “just”); while in 2:1, Jesus is called righteous.

**Verse 2.** The pronoun **he** refers to Jesus (2:1). Jesus is the *only one* who could fulfill this role. This concept is echoed in multiple places in the New Testament.

The next Greek word is very difficult to understand. I had a friend in seminary who wrote his entire (almost two-hundred-page) dissertation on this one word translated **propitiation**. This word is used in the New Testament only here and 1 John 4:10. The word *propitiation* comes from the Latin and refers to a sacrifice to appease an angry god. Old Testament examples are throwing children into fire (to appease the false Canaanite god Molech) or the Nile River in Egypt (to appease the river god Hapi). The idea of this Greek word in the Bible is not that of appeasing an angry God but rather changing our character that causes our alienation from Him. God has provided His grace through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross so that people can be accepted. *Expiation*, the act by which defilement is removed, is another way to translate this Greek word. However, perhaps the best way to understand this Greek word is as an atoning sacrifice. This word picture includes the Old Testament background of animals serving as temporary sacrifices until Jesus, the Lamb of God, was revealed and completed His mission of saving sinners (Matt. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15). The basic meaning of this Greek word is that through Jesus Christ, the believer’s fellowship with God is begun and maintained. God has removed the barrier and punishment for all who believe.

In the last part of 1 John 2:2, John described the extent of Jesus’ sacrifice: **not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world**. Not only was Jesus’ sacrifice offered to those who had or would become Christians, it was also *offered to the whole world*. In John’s Gospel

**RECAP:** The foundation of Christ’s advocacy is the blood He shed for our atonement. The reason for atoning is to appease an offended party. Jesus, through His death on the cross, satisfied the righteous indignation of God. However, we are not to perceive God as some pagan deity who is reluctantly appeased because of blood being shed. On the contrary, God the Father provided the sacrifice Himself; thus, He satisfied His wrath by giving His only Son to die in our place. Furthermore, Christ willingly gave His life as our substitute.

Better than any artificial blood, the blood of Jesus saves everyone who receives it. Those who come to Christ face no compatibility issues, and they will find no scarcity of supply. When you find yourself in doubt, depend on Jesus as your Advocate and your atoning sacrifice, the One who shed His own blood for you.

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 22 of the PSG: **“How does this passage help you be sure of forgiveness?”**

*Alternate: How would you describe Jesus’ roles as advocate and atoning sacrifice in this passage?*



**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, bring a whiteboard or hang a poster at the front of the room. Invite group members to call out typical sins average persons might commit in a typical week. Write answers on the white board or poster. Ask what grievous sins might be added to that list. Write those on the board. Give several members erasers or markers. Ask them to clear the board or strike through each sin as you read 1 John 1:9 once again. Make the point that God's forgiveness cleanses our sin through the blood of Jesus.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "**We are forgiven when we confess our sin and walk with Christ.**"

account as well as in his letters, *world* frequently referred to all those in fallen society. By adding the word **world** to **ours**, John referred to all people being offered Jesus' sacrifice. Although all people are *offered* salvation, only a relative few trust God by *receiving* it. We are forgiven when we depend on Jesus as our Advocate. ◀

### ENGAGE

**Imagine yourself standing before a judge to answer for a serious crime. List five characteristics you would want in an attorney or advocate:**

**Compare these qualities to Jesus Christ who is our advocate before the throne of God:**

**Describe how you felt when you received Christ as Savior and were forgiven of your sins:**

**Write a brief prayer to God, thanking Him for His forgiveness through Christ:**

## LIVE IT OUT

We are forgiven when we confess our sin and walk with Christ. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Examine.** Consider the principles taught today. They will either encourage you as a believer or accuse you as a nonbeliever.
- ▶ **Meditate.** Every day this week pray according to Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”
- ▶ **Share.** Share your personal story of forgiveness with someone this week. “Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:14b-15).

## Live It Out



5 MINUTES

**READ:** Direct group members to page 23 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

## Wrap It Up

**SUMMARIZE:** Read or restate this idea from page 22 of the PSG:

*Turning from darkness, confessing sin, and having Jesus as our Advocate and the one who shed His blood to atone for our sins leaves no room for doubt. Therefore, we can be certain of forgiveness because we confess sin and walk with Christ.*

**PRAY:** Thank God for His forgiveness through the blood of Christ. Ask Him to help group members embrace that forgiveness and extend that offer to others so they also may repent and believe.



**EXTRA!**

Free additional ideas for your group are available at

[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)