

ROOTED WORD BIBLE STUDY

# ASSURANCE MATTERS

## How Can I Know I Belong to Christ?

A six-session guided study through 1 John and related passages

*Designed for personal study or small-group discussion*

*Rooted in Scripture. Growing in truth.*

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## ASSURANCE MATTERS

# Study Overview

Many Christians quietly ask, “Am I truly saved?” Some place their confidence in a past prayer, baptism, church membership, or emotional experience. Others fear that every failure proves they never belonged to Christ. Scripture offers a better way: neither careless presumption nor endless uncertainty, but a settled confidence rooted in Jesus Christ and confirmed by His continuing work in His people.

This study examines the objective ground of assurance, the evidences of spiritual life, the Christian's continuing battle with sin, the purpose of self-examination, and God's promise to preserve everyone He truly saves. First John serves as the primary guide because John wrote so that those who believe in the Son of God may know that they have eternal life.

## CENTRAL TRUTH

Christian assurance rests first on the finished work and trustworthy promises of Christ, and it is confirmed by the Holy Spirit's continuing work of faith, repentance, obedience, and love.

## How to Use This Study

- Read every listed passage before beginning the session. Keep the Bible open as you work through the teaching.
- Move slowly. Assurance grows through truth received by faith, not through rushing to complete material.
- Answer the questions honestly, but do not treat self-examination as a search for sinless perfection.
- Use the personal reflection prompts privately before discussing them with a group.
- End each session in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to apply the Word and direct your confidence to Christ.

## A Biblical Framework for Assurance

| CATEGORY     | WHAT IT MEANS                                                                                                              |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Foundation   | The person and work of Jesus Christ: His righteous life, substitutionary death, resurrection, and continuing intercession. |
| Promise      | God promises eternal life to everyone who repents and believes in His Son.                                                 |
| Evidence     | The Spirit produces a new direction: true doctrine, growing obedience, repentance, and love for believers.                 |
| Preservation | God keeps His people, and they persevere through faith by the means He provides.                                           |

## IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

The strength of your assurance may rise and fall. The faithfulness of Christ does not. A believer may temporarily lose the comfort of assurance without losing the salvation God has given.

## Sessions

1. Made Alive: What Is a Christian?
2. Look to Christ: The Ground of Assurance
3. When Believers Still Sin
4. Evidence of Grace: The Marks of New Life

5. Examine Yourself Without Losing Sight of Christ
6. Kept by God: Perseverance and Peace

## Doctrinal Commitments

This study is written from a conservative evangelical understanding of Scripture. It affirms the full authority and sufficiency of the Bible; the holiness and justice of God; the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ; Christ's substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection; justification by grace alone through faith alone; the necessity of regeneration; the transforming work of the Holy Spirit; and God's preservation of all who are truly united to Christ.

### TRANSLATION NOTE

Read the full passages in Rooted Word or in your preferred faithful Bible translation. Short phrases in this guide are included to highlight the argument of the text, not to replace reading Scripture in context.

## SESSION 1

# Made Alive: What Is a Christian?

|                  |                                                                    |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIME             | 40-50 minutes                                                      |
| READ             | John 3:1-8; Mark 1:14-15; Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17     |
| MEMORY VERSE     | 2 Corinthians 5:17                                                 |
| PRIMARY EMPHASIS | Regeneration, repentance, faith, and the nature of true conversion |

**BIG IDEA**

A Christian is not merely a religious person who made a decision. A Christian is someone God has made alive, who now turns from sin and trusts in Jesus Christ.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

Ask God to expose every false foundation of confidence and to help you see salvation as His gracious work from beginning to end. Read each passage and note what God does and how the sinner responds.

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Father, show me the truth about my heart and the greatness of Your saving grace. Keep me from trusting religious activity, moral effort, or a past experience. Help me understand the new birth and rest in Christ alone. Amen.*

## Introduction

Assurance begins with a clear answer to a basic question: What is a Christian? If we define a Christian as someone who attends church, believes God exists, was baptized, repeated a prayer, or tries to live morally, we will build assurance on foundations Scripture never gives. Those things may accompany conversion, but none of them is conversion itself.

Jesus told Nicodemus, a respected and deeply religious teacher, that he still needed to be born from above. Paul told the Ephesians that they had not merely been confused or spiritually weak; they had been dead in sin until God made them alive with Christ. The gospel is not a program of self-improvement. It is the announcement that God raises spiritually dead sinners and unites them to His Son.

**PART ONE**

## Dead Sinners Need New Life

Ephesians 2 removes every reason for boasting. Apart from Christ, people follow the course of the world, live under the power of sinful desires, and stand under God's righteous judgment. Sin is not only a collection of bad choices. It is a condition of alienation and death that affects the mind, desires, will, and worship of every person.

That is why salvation must begin with God. Paul does not say spiritually dead people improved themselves until God accepted them. He says God, being rich in mercy, made them alive together with Christ. The decisive cause is God's mercy and love. The sinner truly repents and believes, but even this response occurs because grace has awakened the heart to see Christ as beautiful and trustworthy.

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Ephesians 2:4-5 places the turning point in two words: “But God.” Mercy, not human merit, explains why anyone is made alive with Christ.

**Ephesians 2:4-5**

### PART TWO

## Born Again - Born from Above

Nicodemus possessed biblical knowledge, religious discipline, public respect, and membership among God's covenant people. Yet Jesus did not tell him to become slightly more sincere. He told him that no one can see the kingdom of God without the new birth.

The word translated “again” in John 3 can also carry the sense “from above.” Both ideas fit the passage. The sinner needs a new beginning that comes from God. The Holy Spirit sovereignly gives life, cleanses the heart, and creates a new disposition toward God. We cannot control the Spirit any more than we control the wind, but we can recognize His work by its effects.

Regeneration does not make someone instantly mature or free from all struggle. It does create a real break with the old life. New desires appear. Sin becomes an enemy rather than an unquestioned home. Christ becomes more than a religious idea; He becomes the believer's only hope and rightful Lord.

### PART THREE

## Repent and Believe

When Jesus announced the kingdom, He called people to repent and believe the gospel. These are not two unrelated works that earn salvation. They are two sides of conversion: turning from sin and self-rule while turning to Christ in trusting dependence.

Repentance is more than regret, fear of consequences, or a temporary promise to do better. It is a God-given change of mind and direction that agrees with God's verdict about sin and seeks to leave it behind. Faith is more than accepting facts about Jesus. Saving faith receives and rests on Christ Himself - His righteousness, sacrifice, resurrection, and promise.

Repentance and faith continue throughout the Christian life. We do not graduate from the gospel. The same believer who first came empty-handed to Christ keeps coming empty-handed, confessing sin and relying on grace.

## False Foundations and Biblical Reality

| FALSE FOUNDATION               | BIBLICAL REALITY                                                                              |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “I grew up in church.”         | Christian surroundings cannot produce the new birth.                                          |
| “I prayed the prayer.”         | A prayer may express faith, but words do not function as a saving formula.                    |
| “I was baptized.”              | Baptism publicly identifies a disciple with Christ; it does not replace repentance and faith. |
| “I am a good person.”          | No moral record can justify a sinner before a holy God.                                       |
| “I had a powerful experience.” | Experiences must be interpreted by Scripture and followed by enduring faith.                  |

## COMMON QUESTION

## Does a Sinner's Prayer Save?

Scripture does not teach that a particular arrangement of words guarantees salvation. Calling on the Lord is biblical, and prayer is a natural expression of repentance and faith. But confidence must never rest in having repeated the right words. Christ saves everyone who truly comes to Him in repentance and faith. The question is not merely, "Did I say a prayer?" but, "Am I now trusting the Christ proclaimed in the gospel?"

## PASTORAL CAUTION

Do not dismiss a genuine conversion simply because it was expressed through a prayer. Do not grant assurance merely because a prayer occurred. Look to Christ and to the continuing evidence of new life.

## DIGGING DEEPER

## Regeneration and Conversion

Regeneration describes God's act of giving spiritual life. Conversion describes the sinner's Spirit-enabled response of repentance and faith. These truths belong together. Scripture never presents salvation as God doing His part while an untouched sinner supplies the decisive final contribution. Nor does Scripture treat people as passive after they are made alive. Grace creates the very response God commands.

This protects two truths at once: salvation is entirely of grace, and every person is responsible to repent and believe. Because the new birth is God's work, believers have no reason to boast. Because conversion includes real repentance and faith, no one should claim new life while continuing in deliberate unbelief.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

## Questions

- 1 Which common substitute for conversion are you most tempted to trust: upbringing, church involvement, baptism, morality, a prayer, or an experience? Why?
- 2 What does Ephesians 2:1-10 teach about the sinner's condition, God's action, and the place of good works?
- 3 Why is Nicodemus an important example for people who have always been religious?
- 4 How would you explain the difference between regret and biblical repentance?
- 5 What is the difference between believing facts about Jesus and receiving Christ in saving faith?
- 6 Where do you presently see even small signs of new desires, repentance, or love for Christ that were not natural to your old life?

## Personal Reflection

**What are you relying on when you answer the question, “Why should God receive me?”**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

**Describe your present response to Christ. Are you defending your independence, merely admiring Him, or trusting and following Him?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

### APPLICATION

Write a brief gospel testimony in three movements: what you naturally trusted, what Christ has accomplished, and how His grace is changing your direction. Keep Christ - not the drama of your story - at the center.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

### PRAYER

Father, thank You for making dead sinners alive with Christ. Strip away every false refuge. Give me true repentance, living faith, and a heart that rests in Your grace rather than my religious record. Produce the good works You prepared for Your people, so that my life displays the mercy I could never earn. Amen.

## Conclusion

A Christian is not defined by religious proximity but by union with Christ. God gives life; the awakened sinner repents and believes; grace then produces a new direction. Assurance cannot be built on a label or a moment detached from present faith. It begins with the reality of God's saving work and a living dependence on Jesus Christ.

## SESSION 2

# Look to Christ: The Ground of Assurance

|                  |                                                                         |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIME             | 40-50 minutes                                                           |
| READ             | 1 John 5:9-13; John 6:35-40; Romans 8:1-4; Hebrews 7:23-25              |
| MEMORY VERSE     | 1 John 5:13                                                             |
| PRIMARY EMPHASIS | The finished work of Christ, the gospel promise, and faith over feeling |

**BIG IDEA**

Assurance begins outside of us. Our confidence rests on Christ's sufficient work and God's trustworthy promise before it rests on any evidence we see in ourselves.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

As you read, underline every statement about what Christ has accomplished, what God promises, and what belongs to those who believe. Notice how often the passages direct attention away from human performance and toward the Son.

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Lord Jesus, turn my eyes away from self-reliance and toward Your finished work. Teach me to believe what God has testified about His Son and to rest in promises that do not change with my emotions. Amen.*

## Introduction

When fear about salvation rises, many Christians immediately turn inward. They measure the intensity of their faith, review every failure, and search their emotions for certainty. Self-examination has a proper place, but it is a poor starting point. First John directs believers first to the testimony God has given concerning His Son.

Faith is only as secure as its object. A trembling hand can receive a strong gift. Weak faith does not make Christ a weak Savior. The ground of assurance is not the perfection of our repentance, the consistency of our devotion, or the strength of our feelings. It is Jesus Christ - who He is, what He has done, and what God promises to everyone who comes to Him.

**PART ONE**

## Assurance Has an Object

Biblical faith is not confidence in confidence. It does not say, "I believe strongly enough, therefore I must be safe." It looks away from itself to the Son of God. Jesus lived the righteous life we have not lived, bore the judgment our sins deserved, rose bodily from the grave, and now intercedes for His people.

This means the believer's acceptance before God is grounded in an accomplished work. Justification is God's declaration that the sinner who trusts Christ is righteous in His sight because Christ's righteousness is counted to him. The verdict does not depend on a daily spiritual score. The believer's growth matters deeply, but growth is the fruit of acceptance, not the price paid for it.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

God has given eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life.

1 John 5:11-12

PART TWO

The Gospel Promise Is Trustworthy

Jesus promises that the one who comes to Him will not be cast out. He came to do the Father's will, and He will lose none of those given to Him but raise them on the last day. These statements direct assurance to the reliability of the Savior rather than the emotional stability of the believer.

The gospel invitation is not a trap. Christ does not welcome sinners temporarily and later reject those who fail to become impressive enough. Everyone who comes does so as a sinner needing mercy. The same grace that receives the believer also begins the work of sanctification.

The question is not whether your faith feels heroic. The question is whether you are resting in the promised Savior. A small faith may be mixed with fear, yet still be real because it reaches for Christ. The power lies not in the size of the hand but in the sufficiency of the One it receives.

PART THREE

Truth Is Steadier Than Feeling

Feelings are real, but they are not final authorities. The comfort of assurance may weaken after sin, during suffering, through physical exhaustion, or because of a naturally anxious temperament. None of those experiences changes the truth of Christ's death and resurrection.

This does not mean emotions should be ignored. God often restores comfort as we confess sin, hear the Word, worship with the church, receive wise counsel, and meditate on His promises. But faith must speak truth to feeling. We do not deny fear; we bring fear under the testimony of God.

John says he wrote so believers may know they have eternal life. Christian knowledge is not bare optimism. It rests on God's revealed testimony. To refuse every comfort until you can produce perfect internal certainty may sound humble, but it can become another form of looking to yourself rather than believing God.

The Ground and the Evidence

| GROUND OF SALVATION              | EVIDENCE OF SALVATION              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Christ's perfect righteousness   | A growing desire to obey Christ    |
| Christ's substitutionary death   | Honest confession and repentance   |
| Christ's bodily resurrection     | Love for God and His people        |
| God's promise to believers       | Persevering trust through weakness |
| Christ's continuing intercession | The Spirit's sanctifying work      |

The evidence matters, but it must never become the foundation. Fruit can confirm that a tree is alive; fruit does not give the tree life. When believers reverse the order, every bad day appears to erase the gospel. Scripture directs us to Christ first, then teaches us to recognize His work within us.

## COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

## Does Doubt Prove My Faith Is False?

Doubt is not spiritually harmless, but neither is every doubt proof of unbelief. Scripture records sincere believers crying, “I believe; help my unbelief.” Doubt becomes dangerous when it hardens into a settled refusal to trust God’s testimony. But doubt brought honestly to Christ can become an occasion for deeper faith.

Do not nurture doubt as though uncertainty were more humble than trust. Name the specific fear. Ask what Scripture says. Confess any sin feeding the fear. Then choose to rely on God’s promise even before your emotions catch up.

## DIGGING DEEPER

## Propitiation and Advocacy

First John describes Jesus as the righteous Advocate and the propitiation for sin. An advocate represents another. Propitiation speaks of a sacrifice that truly deals with guilt and satisfies God’s righteous judgment. The cross is not merely a display of sympathy. The Son willingly bore the penalty of sin so that God remains just while justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.

Christ’s intercession does not mean the Father must be persuaded to love reluctant people. Father and Son are united in the saving purpose. The risen Christ’s advocacy declares that His completed sacrifice remains effective for every person united to Him.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

## Questions

- 1 When you feel uncertain about salvation, where do you instinctively look first: Christ, your feelings, your recent performance, or a past experience?
- 2 What does 1 John 5:9-13 say God has testified about His Son?
- 3 How do John 6:35-40 and Hebrews 7:23-25 strengthen confidence in Christ’s ability to save completely?
- 4 Why is it dangerous to make the strength of faith the object of faith?
- 5 What is the difference between the ground of salvation and the evidence of salvation?
- 6 Which promise in this session do you most need to believe when fear returns?

## Personal Reflection

**Complete this sentence honestly: “I feel safest with God when I have \_\_\_\_\_. ” What does that answer reveal?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

**What specific accusation or fear most often weakens your assurance, and what gospel promise directly answers it?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

### APPLICATION

Create a short “look to Christ” list containing five gospel truths from this session. Read it aloud when assurance weakens. Begin with what Christ has accomplished before examining how you have performed.

**1 John 5:11-13**

### PRAYER

God of truth, forgive me for treating my changing feelings as more reliable than Your testimony. Thank You for giving eternal life in Your Son. Help me rest in Christ's righteousness, sufficient sacrifice, resurrection, and intercession. Strengthen weak faith and teach me to say amen to Your promises. Amen.

## Conclusion

The first movement of assurance is outward and upward: look to Christ. His work is finished, His promise is trustworthy, and His intercession continues. The believer does not deny weakness but carries it to a strong Savior. Evidence of grace will matter in the sessions ahead, but it can only confirm a salvation whose foundation is already complete in Jesus Christ.

## SESSION 3

# When Believers Still Sin

|                  |                                                                                |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIME             | 45-55 minutes                                                                  |
| READ             | 1 John 1:5-2:2; 1 John 3:4-10; Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 5:16-25                |
| MEMORY VERSE     | 1 John 2:1                                                                     |
| PRIMARY EMPHASIS | Remaining sin, repentance, Christ's advocacy, and the believer's new direction |

**BIG IDEA**

True Christians still sin, but sin is no longer their unquestioned master. They confess it, fight it, and return to Christ, their righteous Advocate.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

Read both difficult and comforting statements in 1 John together. Do not isolate “does not sin” from “if anyone sins.” Ask God to help you understand the difference between remaining sin and a life ruled by sin.

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Holy God, do not let me excuse the sin for which Christ died. Give me honesty to confess, faith to draw near, and strength to fight. Thank You that Jesus is the righteous Advocate of everyone who belongs to Him. Amen.*

## Introduction

Few statements trouble sincere Christians more than John's words that the one born of God does not practice sin. The same letter also says that anyone claiming to have no sin deceives himself, and that if anyone sins, believers have an Advocate with the Father. John is not confused. He is confronting two different errors: denying that sin remains and claiming that new birth leaves a person's relationship with sin unchanged.

A Christian is neither sinless nor contentedly surrendered to sin. Sin remains, but it no longer reigns as the rightful master. Believers stumble, sometimes grievously, yet the Spirit brings conviction, confession, repentance, and renewed warfare. Assurance requires us to take both sides seriously: remaining sin is real, and regenerating grace is real.

**PART ONE**

## Walking in the Light Includes Confession

To walk in the light is not to live without any failure. It is to live openly before the God who is light, refusing to hide, rename, or justify sin. John includes himself when he says that if “we” claim to have no sin, we deceive ourselves. The Christian life is therefore marked by honest confession.

Confession does not inform God of something He missed. It agrees with His judgment. It names sin as sin, abandons excuses, and seeks cleansing on the basis of Christ's faithfulness and righteousness. Confession is not a work that re-earns justification. It is the ordinary response of a justified child whose fellowship with the Father has been disrupted by disobedience.

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS**

John writes so believers will not sin. Yet when a believer sins, Jesus Christ the righteous remains the Advocate with the Father.

**1 John 2:1**

**PART TWO****Remaining Sin Is Not Reigning Sin**

Romans 6 teaches that the believer's old slavery has been decisively broken through union with Christ. Sin may still exert influence, but it no longer possesses the same legal and spiritual dominion. The Christian is commanded not to let sin reign because a real change of realm has already occurred.

John's language in chapter 3 describes the characteristic practice and direction of a life. He is not teaching that a single act of sin proves a person was never born again. His own words in chapter 1 prevent that interpretation. He is teaching that new birth cannot coexist peacefully with a settled life of unrepentant rebellion.

A believer may return to the same sin many times and become deeply discouraged. Repetition is serious and should never be excused. Yet the decisive question is not a numerical threshold. It is whether the person is making peace with sin or continuing to bring it into the light, seek help, and fight in dependence on grace.

**PART THREE****Christ Is the Righteous Advocate**

When Christians sin, they are tempted either to minimize the offense or to run from God in shame. The gospel permits neither response. The cross shows that sin is too serious to excuse and that grace is too sufficient to despair.

Jesus advocates for His people on the basis of His own righteousness and finished sacrifice. He does not argue that the sin was unimportant. He stands as the One who has fully answered its charge. The believer's hope after failure is not, "I will punish myself enough to deserve another chance." It is, "Christ has borne judgment, and I will return in confession and faith."

This advocacy also produces change. Grace is not permission to remain enslaved. The same Christ who pardons sends the Spirit to sanctify. A person who uses forgiveness as a reason not to repent has misunderstood forgiveness.

**PART FOUR****How to Fight Sin Biblically**

- Bring sin into the light. Confess specifically to God and, where appropriate, to those you have harmed.
- Identify the ruling desire or lie beneath the behavior. Ask what you were demanding, fearing, or worshiping.
- Replace the lie with a concrete truth about God, Christ, and obedience.
- Remove practical access to temptation. Biblical mortification is willing to take costly steps.
- Seek help from mature believers, pastors, or trusted accountability rather than fighting in secrecy.
- Practice the opposite obedience. Put off the old pattern and put on conduct consistent with Christ.

**COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING****If I Keep Failing, Am I Unsaved?**

Repeated failure does not automatically prove the absence of salvation. Peter denied Christ repeatedly in one night and was restored. The Corinthian church contained serious sin and was called to repentance. At the same time, habitual sin should never be treated casually. A profession of faith joined to stubborn refusal of repentance is a biblical warning sign.

A tender believer often says, “I hate that I keep returning to this.” A hardened heart says, “God must accept this because I intend to continue.” One is struggling and needs help; the other is attempting to make peace with rebellion. Only God knows the heart perfectly, but Scripture calls us to examine the direction honestly.

#### DO NOT CONFUSE

Conviction says, “This sin dishonors God; bring it to Christ and turn.” Condemnation says, “There is no mercy for you; hide and give up.” The Spirit leads believers into truthful repentance. The accuser drives them toward hopelessness.

#### DIGGING DEEPER

### Key Words in 1 John

The verb commonly translated “confess” is *homologeō*, carrying the idea of acknowledging or agreeing. Biblical confession agrees with God’s verdict rather than negotiating for a softer name. John also calls Jesus our *paraklētos*, an advocate or helper who speaks on behalf of another. These words hold together honest guilt and confident grace.

The phrase “walking in the light” describes a continuing way of life under God’s revealed truth. It does not mean a believer never enters darkness through sin. It means the believer cannot make darkness his permanent hiding place. The light exposes, cleanses, and redirects.

#### REFLECT AND RESPOND

### Questions

- 1 How do 1 John 1:8-2:2 and 1 John 3:4-10 interpret one another?
- 2 What is the difference between sin remaining in a believer and sin reigning over a person?
- 3 How do you normally respond after sin: minimize, hide, punish yourself, blame others, or return to Christ?
- 4 What does Christ’s advocacy teach about both the seriousness of sin and the sufficiency of grace?
- 5 Which practical step in fighting sin are you most likely to avoid?
- 6 Is there a repeated pattern you have treated as an identity or inevitability rather than an enemy to be fought?

## Personal Reflection

**What sin are you most tempted to hide, rename, or manage instead of confessing plainly?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

**When you fail, do you believe Christ is more willing to receive a repentant sinner than you are willing to come? Explain.**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

### APPLICATION

Build a concrete repentance plan for one recurring sin: name the trigger, the ruling lie, the biblical truth that answers it, the escape step, the opposite act of obedience, and the person you will ask for help.

**Romans 6:12-14**

### PRAYER

Righteous Father, I confess that I have sinned and cannot cleanse myself. Thank You for Jesus Christ, my righteous Advocate. Teach me to walk in the light, reject excuses, receive cleansing, and fight sin by the Spirit. Do not let me become comfortable with what dishonors You. Amen.

## Conclusion

The presence of sin is not by itself proof that a person is outside of Christ; every believer still needs confession and advocacy. The absence of repentance, however, is a serious warning. New birth creates a new relationship with sin: no longer peace, but war; no longer hiding, but confession; no longer self-salvation, but continual return to Christ.

## SESSION 4

# Evidence of Grace: The Marks of New Life

|                  |                                                                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIME             | 45-55 minutes                                                                       |
| READ             | 1 John 2:3-11; 1 John 3:14-24; 1 John 4:1-8; Romans 8:12-17                         |
| MEMORY VERSE     | 1 John 3:18                                                                         |
| PRIMARY EMPHASIS | True doctrine, growing obedience, love for believers, and the witness of the Spirit |

**BIG IDEA**

Good works do not create salvation, but salvation creates good fruit. The Spirit confirms new life through true faith in Christ, a growing pattern of obedience, and sincere love for God's people.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

Read the passages looking for repeated words such as know, love, obey, remain, and Spirit. Ask how these evidences flow from grace rather than becoming a new way to earn acceptance with God.

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Spirit of God, use Your Word to reveal both true fruit and areas needing growth. Keep me from pride when I see grace and from despair when growth is slow. Make me more like Christ in truth, holiness, and love. Amen.*

## Introduction

Assurance rests first on Christ, yet Scripture also tells believers to recognize the fruit of His work. First John repeatedly circles around three broad evidences: believing the truth about Jesus, practicing righteousness, and loving God's people. These do not purchase salvation. They reveal the life salvation produces.

John's tests are not isolated boxes to check once. They overlap and deepen. True doctrine shapes obedience. Love obeys God's commands. The Spirit who glorifies the true Christ also produces holiness and love. The question is not whether every mark appears in perfect maturity, but whether grace has established a real and growing direction.

**PART ONE**

## The Doctrinal Test: The True Christ

Christian assurance cannot be separated from Christian truth. John opposes teachers who used spiritual language while denying essential truth about Jesus. Saving faith receives the apostolic Christ: the eternal Son who truly came in the flesh, died for sin, rose, and is the only way to the Father.

A vague belief in God, admiration for Jesus as a moral teacher, or emotional attachment to religious ideas is not the same as confessing the Son. Doctrine matters because the identity and work of the Savior matter. A false christ cannot save.

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

The Spirit of truth directs believers to confess the Jesus proclaimed by the apostles rather than a christ reconstructed according to human preference.

1 John 4:1-6

### PART TWO

## The Moral Test: Growing Obedience

John says that knowing God becomes visible in a desire to keep His commandments. He is not teaching salvation by moral achievement. He is exposing the contradiction of claiming intimate knowledge of God while rejecting His authority.

Christian obedience is imperfect but sincere. The believer may disobey, yet cannot finally declare God's commands irrelevant. Grace creates a heart that increasingly agrees that God's will is good. Obedience includes both outward action and the inward motives Christ addresses.

Growth is often uneven. Some sins weaken rapidly; others require long warfare. Assurance should not be measured only by how much remains to change. Look also for evidences such as quicker confession, greater sensitivity, increasing dependence, and renewed desire to obey after failure.

### PART THREE

## The Social Test: Love for Believers

John treats love for fellow Christians as a major evidence of passing from death to life. This love is more than friendliness toward people with similar personalities or interests. It arises from shared life in Christ and expresses itself in patience, generosity, truthfulness, forgiveness, burden-bearing, and practical care.

Love is not opposed to truth. It does not celebrate sin or avoid necessary correction. Biblical love seeks another person's good before God. It is willing to sacrifice comfort and convenience, and it refuses hatred as a settled posture.

A believer may find particular Christians difficult. The test is not effortless affection for every person. The question is whether the Spirit is teaching us to recognize God's people as family and to pursue their good despite weakness and conflict.

### PART FOUR

## The Spirit's Witness

First John says believers know that God abides in them by the Spirit He has given. Romans 8 describes those led by the Spirit putting sin to death and crying to God as Father. The Spirit's witness is not merely a private impression detached from Scripture. He confirms adoption by directing us to Christ, producing filial trust, exposing sin, and forming holy love.

Inner assurance may include a deep sense of God's fatherly love, but impressions must be tested by the Word. The Holy Spirit never assures someone by contradicting the gospel or making obedience unnecessary. His comfort and sanctifying work belong together.

## Root and Fruit

| ROOT: WHAT GOD GIVES | FRUIT: WHAT GRACE PRODUCES    |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Union with Christ    | Confession of the true Christ |

| ROOT: WHAT GOD GIVES       | FRUIT: WHAT GRACE PRODUCES    |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Justification by faith     | A desire to obey God          |
| The indwelling Spirit      | War against sin               |
| Adoption into God's family | Love for brothers and sisters |
| God's preserving grace     | Persevering faith             |

## COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

## Can Unbelievers Be Moral and Loving?

Yes. People who do not know Christ can display courage, generosity, discipline, affection, and civic virtue because they bear God's image and receive common grace. That is why outward morality by itself cannot prove regeneration.

The evidence John describes is integrated: truth about Christ, obedience to God's revealed will, and love for God's people flowing from new life. Even then, believers do not claim infallible insight into hearts. We recognize credible fruit while remembering that God alone knows perfectly.

## DIGGING DEEPER

## Abiding in Christ

A repeated word in John is *menō*, often translated remain or abide. Abiding is not spiritual passivity or a mystical state achieved by withdrawing from ordinary obedience. It describes continuing in Christ, His Word, apostolic truth, and love. The believer remains because Christ's life is active within him.

John's tests should therefore be read as a portrait of abiding life rather than a mechanical scorecard. The same grace appears in belief, obedience, and love. When one area is weak, the answer is not to manufacture fruit independently of Christ but to remain in Him through faith, Scripture, prayer, and obedience.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

## Questions

1 Why does the identity of Jesus matter for assurance rather than merely for theological precision?

2 How would you distinguish growing obedience from legalistic perfectionism?

3 What small evidences of grace might a discouraged Christian overlook?

4 How does biblical love differ from mere friendliness, approval, or conflict avoidance?

5 What does the Spirit's witness include according to 1 John and Romans 8?

6

Which of John's three broad evidences - truth, obedience, or love - most clearly needs growth in your life?

## Personal Reflection

**Where have you recently obeyed Christ even when obedience was costly or contrary to your natural desire?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

**Whom in the church is God calling you to love in a more concrete, patient, or sacrificial way?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

### APPLICATION

Choose one action in each area this week: review one essential truth about Christ, obey one command you have delayed, and perform one specific act of love for another believer.

**1 John 3:18-24**

### PRAYER

Father, thank You that good fruit does not purchase Your love but grows from it. Keep me in the truth about Your Son. Teach me joyful obedience, expose hypocrisy, and make my love practical and sincere. By Your Spirit, produce evidence of the life You have given. Amen.

## Conclusion

The marks of new life are not flawless performance but a Spirit-produced direction. Believers confess the true Christ, desire obedience, and grow in love for God's people. These evidences do not replace the foundation of Christ's work. They confirm that His grace is active in those who belong to Him.

## SESSION 5

# Examine Yourself Without Losing Sight of Christ

|                  |                                                                                  |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIME             | 45-55 minutes                                                                    |
| READ             | Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 13:5; James 2:14-26; Luke 18:9-14                 |
| MEMORY VERSE     | 2 Corinthians 13:5                                                               |
| PRIMARY EMPHASIS | False assurance, living faith, biblical self-examination, and tender consciences |

**BIG IDEA**

Biblical self-examination exposes empty profession and directs sincere believers back to Christ. It asks whether faith is real, not whether Christian growth is flawless.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

Ask the Lord for courage without panic and humility without hopelessness. Read the warnings as God intended: to awaken the presumptuous, strengthen the sincere, and drive all of us away from self-righteousness to Christ.

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Search me, O God, and lead me in truth. Expose false confidence, strengthen weak faith, and keep me from endless self-absorption. Let honest examination lead me to repentance and deeper trust in Christ. Amen.*

## Introduction

Scripture contains both strong promises and strong warnings. Jesus warns that some who use His name and perform impressive works will hear that He never knew them. Paul commands professing Christians to examine themselves. James rejects a faith that produces no works. These passages are meant to disturb false peace.

Tender believers may read the same warnings and assume they must be the hypocrites described. The answer is not to remove the warnings, nor to use them carelessly. Biblical self-examination asks honest questions under the light of the gospel. It exposes empty profession while driving sincere sinners toward Christ, not toward endless self-analysis.

**PART ONE**

## The Danger of False Assurance

False assurance can rest on orthodox vocabulary, ministry activity, spiritual gifts, family background, or a past decision. Matthew 7 is especially sobering because the people described are not religiously inactive. They appeal to works performed in Jesus' name. Yet Christ says He never knew them.

The problem is not that they failed to achieve enough impressive deeds. Their appeal reveals that they are resting in what they did rather than in Christ, and their lives are characterized by lawlessness. Religious activity can coexist with a heart that has never bowed to the Lord.

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS**

The final question is not whether we used Jesus' name, but whether we belong to Him and do the Father's will as the fruit of grace.

**Matthew 7:21-23**

**PART TWO****Living Faith Bears Fruit**

James says faith without works is dead. He is not contradicting Paul's teaching that sinners are justified apart from works of the law. Paul denies that works form the basis of our acceptance with God. James denies that a barren profession should be called saving faith.

Living faith receives Christ and therefore cannot remain permanently alone. Works vindicate or demonstrate the reality of faith before others. Abraham's obedience did not replace his trust in God's promise; it revealed that his trust was genuine.

This protects the church from two errors. Legalism adds works to Christ as the basis of justification. Antinomian presumption claims Christ while treating His lordship and transforming grace as unnecessary. The gospel rejects both.

**PART THREE****How to Examine Yourself Biblically**

Self-examination should begin with the object of faith: What am I trusting for acceptance with God? Then it considers the direction of life: Do I confess the apostolic Christ? Is there a real, though imperfect, pattern of repentance and obedience? Do I love God's people? Do I return to Christ when I fail?

The wrong question is, "Can I find any sin, weakness, mixed motive, or doubt?" Every honest Christian can. The better question is, "What is the settled direction created by grace?" Examination should be specific enough to produce repentance, but not so obsessive that the soul never looks up from itself to Christ.

Because self-perception is limited, examination should occur within the life of the church. Mature believers and faithful pastors can sometimes see both danger and grace more clearly than we do. Their judgment is not infallible, but Christian assurance was never designed to grow in isolation.

**PART FOUR****Tender Consciences and Weak Assurance**

A tender conscience is quickly troubled by sin and fearful of offending God. That tenderness can be a work of grace, but it can become distorted when a believer treats every unwanted thought, emotion, or weakness as proof of apostasy. The same Scripture that awakens the presumptuous also comforts the contrite.

The hypocrite typically wants the benefits of Christ without Christ's rule. The tender believer often wants Christ but fears being rejected. Both need the gospel, but they need it applied differently. The first needs warning and repentance. The second needs to hear that Christ does not cast out the one who comes to Him.

**A HEALTHY PATTERN**

Examine honestly. Confess specifically. Receive the gospel promise. Seek wise counsel. Then return to ordinary obedience rather than repeating the examination until you achieve a feeling of certainty.

## COMMON QUESTION

## Must I Remember the Exact Moment I Was Saved?

No. Some believers can identify a clear moment of conversion. Others came to understand the gospel gradually and cannot name an exact date. Scripture does not make memory of a date the basis of assurance. The central issue is present reality: Are you now trusting Christ, repenting of sin, and showing evidence of His life?

A clear testimony can be valuable, but it must not become a substitute for present faith. Likewise, an unclear timeline does not invalidate genuine conversion. We know a tree is alive by its present life, not by remembering the exact minute the seed opened underground.

## DIGGING DEEPER

## Test and Prove

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul uses language of testing or proving. The goal is not destructive suspicion but honest verification. The same idea can describe testing metal to reveal whether it is genuine. Examination may expose counterfeit faith, but it may also reveal evidence of Christ's presence that a discouraged believer has overlooked.

Paul and James remain in harmony. Paul answers, "How is a sinner declared righteous before God?" By grace through faith apart from works. James answers, "What kind of faith is genuine?" A living faith that acts. Works are not the root of justification; they are necessary fruit of living faith.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

## Questions

1

What forms of religious activity can create false confidence according to Matthew 7?

2

How do Paul's teaching on justification and James's teaching on living faith fit together?

3

What is the difference between honest self-examination and endless self-absorption?

4

Which questions should guide biblical examination?

5

How might a local church help protect both against false assurance and unnecessary despair?

6

Do you tend more toward presumption or toward fear? What truth does your tendency most need?

## Personal Reflection

**When you imagine standing before God, are you most tempted to point to Christ or to present your religious record?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

**What evidence of grace would mature believers who know you well probably identify? What warning might they lovingly give?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

#### **APPLICATION**

Set aside one focused period for examination using four questions: What am I trusting? What sin must I confess? What evidence of grace can I thank God for? What act of obedience should follow? Then stop examining and act on the truth.

**2 Corinthians 13:5**

#### **PRAYER**

God of truth and mercy, expose every false refuge and every empty profession. Keep me from trusting my works, yet do not let me call a fruitless claim living faith. Strengthen my weak conscience with Christ's promise, and lead me from examination into repentance, gratitude, and obedience. Amen.

## **Conclusion**

Self-examination is a servant, not a savior. It cannot cleanse guilt or create life. Properly used, it exposes false confidence, identifies sin, recognizes grace, and returns the believer to Christ. The goal is neither careless peace nor perpetual fear, but truthful assurance that bears the fruit of repentance and faith.

## SESSION 6

# Kept by God: Perseverance and Peace

|                  |                                                                          |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIME             | 45-55 minutes                                                            |
| READ             | John 10:27-30; Romans 8:28-39; Philippians 1:6; Jude 20-25; Hebrews 7:25 |
| MEMORY VERSE     | Philippians 1:6                                                          |
| PRIMARY EMPHASIS | God's preservation, the believer's perseverance, and lasting assurance   |

**BIG IDEA**

Everyone God truly saves will persevere because God faithfully preserves them. Our security is not passive carelessness but confident dependence on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

As you read, list every action God takes to save, keep, intercede for, complete, guard, and present His people. Also note the commands believers are given as they continue in faith.

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Faithful God, thank You that salvation does not finally depend on the strength of my grip. Keep me near Christ through Your Word, prayer, the church, and every means of grace. Give me peace that produces perseverance rather than carelessness. Amen.*

## Introduction

The Christian's final hope is not the strength of his resolve but the faithfulness of God. Jesus says no one can snatch His sheep from His hand or the Father's hand. Paul is confident that the God who began a good work will complete it. Jude praises the One able to keep His people and present them blameless with great joy.

These promises do not create passive Christians. The same Jude who says God keeps believers also commands them to build themselves up, pray, remain in God's love, and wait for Christ's mercy. Scripture holds preservation and perseverance together: God faithfully keeps His people, and His keeping causes them to continue in faith.

**PART ONE**

## The Triune God Keeps His People

The Father purposes salvation and works all things toward the conformity and glory of His people. The Son lays down His life for the sheep, gives them eternal life, holds them securely, and lives to intercede. The Holy Spirit seals believers, indwells them, and continues the work of sanctification.

Security is therefore rooted in God's united saving action. No created power can overturn the Father's purpose, invalidate the Son's atonement, or defeat the Spirit's seal. The believer's failures are serious, but they are not stronger than the covenant faithfulness of God.

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS**

Jesus gives His sheep eternal life. They will never perish, and no one can snatch them from His hand.

**John 10:27-30**

**PART TWO****Preservation Produces Perseverance**

The perseverance of the saints means that all who are truly united to Christ will continue in faith to the end. This does not mean every believer moves forward without seasons of doubt, severe sin, or spiritual weakness. It means God does not finally abandon His saving work.

Believers persevere because God preserves them. His grace renews repentance, disciplines wandering children, restores the fallen, and sustains faith through trial. Even the believer's continuing dependence is a gift of grace, though it is genuinely exercised by the believer.

This doctrine creates humility. We cannot say, "I am secure because I am stronger than those who fell." We say, "By the grace of God I stand, and I must continue depending on Him."

**PART THREE****God Keeps Us Through Means**

God's promise to preserve His people does not make Scripture, prayer, the church, preaching, fellowship, baptism, the Lord's Supper, discipline, and obedience unnecessary. These are among the ordinary means He uses to sustain faith.

A person who says, "If I am elect, I can neglect Christ and still be safe," is not reasoning biblically. The God who appoints the end also appoints the path. His children hear Christ's voice and follow Him. Perseverance is not earning salvation; it is the continuing life of those being kept by grace.

- Remain under the regular preaching and reading of Scripture.
- Pray honestly, especially when desire is weak.
- Participate faithfully in the life and accountability of a local church.
- Receive correction and discipline as expressions of the Father's love.
- Use baptism and the Lord's Supper as God-given signs that direct faith to Christ.
- Serve, confess, forgive, and obey rather than waiting for stronger feelings.

**PART FOUR****Warnings Are Part of God's Keeping**

The New Testament contains real warnings against unbelief, hardness, and apostasy. These warnings do not undermine God's preservation. They are among the means He uses to keep His people watchful. A true believer does not respond, "Warnings cannot apply to me." He hears them, trembles at sin, and returns to Christ.

When someone permanently abandons the apostolic Christ, Scripture may describe the departure as revealing that the earlier profession was not genuine. We cannot always know what occurred within a person's heart at an earlier time. Our responsibility is to pursue the wandering, call for repentance, and refuse to grant false assurance while life remains.

## COMMON QUESTION

## Can a True Believer Lose Salvation?

From a conservative evangelical reading of these promises, everyone whom God truly regenerates and justifies will be preserved to the end. Eternal life is not temporary life. Christ does not lose His sheep, and nothing can separate God's people from His love in Christ.

The phrase “once saved, always saved” can be misleading if it means a person may make a profession, remain unchanged, abandon Christ, and still claim certainty. Biblical security belongs to those truly saved, and true salvation produces perseverance. We are kept by grace, not by a one-time act detached from continuing faith.

## BALANCED CONFIDENCE

Security without regeneration becomes presumption. Perseverance without preservation becomes self-reliance. Scripture gives a better confidence: God keeps His people, and His people continue by depending on Him.

## DIGGING DEEPER

## Kept and Guarded

Jude begins by describing believers as kept for Jesus Christ and ends by praising God as able to keep them from stumbling and present them blameless. The language emphasizes guarding or protecting. Yet the command in the middle is to keep themselves in the love of God. Divine keeping and human perseverance are not competitors; God's preserving action establishes and sustains the believer's faithful response.

Hebrews adds that Jesus is able to save completely because He always lives to intercede. The security of believers is connected not only to an event in the past but to a living Priest in the present. Christ's sacrifice is finished, and His priestly ministry never ends.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

## Questions

- 1 What actions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit strengthen assurance in these passages?
- 2 How would you explain the relationship between God's preservation and the believer's perseverance?
- 3 Why are the ordinary means of grace necessary if God has promised to keep His people?
- 4 How can biblical warnings function as instruments of God's preserving grace?
- 5 Why can the phrase “once saved, always saved” become misleading?
- 6 Which habit or means of grace do you need to receive more faithfully in the coming month?

## Personal Reflection

**Do you live as though your salvation finally depends on your grip on Christ, or as though His grip makes your dependence unnecessary?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

**What season of weakness has God used to demonstrate His faithfulness rather than your strength?**

*Write your response in the app or in a journal.*

### APPLICATION

Write a simple perseverance plan for the next thirty days: regular Scripture, specific prayer, weekly gathered worship, one trusted Christian relationship, and one area of active obedience. Treat these not as payments for salvation but as means through which God keeps you near Christ.

**Jude 20-25**

### PRAYER

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank You for beginning, accomplishing, and completing salvation. Guard me from presumption and from despair. Keep me through Your Word, Your church, prayer, discipline, and every means of grace. Make me faithful because You are faithful, and present me with joy in Christ. Amen.

## Conclusion

Christian assurance ends where it began: with God. The Father purposes, the Son purchases and intercedes, and the Spirit applies and preserves. Believers truly persevere, yet they do so because grace sustains them. Peace is therefore not confidence that we will never feel weak. It is confidence that the Savior of weak people is faithful to finish what He began.

## ASSURANCE MATTERS

# Study Conclusion

The purpose of assurance is not to make Christians preoccupied with themselves. It is to free them to worship, obey, endure, confess, love, and serve with confidence in Christ. John wrote so believers may know they have eternal life, and that knowledge is meant to deepen holiness rather than replace it.

## Remember the Order

7. Look first to Christ: His righteousness, sacrifice, resurrection, promise, and intercession.
8. Believe God's testimony: eternal life is given in the Son to everyone who truly trusts Him.
9. Recognize the Spirit's fruit: true doctrine, repentance, growing obedience, and love.
10. Examine honestly: reject both false confidence and perfectionistic despair.
11. Continue through grace: God preserves His people through faith and the ordinary means He provides.

### ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY

Assurance is a Christ-centered confidence that God has saved, is sanctifying, and will preserve everyone who truly trusts His Son.

## When Assurance Weakens

- Read the promises of the gospel before reviewing your performance.
- Confess known sin rather than trying to regain confidence through self-punishment.
- Ask whether you are making peace with sin or grieving and fighting it.
- Look for real fruit, including small evidences of repentance and love.
- Seek the counsel and prayers of mature believers and faithful church leaders.
- Return to ordinary obedience while waiting for emotional comfort to follow truth.

## A Final Prayer

### PRAYER

God of all grace, fix our eyes on Jesus Christ. Give false professors no rest until they repent, give tender believers no despair when they come to Your Son, and give all Your people endurance in faith. Make the evidence of Your grace visible in truth, holiness, and love. Keep us from stumbling and present us blameless with great joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Suggested Further Reading in Scripture

- The Gospel of John, especially chapters 3, 6, 10, 15, and 17
- Romans 3-8
- Galatians 2-5
- Ephesians 1-2
- Hebrews 4, 7, 10, and 12
- The entire letter of 1 John
- Jude 20-25

### ROOTED WORD

*Rooted in Scripture. Growing in truth.*