

Finding Assurance

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[0 : 01] What would you do if someone who you know well comes up to you this week and tells you that they're struggling with their relationship with God?

They know you're a Christian. Maybe someone goes to church here with you and they just talk to you and say, listen, I have some real doubts.

I don't have assurance of my salvation, that everything's right with God. I don't know for sure that I would go to heaven if I die. But you know me.

You've known me for a long time. What do you think? If this person that you know, your friend, your family member, looks at you and asks you, help me, do you think I am a Christian?

What would you say? How would you respond to them? I would not tell them.

[1 : 12] I wouldn't tell Brian. I have no reason to doubt he's a Christian. But if he came to me struggling like that, I would not look at him and try to convince him from my perspective.

In my opinion, you're a Christian. Because I don't know what's inside Brian. Now, what I would do is take him seriously.

And I would want to help him. You need to take someone seriously if they come and confide in you. They're wanting your help. Tell them, you know, I can't say that because I don't know what's in your heart.

I don't know what's in your soul. But God has given us some great counsel, help, evidence of what a Christian is, what a Christian believes, how a Christian lives in the Bible, and specifically the book of 1 John.

And so I would direct someone, and I want to encourage you to direct someone who is talking with you about a struggle, direct them to the book of 1 John, where I want us to turn this morning.

[2 : 35] John wrote this letter to Christians who were struggling with issues related to who Jesus was, what salvation really was. You see, John was writing to Christians where there had been false teachers who had just sort of poisoned their thinking, their theology.

And so what he's trying to do is help real Christians understand the basics of the Christian faith. What we do believe about Jesus. Why we believe it. And if we are Christians, how will that be seen in our life?

What are the signs? What are some of the evidences? John made it clear toward the end of his letter that he really wanted true believers to have assurance of their salvation.

Look at it with me one more time. 1 John chapter 5, verse 13. We've looked at it over the last two weeks. He says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

[3 : 49] Now what John does in these five chapters of this little book, 1 John, John describes several things about what Christians believe about Jesus, about their relationship with Jesus and the Father.

He talks about how a real Christian will live. Some of the evidences in his or her life. But what he does is throughout these five chapters, he just sort of mingles it all together.

He doesn't in a sequential way say, here's how you know if you're a Christian. This, this, this, this.

No. But what I want to do this morning is I want to try to put together three of the things John said.

Three things that if you read the book of 1 John, all five chapters, you'll see these statements, you'll see these phrases, you'll see these evidences repeated.

Most of them several times. Let's look, number one. A true Christian experiences a personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

[5 : 00] A true Christian experiences a personal relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to look at three different passages of Scripture and follow the thinking of what I want you to see.

Number one comes from 1 John chapter 4, verses 14 and 15. I'm going to put all these on the screen this morning, but if you have your Bible, open it up, look at it yourself. There may be specific verses that are real helpful to you or something you need to go back and look at more carefully because it sort of bothers you.

Have it and mark it. But in 1 John 4, verses 14 through 15, John says, And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. Here's what I want to ask you. Do you truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

You think, I'm in church. You know I would believe that. I've heard that all my life. That's not what I want you to really think about. Do you right now believe that this person that we sing about, we talk about, his name is on virtually every page of the New Testament, Do you really believe that Jesus is the Son of Almighty God?

[6 : 33] Do you really believe He is divine? He's not just a man. He is a man. He is divine. He is God. And He is man. He is God in the flesh.

That's what Christmas is all about. We're beginning this season. It's all about God coming into this world in the form of a man born in a stable Jesus. But do you really and truly believe that Jesus is the Son of Almighty God?

And if you do, does your life reveal that by the way you live in relationship to Him? Is He truly the Lord of your life?

There's another way to put that. Is Jesus really to you the Son of God? And as a result, He has the authority and the right to rule your life?

To be your boss? Or just to be more accurate, to be your God? Is it your goal to serve and please God the Father?

[7 : 42] Do you have within you this desire to know God, to serve Him, to please Him, to know His Son?

To not just believe facts about Him, but to truly honor Him and obey Him because He's God. He's the Son of God.

Look at the next verse I want you to look at along these lines. It's 1 John chapter 2 verse 2. He is the propitiation for our sins. That is a big word, isn't it?

We don't use that. We never use that in our regular language. Sometimes it's translated, He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Propitiation. It means He is the one who absorbs the wrath of God so that we don't have to.

It's like Jesus, as He hangs on the cross, He takes our sin upon Himself. And He absorbs God's just, right, good wrath.

[9 : 02] Punishment of sin. Jesus does that for us. He turns it away from us because He's dying in our place as our substitute.

Now, do you really believe, understand that before God, you have failed Him? You have lived life your way instead of His way.

You've broken His laws. You are a sinner. You don't deserve to be right with Him, to have fellowship with Him. You understand that you are a sinner, but you trust that Jesus took your place when He died on the cross and paid the penalty for your sins.

And right now, this moment, are you trusting Him for your salvation? Are you trusting Him as your Savior?

Remember what we looked at last week? Saving faith is continuing faith. If I ask you, if you're a Christian, if I ask you, do you believe in Jesus? Don't even think for a moment about, many years ago, I put my faith and trust in Jesus.

[10 : 15] I'm asking you now. The most well-known verse among us in this room is probably John 3.16. For God so loved the world, He gave His only Son, that what?

That whoever believes in Him, that's present tense. Whoever is believing in Him now has everlasting life.

Will not perish, but have everlasting life. Remember, what God starts, He finishes always. We don't always do it. There's probably projects around your house, somewhere in the past, you started it.

Had good intentions, but never finished it. God has never started a project without continuing to work in it and on it and will complete it.

And we, if we're Christians, we are God's project. And what He started, when He saved us, when He put His Spirit in us and brought about that new birth, God is continuing to do.

[11 : 23] It's God who enables us to continue to believe. And as Paul said, we saw last week in Philippians chapter 1, verse 6, Paul says, I'm sure of this.

I have absolute confidence that He who began a good work in you, writing to Christians, will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Now, let's look at one more verse under this big heading of our relationship with the Lord.

It's in 1 John chapter 1 and verse 3. Here's this question.

Do you experience real fellowship with Jesus Christ and your Heavenly Father?

You know what it is to have a relationship with people. You know what it is to enjoy having fellowship with people. Hopefully you experience that with the people you live with.

[12 : 38] Hopefully in your home, you have a healthy relationship with those people. Hopefully where you work, you have some good relationships with people.

At school, you have some good, healthy relationships. You interact. You share life with them. And you enjoy that.

Well, think about how that's done. You talk. You listen. It's back and forth.

It's just living life, sharing life with a person. Let me ask you this. Do you have such a relationship with God that, let's just say you're riding down the road, that you've got some things on your mind? Is it normal and natural for you to just talk to God? Ask Him to help you, give you insight, give you wisdom.

[13 : 42] You know, we've, a lot of us in this room, we've had some family gatherings this week. And some of those family gatherings, some of those people in those family gatherings, we really wanted to see some of them.

Let's just be honest. We didn't. And were there some people there that you just talked to God about and said, God, help me not to get into it with so-and-so.

Help me to keep my mouth shut. Help me not to react when they start saying all those stupid things that they always say and do when the family gets together.

Now, if you don't know who that person is, chances are you are the person. That somebody's asking God to help. They're there.

And for us to pretend they're not, it's just not being real. But the point here is, do you just know God as your Heavenly Father? Is Jesus real to you?

[14 : 50] You just talk to your Father. Because you know Him. You love Him. That's what prayer is you're talking to. When you read the Bible, you're thinking, this is God's Word.

This is God making Himself and His ways and His will known to me. Do you have a real, loving, ongoing, meaningful relationship with and fellowship with your Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

That's what we should be experiencing if we're Christians. Let's look at something else John tells us. A true Christian will experience a personal relationship with God and the Lord Jesus.

But he also tells us a true Christian desires to please God by the way he or she lives. A true Christian does have a desire. It's just a God-given desire within us.

We want to please Him. And I want you to look at three ways John points that out. First, a true Christian desires to obey God's Word. Look at 1 John 2, verses 3 through 6.

[16 : 09] And I want you to be, note, this is about as clear as you're going to find anywhere in the Bible about how do you know that you know Him.

Look at it. John writes, And by this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. Whoever says, I know Him, but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in Him.

By this we may know that we are in Him. Whoever says he abides, he remains in Christ. Ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.

John's just real clear here. If you're a Christian, you're going to want to obey God. You're going to want to keep His commandments. So let me ask you this. Do you consistently seek to know and do God's will as He has revealed it in the Bible?

And does it show in your life? Think about it. The Bible talks about how we ought to relate to one another in our home. The Bible talks about, for an example, in Ephesians chapter 5, about husband-wife relationships.

[17 : 26] Do you as a Christian really want to know and do God's will about being the husband He wants you to be? Being the wife He wants you to be? Being the parent that He intends for you to be for your children's overall well-being?

Do you care about being the child showing honor and respect to your parents that God clearly says in His Word in Ephesians 5 and 6 that you ought to be?

Do you seek to please God by the way you respond to people that you don't like? People who don't like you and they even maybe mistreat you.

The most natural way for us to respond to people that we don't like, if they don't like us, especially if they mistreat us, the way that we naturally respond is not good, it's not healthy.

We exert our power in some way. We try to get even in some way. We try to retaliate. These things like this. But as Christians, we're called to not do those kind of things.

[18 : 40] You can't always just play tit for tat. You can't always just give what you get. And as Christians, we know this. We've read it. We've studied it in Sunday school in these services.

Not too long ago, we went through Romans chapter 12. It talks a lot about our relationships with one another. If we're Christians and the Spirit of God lives within us, we're going to want to know and do God's will in the details of our life and how we do our job and attitude toward the people we work with and the way we spend our time and our money.

Do the people that know you best know that while you are far from perfect, they know your weaknesses, they know your failures, but bottom line, do people who know you best know that there is within you a real desire to know and do God's will, that you take God's word seriously?

It does not matter what your personal statement of faith is about the Bible if you don't seek to do it.

You can talk about, I believe all the Bible is the very word of God, inspired, infallible, inerrant.

If you don't seek to live it, you don't. You're just lying. That's what John says. Liar is the word he used. See, we demonstrate what our real theology is by the way that we live, not just by the words that we say.

[20 : 15] A true Christian, number two, desires to stop living a sinful life. I want you to look at what John says, just real plain, 1 John 3, 9 and 10. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him.

And he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. When God does this work of regeneration, brings about a new birth, puts his spirit in us, the Holy Spirit in us changes us, and we cannot help but be different, to have different desires, one of which, not to go on living the sinful life we did before we became a Christian.

We're not living the sinful life that we know does not please God. Look on in this verse. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness, that means doing right before God. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

We'll come to that love brother part in a moment. Let me ask you this real simple. Do you hate sin and really and truly want to overcome it? Now we still sin, every single one of us.

[21 : 35] And John makes it clear that we do. And he says some things about if we say we don't, we're lying. John likes the word liar. He's not worried about offending anybody.

He just says it like it is. About what we are. Based on how we live. Do you hate sin?

And want to overcome it? Understand now. We all still as Christians have a sinful nature. And there's part of us that does like sin.

And if we didn't, we would never do it. And in moments of, you know, where sometimes we're tempted, and in those moments, we basically do what we want to do.

I'll use Mike as a bad example this time. You know, if he does something that makes me mad, but I know I shouldn't say anything to him. I'm tempted. I want to say, you are just a moron.

[22 : 39] That's what I want to say. And I know I should not say that. That is not good. I shouldn't do that to my brother. But there are times, I just want to say, you are a moron.

And I do. That's what we do when we sin. It may be something that you actually do in action. It may, it may be something you entertain with your mind.

You just keep on with it. See, sin is appealing, or we wouldn't do it. But deep down, do you really want to do that, which you know displeases God, which is all about doing what you want to do?

Or do you really not want to do that? You want to overcome that. You want to live the kind of life that would truly please the Lord. When you sin, does it bother you?

Let's look at it this way. Do you feel guilty knowing that you have done something, said something, that you know displeases God? Does it bother you?

[23 : 47] Does it make you feel guilty? Does God convict you of that sin? And if you don't do something about it, you just keep on and on. Does God discipline you when you continue in it?

God disciplines His children. Look at what the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 says. Our Heavenly Father disciplines those He loves and punishes everyone He accepts as a son.

I'm going to guess in a crowd this size, there are people in this room, children, teenagers, some of you right now, you are in trouble. Some of you right now, maybe you're on restriction. Some of you right now, there's some things going on at home that you're being disciplined.

And it's no fun. I've been there, done that. It's no fun for your parents. But if your parents are disciplining you, whenever they discipline you, it's because they love you.

They care enough about you not to just let you do things that are not good, that are not helpful, that may actually harm you. And some things as parents, you just have to go to war over because you love them too much to let it go.

[24 : 53] And there's some things in our life, if we're God's children, God's just going to crush us. He's going to make our life miserable until we wake up, confess that sin, seek His forgiveness, reconcile with a person if another person is involved.

God disciplines His children because He loves us. And then when God does discipline you, do you confess your sins? Do you seek God's forgiveness?

Do you seek other people's forgiveness? When you've wronged them? That's something that we as Christians should be very familiar with, confessing and turning from our sin.

And when we do, as Christians, knowing we're God's children, we should get relief. We should experience emotionally. We should experience forgiveness and restored fellowship with God.

I want you to look at something that hopefully is familiar to all of us as Christians. 1 John 1, 8 and 9. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[26 : 13] Do you confess your sins and experience God's forgiveness and it's just a great release, relief?

That's what we should experience, we feel in. Look at one more thing. A true Christian desires to live a pure life. We're talking about how a real Christian will desire to please God.

What we'll want to know and do is will. We'll want to overcome sin in our life. We'll hate it. And a true Christian desires to live a pure life. Look at what John says about this in 1 John 3, verses 2 and 3.

Beloved, we're God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

We don't know what we'll be like in heaven, but one day when Jesus returns, when everything's wrapped up, we will be like Him to some degree. Look at the next sentence. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.

[27 : 17] One of the evidences of someone, that someone is a Christian, is they have a desire, a God-given desire, to live a morally pure, separate from this world kind of holy life.

That's something the Spirit of God causes us to desire, to want. Do you see that in you? Do you have such desires? No one has only pure desires now.

Remember what we said earlier about sin. All of us struggle with temptation. All of us struggle in some way with impure thoughts, words, actions.

But do you have this desire? And do you put forth, it's evident, people can see, that you really do want, deep down, to live a pure life as Jesus is pure.

I want us to look at one more major issue that John describes throughout his letter. And that is number three. A true Christian genuinely loves his or her brothers and sisters in Christ.

[28 : 30] A true Christian loves other Christians. Look at what two things John says about this. And again, he says it real forthrightly. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

Whoever does not love abides in death. And then 420. Anyone who says, I love God, hates his brother. He is a liar.

For he does not, he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. John makes some strong statements, doesn't he?

About the necessity of love among Christians. Why would he do that? Well, maybe he just always remembered, could even visualize, when Jesus told him and the other disciples about a new commandment, about loving one another.

Look at what Jesus said. It's in John chapter 13. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

[29 : 36] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love, if you have love for one another. Do you show that you are a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, by the way that you love other Christians?

It doesn't mean you always like them. Let's just be real honest. You don't like everybody. I don't like everybody. Going back to Thanksgiving, most, a lot of us, we had people at our table, they're our family.

We love them, but we don't like them. And we were glad to see them leave. I've had people this morning already tell me they enjoyed Thanksgiving, but they were glad to see some of them go. And that doesn't mean that you're not, you're an inferior Christian. Nobody likes everybody. We're just different. We're made different.

We look at life differently. I've got, I'm not going to say in this service, because this is recorded, but I've got a family member. All my life, we've just basically never really been close.

[30 : 42] Never got along great. have nothing in common. But I can remember back many years ago, being kids, being in a car.

I can remember it's like it was yesterday, being in a car. And in that car, parents not there, buddy there, in that car, if I wanted to do something to him, I would have done it, not felt guilty.

I'd have aggravated him, I'd have hit him, or done anything else. But when my buddy hit my relative, even though I didn't really like that relative much, when he hit my relative, the love came out, and I popped my buddy, with my fist, because he hit my family member.

I loved him. Love among Christians, is something special, that we should experience, even if we don't particularly, like everything about, one another.

There's something about, a family relationship, physically, biologically, and there's something about, a spiritual family relationship, that should unite us, cause us to care, take an interest in, want the best for, one another.

[32 : 05] But, however you want to slice it, John makes it clear, that love is one of the vital signs, of a genuine Christian. The best way, that you and I, can help someone, with assurance of their salvation, is to get them, to read the scripture, especially 1 John, and see what God, God's word reveals, about what true Christians believe, and how true Christians live.

But the way God, actually provides, personal assurance, peace, comfort, is through his Holy Spirit. It's the spirit of God, who actually gives us assurance, if we are Christians, for example, as we read through 1 John, look at what Paul says, about this.

He says in Romans 8, 16, the spirit himself, testifies with our spirit, that we are God's children.

That's what we're going to look at, next week, in more detail. But before we go, let me make one thing clear, this morning.

No one will everly, perfect, will never perfectly, experience, unbroken fellowship, with God the Father, or the Lord Jesus.

[33 : 23] No Christian, will always desire, to please God, in these ways, we've been looking at. And you know, no matter how faithful we are, we don't always love one another, as we should.

But to some degree, if we're real Christians, these things will be true, in our lives. That's what the scripture is telling us. The question we need to ask ourselves is this, are these things, basically, generally, true, evident, in my life?

Do I see these attitudes, in me, do I have these kind of desires? Can I, and people who know me, see evidence, that while I'm far from perfect, God is working in me, helping me to grow, in my relationship, and fellowship with Him.

Helping me to grow, in putting forth the effort, to please Him. Helping me to develop, more love, for my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ask God to make it clear, what your, status is, before Him, right now. And then you respond to Him, as you need to.

[34 : 53] Let's pray together. Dear God, in this room right now, help all of us to see, how you see us, which is how we really are.

Father, Father, for those in this room, who are truly Christians, give them assurance, help them to see, from Your Word, affirm them, from within, by Your Spirit, that they are Your children, if they are.

Father, if there are people in this room, who really are Christians, but they've allowed some, things to develop, in their life, they have some attitudes, they are holding on, to some pet, sins, they're refusing, to confess.

Help them to see, dear God, they don't have assurance, because they're not, pleasing to you. They're rebelling, against you. And show that, person, what they need to do, right now, what sin, they need to confess, what attitude needs to change, what needs to be done, right now, in order to, confess, and repent of their sin, and experience, Your forgiveness, and a restoration, of good fellowship.

Show them right now, and help them to do it. But Father, if there are people in this room, who are not Christians, make it, very clear to them, plain to them. Then Lord, we pray that You will, so work in them, to burden them, break them, over their sin, over the fact, that they don't know You.

[36 : 29] Call them to put their faith, and trust in Jesus, to turn from their sin, their attitude, words, actions, to just repent, change their mind, about the way they've been living. Open their eyes, of faith, to see that when Jesus died, on the cross, He died for them.

Help them right now, to call upon Jesus, to save them. In an attitude of prayer, you just listen to the Lord, and obey Him. Do whatever He's telling you to do. Let's just be still, and quiet, heads bowed, eyes closed, respond to the Lord.

If I could pray with you, I'll be here at the front, and would be happy to do that.