

How to Experience God More Fully:
Living Openly in God's Presence
A Study of 1 John 1:6-10

Characteristic of Completeness: Bible Study

Big Idea: Don't hide in the dark; walk in the light.

Related Scriptures: Genesis 3:8; John 3:20-21; James 1:22-25;
Psalm 119:105; Psalm 139:23-24; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews
4:12

Introduction:

- A. We are very good at hiding. We hide what we don't want others to see. Our propensity to hide dates all the way back to ► the Garden of Eden. Remember, Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit. They were ashamed of their sin. So what did they do? They tried to hide from God. Genesis 3:8 ► says,

^{NKJ} **Genesis 3:8** And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

- B. We're still hiding today. ► We try to hide from God. We all do it. I'm a believer in Jesus Christ, and I'm a pastor. And I still try to hide from God.

I'm not unusual. In fact, I find that believers in general and church-goers in particular can be among the most accomplished and sophisticated hiders. Some of us are hiding right now. Maybe most of us. And we're so good at it—it comes so naturally to us—that we're often not even aware that we're hiding. It can come as naturally to us as closing the door on a messy room when a guest arrives. We don't give it a second thought. It's what we do.

But hiding robs us. Hiding prevents us from experiencing God more fully. Hiding cuts the abundance right out of life. We think hiding protects us, but it actually just makes us more vulnerable.

- C. I'm going to tell you what the big idea of my message is right up front. Then, I'll spend the rest of our time explaining what I mean. Here's ► the big idea: Don't hide in the dark; walk in the light. That's the big idea or principle I get from ► 1 John 1:6-10. Don't hide in the dark; walk in the light. I realize you probably aren't quite sure what that means right now. That's okay. We're going to unpack the idea together.

Let me read the text one time through. I want you to notice how John weaves back and forth between hiding in the dark and walking in the light. In the even-numbered verses, He talks about hiding in the dark. In

the odd-numbered verses, He talks about walking in the light. Listen. He ► says,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:6** If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ► ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ► 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.

- D. Now let's go back and study this passage more closely.
- I. In ► Verse 6, John talks about what it means to hide in the dark. He says,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:6** If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

- A. The hiding John is talking about is identified by ► the conditional clause, "If we say that we have fellowship

with Him, and walk in darkness . . .” Let’s study this a little.

1. When John says, ► “we,” who is he talking about? We have learned previously that, in the preceding verses, John uses the term, “we” to describe the apostles. To be sure, what he has to say also applies to his believing readers and to us, but the apostles are certainly in view. This is important because it means that even an apostle like John can walk in darkness. If John had felt that he and his fellow apostles were impervious to such danger, he could have easily said, “you” and not “we.” So, even the most mature, godly, knowledgeable believers in this room can be hiding. No one is immune.
2. When John says, “fellowship with *Him*,” who is he talking about? Who ► is “Him?” It appears that John’s focus is on God the Father because, in Verse 7, John describes Jesus as “*His* Son.”
3. What does it mean to ► have fellowship with Him, the Father?
 - a. Our text makes it clear that fellowship with the Father is something that believers and even apostles may or may not experience. Because John includes himself in the term,

“we,” John is saying that, if he himself were to walk in darkness, then, he would not have fellowship with the Father. In Greek, this is written as a third-class condition, indicating that being out of fellowship with God is a distinct possibility.

- b. Because this fellowship is something that believers may or may not experience, having fellowship with God cannot be the same thing as receiving eternal life from God. Through faith alone in Christ alone, John and his believing readers had already received eternal life once and for all; they were Christians. So fellowship with God must not have to do with *becoming* a Christian; it must have to do with *living* as a Christian.
- c. Let me illustrate. When you believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life, you are adopted into God’s forever family. The adoption is irrevocable; you cannot be unadopted. By faith alone in Christ alone, you are a child of the heavenly Father, forever. Your status as an adopted child of God is absolutely secure.

Fellowship does *not* describe this adoption. Rather, fellowship describes the Father-child

relationship *after* adoption. As a child, you can experience an open, honest, close relationship with the Father. That's having fellowship with Him.

Or, as a child, you can hide from the Father, and thereby experience a distant, strained relationship that forfeits fellowship.

So, as a child of God, you may or may not experience fellowship with Him, depending on whether you are hiding or walking in darkness.

4. What does it mean to ► walk in darkness?
 - a. To walk is a common biblical expression describing how a person lives. To walk is to live. It's a way of life.
 - b. You may recall that, in the Bible, light is a symbol of revealed truth, righteousness, holiness, moral purity, and goodness. In contrast, darkness is a symbol of falsehood, sinfulness, and evil.
 - c. You may also recall that 1 John 1:5 says,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:5** . . . God is light
and in Him is no darkness at all.

So to walk in darkness is to find yourself morally and spiritually in a place where God is absent. It is to have lost touch with a holy God. It is to live in a dark way, apart from the revealed light of God's truth. To walk in darkness is to hide from God.

5. Does this happen today? Does it happen here? Do we believers ever say we have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness? It happens all the time.
 - a. God only knows how many of us in this moment secretly struggle with some dark sin, all the while, leading others to believe that we're tight with God. We hide in the dark.
 - b. Sometimes we hide because we're so ashamed of ourselves. Openness and intimacy with God and others is actually a fearful proposition because we think we'll be rejected once our sin comes to light. So, we hide in the dark.

- c. Sometimes we hide because we prefer the darkness. The deeds of darkness can be satisfying for a season. John 3:20 ► says,

^{NKJ} **John 3:20** “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”

We don't want to be exposed. We secretly prefer the porn. We prefer to worry. We prefer to get a buzz. We prefer the control. We prefer materialism. So we hide in the dark.

- B. And the ► results of our pretending and hiding are not good.

1. John says that when we pretend to be tight with God but hide in the dark, ► we lie. And the Greek verb, to lie, is in the middle voice, indicating that we are lying to ourselves. We're not just lying to other people; we are actually deceiving ourselves.

This is a sobering notion. It suggests that we can begin to believe our own lie. We, as Christians, can actually believe that we're fine with God while we're walking in darkness.

2. How is this possible? How is it possible that a Christian could be walking in darkness, and, at the same time, saying and even believing he is in fellowship with God? The last clause in ► Verse 6 is enlightening. John says, we “do not practice the truth.” A painfully literal translation is, “we do not do the truth.” Doing the truth is applying the truth of the word of God to our lives. So, if we’re not applying the truth of the word of God to our lives, we’re walking in darkness and may be deceiving ourselves. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been a Christian. It doesn’t matter how mature you think you are. It doesn’t matter how much you think you know. It doesn’t matter how many years you’ve attended seminary. It doesn’t matter how much you go to church. If you’re not applying the Bible to your life, you may be walking in darkness.

This is related to something James wrote many years before John. James 1:22-25 ► says,

^{NKJ} **James 1:22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ►²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ►²⁴ for he observes himself,

goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ►²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

All this raises a very important question: Are you applying the Bible to your life? Are you a doer of the word and not just a hearer? If you are not proactively reading and applying the Bible to your life, you may be deceiving yourself. You may be walking in darkness.

II. Now John ► turns from hiding in the dark to talk about walking in the light. In ► Verse 7, he says,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:7** But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

A. What does it mean ► to walk in the light as He is in the light?

1. First, it is very important to recognize what it does not mean. To walk in the light does not mean that we are to be sinless. In fact, Verse 8 says quite

plainly that we cannot be sinless. So, thankfully, this is not saying that we must be without sin in order to enjoy fellowship with God.

2. John 3:21 is helpful in understanding what walking in the light entails. In ► John 3:21, Jesus says,

^{NKJ} **John 3:21** “But he who does the truth comes to the light . . .”

In Greek, the phrase “does the truth” is exactly the same phrase rendered, “practice the truth” back in Verse 6. So, it seems that doing the truth is equated with coming into the light or walking in the light. And, as I mentioned previously, doing the truth involves applying to our lives the truth God has revealed to us in the Bible. Indeed, ► Bible study, including specific life application, is our key characteristic this morning. It’s the opposite of hiding; it’s living openly in God’s presence by letting the light of His word shine in the darkest corners of our hearts to reveal what God wants to show us.

3. Noted Bible scholar, Zane Hodges, explains it this way:

. . . to walk in the light must mean essentially to live in God's presence, exposed to what He has revealed about Himself. This, of course, is done through openness in prayer and through openness to the Word of God in which He is revealed (Hodges, The Epistles of John, 61).

. . . to walk in the light is to live open to the light and to all that it can reveal to us (Hodges, Six Secrets of the Christian Life, 46).

4. This is not a new idea.
 - a. Many years before, the psalmist spoke of the illuminating power of God's word. Psalm 119:105 speaks openly to God, saying,

^{NKJ} **Psalm 119:105** Your word *is*
a lamp to my feet And a light to
my path.
 - b. Also, Psalm 139:23-24 reflects the kind of open, honest, and prayerful attitude with which we walk in the light. It says,

^{NKJ} **Psalm 139:23** Search me, O
 God, and know my heart; Try
 me, and know my anxieties;²⁴
 And see if *there is any* wicked
 way in me, And lead me in the
 way everlasting.

- B. What happens when we walk in the light? What happens when we come into God's presence? Maybe ashamed and wounded. Or disgraced and humiliated. Or trembling and afraid. But certainly open and honest. What happens?

Will He condemn us? Will He give us a spiritual whipping? Will He say that we're too far gone? Will He disown us? No. Two remarkable things happen when we walk in the light.

1. First, John says, ► "we have fellowship with one another." The focus is not on fellowship between one believer and another. The focus is on fellowship between a believer and God. Remember from Verse 6, this is all about fellowship with "Him," the Father. When we walk in the light, we experience the warm embrace of fellowship with the Father.
2. Secondly, John says, when we walk in the light, ► "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us

from all sin.” The verb, “cleanses” is in the present tense, indicating that it is an ongoing action. When we walk in the light, God continuously cleans us up.

If you are a believer, this may sound strange and unsettling to you. You may be thinking, “Wait a minute. I thought that all my sins were washed away the moment I believed in Jesus.” In order to understand what John is saying, we need to understand that there are at least two kinds of cleansing and forgiveness in the Bible.

- a. The kind of cleansing and forgiveness from God we perhaps think of most often is the kind that we experience the moment we believe in Jesus. This is a judicial forgiveness. This is where God forgives the guilt of our sin and declares us righteous. Judicial forgiveness is in view in verses like Ephesians 1:7. In speaking of Jesus, it says,

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 1:7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

All believers have experienced this judicial cleansing and forgiveness once for all. John is *not* talking about this judicial cleansing and forgiveness in 1 John 1:7.

- b. He's talking about a different kind of cleansing or forgiveness. It's relational forgiveness. Relational forgiveness involves a letting go of relational barriers that stand in the way of fellowship. The letting go allows the restoration of harmony in a relationship. Relational forgiveness is closely associated with reconciliation in which full fellowship is restored. Relational forgiveness is in view in Matthew 6:15 when Jesus says,

^{NKJ} **Matthew 6:15** “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Jesus is not threatening unforgiving believers with the loss of salvation and a trip to hell. He's saying that if we believers are unforgiving, then God will not extend to us the relational forgiveness we need to enjoy fellowship with Him.

In the analogy of God's family, God's *judicial* cleansing enables our adoption. His *relational* cleansing enables our ongoing fellowship. The blood of Jesus is the basis for both.

III. Now John ► turns from walking in the light, to talk more about hiding in the dark. In ► Verse 8, he says,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:8** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

A. What believer would actually say that he has no sin? Seems like a person would have to be nuts to claim sinless perfection. Few if any in this room would claim to be sinless. So I guess we can move on because we don't have this problem.

Not so fast. Theologically, I suspect we all agree that we sin. That's what you're supposed to say in an evangelical church. We pay it lip service as a point of correct doctrine. But sometimes, we don't act like we believe it. Our attitudes betray us.

You see, we believers can adopt what I call a two-group mentality. We think that there are basically two groups of believers in the church. There's the group with issues. You know, it's the believers who struggle with

some big sin issues in their lives. They're the black sheep in God's family.

Then there's the group with no issues. No big sins issues in that group. They're the spiritually beautiful people. They've got it all together.

Those in the group with issues feel like giving up. They feel stigmatized. Those in the group with no issues are feeling pretty good about themselves for not being in the group with issues.

But hear what John is saying in Verse 8: There aren't two groups. And if we think there are two groups, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We're all in one group—the group with sin issues. Every believer struggles with big sin issues. The best moment of the best day for the best believer is still tainted with sin. If we think it's not, we're hiding in darkness, and we may be deceived by the biggest sin issue of all: pride. If anybody could have put himself in a group with no issues, it would have been the Apostle Paul. He doesn't. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul ► says,

^{NKJ} **1 Timothy 1:15** . . . Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Paul doesn't say, "of whom I *was* chief." He says "of whom ► I *am* chief." And he is writing nearly 30 years after his conversion. He is saying, "I'm an apostle, and I've got issues."

- B. Here's a very important point in all this: The thing that distinguishes hiding in the dark from walking in the light is not the presence or absence of sin in our lives. We all have sin in our lives. The thing that distinguishes hiding in the dark from walking in the light is our openness—our openness to come into God's presence and let Him show us our sin and deal with it through the prayerful application of His word.

IV. That's what John is saying in ► Verse 9,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- A. What does it mean to ► confess our sins? To confess means to agree. With whom do we agree? We agree with what God says about our sin. Our confession is to God; our agreement is with Him. In order to agree with God, we first need to know what He is saying about us. In order to know what He is saying about us, we must apply the word of God to our lives. We walk in the light; the light reveals our sin; we agree with God about it; and God forgives us and cleans us up.

If we're not applying the Bible to our lives, we're going to have trouble confessing our sin. We're like the little boy whose father is trying to tell him something, but the boy looks away, puts his fingers in his ears, and sings *la-la-la-la* to drown out his father's voice. Let's trace the logic. To confess is to agree. It's tough to agree with something we do not hear. And it's tough to hear unless we're listening. So how do we listen to God? Through the prayerful application of His word to our lives.

- B. God uses His word in the Bible in a powerful way to shed light on the condition of our hearts. Hebrews 4:12
▶ says,

^{NLT} **Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are.

No wonder we find it difficult to apply the Bible to our lives. It exposes us. It opens the door to the messy bedroom in our hearts—the one that has the skeletons in the closet. That is the front lines of our spiritual battle. Satan doesn't want us to see who we really are. He doesn't want us to deal with our issues. He doesn't

want us to agree with God. He doesn't want us to get cleaned up in God's presence and enjoy His fellowship.

- C. But ► when we walk in the light, when we agree with God, when we confess our sins to Him, that's exactly what happens. ► We're forgiven. We're cleansed. We're in fellowship with our heavenly Father.

What a great irony. One of the reasons we hide in the dark in the first place is because we tend to think it's safer there in the dark. The light, we think, will be too revealing. We think it will show us to be unacceptable, and we will be devastated. The opposite is true. It's the darkness that's damning and dangerous. The moment we step into the light and are honest with God, agreeing with Him about our condition, we get what we need and have been longing for: the experience of His love, forgiveness, and fellowship.

- V. Even when we're walking in the light, as fulfilling as that can be, we still struggle with sin. We never arrive at a place in this life where sin is no longer an issue for us. There is no Christian cruise control. In fact, John tells us how we often ► step right back out of the light and into the darkness. John says in ► Verse 10,

^{NKJ} **1 John 1:10** If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

- A. At first blush, this looks like a reiteration of Verse 8. But I think it has a slightly different nuance—one that is a logical contrast to the confession of Verse 9. You see, when we walk in the light of God’s word, God shows us things about ourselves He wants to change. When we see what God wants to show us about ourselves through His word, we have a choice. We can confess or agree with God about it and seek His help for change. Or we can deny it and “say that we have not sinned.” To deny what God has brought to light is to make Him a liar. “His word is not in us” in the sense that we deny its authority over us. And we step right back into the darkness.
- B. Does this happen to us? Yes it does. It happens to me a lot. I can be reading the Bible, open to whatever God wants to show me. I’m in the light. It’s good. Then I read something like Matthew 5:44, where Jesus says,

^{NKJ} **Matthew 5:44** “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”

Then the Holy Spirit brings to mind the specific person in my life who fits that description. The enemy. The one who curses me. The one who hates me. The one who has used me and persecuted me. And I sense that

the Lord is telling me that I have a really bad attitude about this person. I don't want to love him or bless him or pray for him; I want to see him suffer.

In that moment, I have a choice. I can remain in the light and say, "I agree with You, Lord; help me to change." Or I can say, "It's gettin' too bright in here; I think I'll step back into the darkness; I don't have a problem; my enemy does." In that way, I can make God a liar. And we all have tried to make God a liar.

You see, the life of a growing believer is an ongoing spiritual battle—a battle to stay in the light.

- VI. The big idea of this message is this: ► Don't hide in the dark; walk in the light. How might you apply this principle today?
 - A. We've learned about how good God is to cleanse and forgive His children. But perhaps you've never been adopted into God's forever family. Do you want to be His child? You can be adopted this moment by simply believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life. Jesus died and rose again to pay for your adoption—to make your adoption possible. Will you believe Him for it? It's your move. He's waiting for you in the light.
 - B. Many of you have already believed in Jesus. You are His child. But perhaps you are so ashamed of yourself

that you are hiding in the dark. You are at once drawn to the light and terrified by it. You're afraid that if you step into the light, you will be rejected and devastated. Maybe Satan's even got you thinking that maybe you're not really a child of God after all, even though you've believed in Jesus. Will you step away from that deception and into the light? Will you prayerfully and proactively open yourself up to what God is saying about you in His word? Will you agree with Him and receive His forgiveness and cleansing and the embrace of His fellowship? It's your move. He's waiting for you in the light. Don't hide in the dark; walk in the light. If you need some help doing that, I encourage you to connect with Jeff Bauer our Pastor of Counseling and Recovery.

- C. Perhaps you are a believer this morning who walked in thinking you were a part of the group with no significant sin issues, not realizing that there is no such group. At the same time, you haven't really been applying God's word to your life. You are like a pilot flying in darkness with no visibility and no instrumentation. Whistling some religious refrain won't help. You need the light of God's word. Will you quit deceiving yourself and walk in the light? Will you prayerfully and diligently open yourself up to what God is saying about you in His word? Will you agree with Him and receive His forgiveness and cleansing and the embrace of His fellowship? It's your move.

He's waiting for you in the light. Don't hide in the dark; walk in the light.

- D. You may have heard that we at Moon Valley are preparing now to launch a bevy of Life Groups shortly after the first of the year. A primary purpose of these groups is to walk in the light together. Will you make plans now to check out one of these groups? It could be the most important New Year's resolution you'll ever make. Look for announcements in the coming weeks, and join us in walking in the light.