

September 13/14, 2025

Dancing in the Light Together

Face to Face Series

1 John 1:5-2:6

Pastor Bryan Clark

Back in the late 70s, I lived in Chicago for three years when I was going to school there. I also had a job for a man that owned a bunch of apartment buildings on the north side of Chicago, and I was like his maintenance man. So, most of his apartments were pretty decent, but from time to time, he would buy some that were condemned by the city of Chicago. They were pretty rough, and you'd get a printout of all the things that had to be addressed, and then he got like one hundred and twenty days to do them in order to keep people in the building. So, this particular apartment complex was fairly large, and it was really run down. But there were still people living in it. It was probably about half occupied. One evening when I was there, it was dark outside. I was doing some work, but the kitchen was dark. I was in a different part of the apartment, and as I went by the kitchen, I could hear something kind of scurrying about in the kitchen. So, I listened for a little bit, and I eventually reached in, turned on the light, and there were about a dozen rats that scurried back into the shadows. I thought, "Well, that's nice." (*laughter*) So I turned off the light, went back to my business, and after, I don't know, between half an hour and forty-five minutes, I started hearing it again. So I waited a little bit. I listened, flicked on the light, and there were the rats. As soon as the light went on and they were exposed, they scurried back into the shadows.

Last week we learned that Jesus came to unveil to us the life that our soul longs for: to dance with God. But to dance with God, you must dance in the light. It's the only option you have. The issue with that is the light exposes our rats, and a lot of people don't like that. But the reality is, how you choose to respond when your rats are exposed, will determine whether your soul is going to shrivel up in despair, or whether you're going to find the life your soul longs for, which is what we want to talk about this morning.

So if you have a Bible, I encourage you to turn with us to 1 John as we continue to work our way through the letter. Last week, we learned that Jesus came to unveil this life, this eternal life that God offers. But we don't just enter into this koinonia, this fellowship with God. We enter into this fellowship with God together. That's part of the unique experience that binds us together in true community. John is going to further develop this idea then in our passage this morning. So, 1 John Chapter 1, Verse 5:

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. (*NASB, 1 John 1:5)

God is Light. The literal Greek here is there is no, not, any darkness at all. It's a double negative which makes it emphatic. I think it's hard for us in 21st century American culture to appreciate the biblical contrast between darkness and light, because light is so accessible. Even in the middle of the night, there's still plenty of light. But in an ancient culture with no artificial lighting other than an oil lamp or a candle, the contrast between darkness and light was extreme. So imagine it's dark outside, and there's some sort of an oil lamp inside. It's still a minimal amount of light, and the

room is filled with shadows and darkness in the corners. So often the Bible talks about, “In God, there are no shadows.” There are no corners where the cockroaches lurk. There are no shadows. There's nothing in God other than utter, pure goodness. That's who God is. So, in other words, to dance with God, it requires that we dance in the light.

Imagine this morning if we turned off all the lights in the auditorium and just created one shaft of light in the stage right here, and that represented the presence of God. People lurk in the darkness, and as long as you're in the darkness, you can hide your rats. But to dance with God, you have to step into the light, and the light exposes our sin. Verse 6:

If we say...

Now this is code language for what the false teachers were teaching. So you see it in verse 6; you see it in verse 8; you see it in verse 10. So, John is responding to the message of the false teachers. In essence he's saying, “Okay, think about this ‘if’ we’re going to say...” That's the idea of it.

If we say that we have fellowship (this koinonia) with Him and yet walk in the darkness, (We dance in the dark.) we lie and do not practice the truth;

Whatever these false teachers were teaching, it had something to do with the fact that you can dance with God in the dark. And John is saying is, “That's a lie. The only place you find God is in the light.”

Now to understand this, it's helpful to go back to John's Gospel. The idea of light was a familiar theme in John's gospel, especially like the clarity in the Gospel of John, chapter 3. So if you want to turn back to chapter 3 in John's Gospel, you have what is probably the most familiar verse in all the Bible. John 3:16: **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** Everybody really likes that verse, but it's funny how many people don't keep reading. So pick it up, then, in verse 19: **And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, (referring to Jesus) and men loved the darkness rather than the Light,** That's interesting. I wonder why that is? **...for their deeds were evil.** For everyone who does evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. Jesus is the Light, and when people come into the Light, their rats are exposed, and people don't like that. So they prefer the darkness where they can slink back into the darkness and hide their rats so no one can see them.

Imagine if a person lived in that apartment with these rats and contacted the management to do something about it. So the manager comes to the apartment, and the person living in the apartment flicks on the light and the rats scatter, and the person says, “You need to do something about this.” And the manager says, “That's simple. Just turn the lights back off.” That's where we're at as a culture. People don't want the Light, because the Light exposes our rats. You cannot dance with God in the dark. But there is an alternative. Verse 7: But there's a better way.

...but if we walk in the Light, (if we dance in the Light), as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship (we have this koinonia) with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Now I think that verse surprises us a little bit. Here's what I think we're expecting. But if we dance in the Light, we walk in the Light, as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship; we have this koinonia with Him. That's what I'm expecting John to say. So he kind of surprises me by saying **we have fellowship with one another.**

Here's what John is saying. In order to dance with Jesus in the Light, when our rats are exposed, we have to do something with that rather than slinking back into the darkness and pretending there are no rats. "I don't know what you're talking about." We recognize I have a problem. Notice in verse 7, it's not sins plural; it's sin singular. It's referring to the fact that we have a sin problem. Sometimes theologians refer to it as *the sin principle*. I'm a sinner. Every one of us is a sinner. I have a sin problem. But rather than slinking back into the darkness, I recognize that God sent His Son just for this purpose. Recognizing that His blood cleanses me from all my unrighteousness, rather than pretending I don't have a sin problem, why not rather experience the forgiveness that God offers? What happens in the darkness is because people are hiding their rats; people are wallowing in their shame and their guilt. It becomes this competitive, judgmental, condemning culture where everybody's pointing fingers at each other and everybody's condemning each other, and everybody's trying to figure out who's the bigger sinner. It's a culture that just causes my soul to wither away.

But those who choose to dance with Jesus in the Light recognize, "I'm a sinner in need of a Savior," and what we all share in common, koinonia, we talked about this last week. The word literally means *to share in common*. What we all share in common is that we are sinners. We have a sin problem, and the only possibility of remaining in the Light is because the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Therefore, there's no finger-pointing; there's no condemning one another; there's no trying to figure out who's the bigger sinner. We're all sinners. We all have a big problem. But what we share in common is we're all sinners saved by the blood of Jesus. That's what he's saying in verse seven. Verse 8:

If we say (So this is the false teachers.) **that we have no sin,** (singular) "I don't have a sin problem. I don't know what you're talking about. There's no rats in this apartment. I don't see them." **...we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

John really loves this word **truth**, It shows up 109 times in the New Testament. Almost half of those—45—are either in his gospel or in his letter. If we say, "I'm not a sinner; I don't have a sin problem; I really don't know what you're talking about," as long as we remain in the darkness with the lights out and hide our rats, I don't have a problem. If I have no sin problem, I have no need for a Savior. So we, as a culture figure out all these ways to explain away the rats, as we dwell in the darkness. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't see any rats." We excuse; we rationalize.

We believe, what I think is this utterly ridiculous notion that there are no such things as moral absolutes, that all morality is relative. When you think about it, that's just an utterly ridiculous notion. What is true is moral relativity is something that is discussed in classrooms and coffee shops, but nobody actually lives that way. Nobody does, because deep down in our souls we know there's such a thing as right and wrong and good and evil...which is why our culture is filled with shame and guilt. It's filled with people that wallow in it every day, because deep in my gut I know

I have a problem. So, we try to numb the shame and the guilt and the emptiness. We numb it with our substances. We numb it with pornography. We numb it with our busyness. We talked about this last spring, that the therapists are now referring to busyness, this crazy busyness, as a numbing strategy. If I can stay busy enough, I don't have to look at how empty my life is. We do it through the pursuit of pleasure, through the pursuit of money, through the pursuit of position and status. We try to figure out all these ways to numb the reality that I know I have a problem.

Think back to Genesis chapter 3. What's the first thing Adam and Eve did after they felt the shame of their sin? They hid, and people have been hiding from God in the darkness ever since. But it doesn't have to be that way. Contrary to that, Verse 9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful (which means He's willing) **and righteous** (which means he's perfectly just; He's right) **to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

You'll notice sins in verse nine is plural. So, here's the basic idea. As a believer, when I trust Jesus as Savior, He deals with my sin problem past, present and future. I wish, at that point, He made me perfect so that's the end of any sinning. But of course we know that's not the case. I still do sin. But rather than that causing me to slink back into the darkness, I recognize this is the whole point of the story. The word **confess** is a Greek word that literally means *to agree with*. I step into the Light and my sins, my rats, are exposed. Instead of slinking back into the darkness, I see it; I don't like it; I don't want it. I agree with God, "This is sin." I don't want these rats. These rats will poison my life. So what do we do? We agree. "Yes, this is bad; this is destructive." So, I reach out and experience the forgiveness that God offers. This is the whole point of the story. He is willing, and He is right. Because of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, He has made payment for my sin. The Greek word used here, translated **forgive**, literally means *to pay the debt*. When Jesus hung on the cross, He said at the end of His time on the cross, "It is finished!" The Greek word is *Tetelestai*. It's a banking term; it means *paid in full*. Therefore, having paid the debt, He is right; He is just to forgive us our sin. The debt has been paid and **cleanses us from all unrighteousness.** Verse 10:

If we say (It's the false teachers again,) **that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.**

The Bible couldn't be clearer on this. God says we're all sinners. We often refer to ourselves here as *sinners and misfits and losers* who stand before a holy God. But if we're going to say, "I don't have any rats; I'm going to just slink back into the darkness; I don't know what you're talking about. I don't see any rats." Then what we're saying is, "God, you're a liar. I don't have any sin." And the rats will continue to poison your life.

It's very important to understand what John is saying. God does not invite us into the Light to condemn us...to give us a big lecture...to point His finger at us...to whack us...to kick us out of the Light. That's not what the story is about. He invites us into the Light to expose our rats, because rats are bad...in order that we may see them...in order that we may agree with Him...in order that His blood may cleanse us free of our rats, to remove the roadblock in order to experience the life my soul longs for. I don't like to have my rats exposed, but I understand I need that. I don't want

those rats in my life. It's a roadblock to the intimacy I long to experience with God. So, when the Light exposes them, instead of slinking into the shadows, I experience His forgiveness. I deal with it in order to experience a deeper relationship with Him.

Chapter 2, verse 1:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*. (Vs. 1-2)

There's a real change in tone here. He has been talking to these false teachers and calling them out on what they're teaching. But this is a real shift now to these people that He loves. It's very pastoral. "You're my spiritual **children**; I don't want you to sin. The false teachers are saying there's no big problem with that. You can dance with Jesus in the dark, but you can't. That's not true!" So, he doesn't want them to sin, but recognizes the reality is, it is going to happen. **If anyone sins, we have an advocate.** It's the Greek word **paraclete**. It literally means *to come along side of*. It's typically a legal term. We would probably think of it as a defense attorney. So, if I do sin, I have a defense attorney to represent me before the judge. Who is it? Well, it's **Jesus Christ the righteous**. I couldn't have a better defense attorney than the Son of God who stands righteous before the Father.

Verse 2: **and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.** It's highly likely you did not use that word in a sentence this week. (*laughter*) It's not really a common term. It's not common in the Bible. It only shows up two times, and both are in John's letter. But for a first-century reader, the concept was very familiar to them. The word **propitiation** means *a payment to satisfy a debt that's owed*. The debt is owed to the propitiator. So, who is the propitiator? It's the Father. And what is the payment to satisfy that debt? Jesus Himself is the payment. He is the propitiation for our sins. So the eternal Son of God that took on human flesh in order to be the Savior of the world, not only stands as my defense attorney before the Judge, but He Himself is the payment. To the Father, He says, "I myself have made payment, and based on that, my client stands righteous in Your presence." There is no possibility that God would refuse that. It couldn't get any better than that, not only for ours, but for those of the whole world. I love that for everyone that slinks into the shadows and lives in their shame and guilt, it's not necessary to live that way. The God of the universe has given up His own Son to make it possible to experience the forgiveness of those sins and to dance with God in the light. Verse 3:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:
(Vs. 3-5)

So most scholars think, at least in part, the false teaching was an early form of what's called *Gnosticism*, which is taken from a Greek word that means *to know, to be in the know*. We're the people *in the know*. We're the people enlightened. We can dance with God in the dark. We have no rats; it's not a problem. So, John is making a play on words here with the word **know**. Actually,

by this we know is actually the *truth* that we have come to know Him, and the one who says, **“I have come to know Him” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar.** I love in verse 5, where it says, **But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.** It could be translated *fulfilled*.

Here's what John is saying. The life that Jesus came to unveil is a love story. *For God so loved the world that He sent His Son.* Jesus Himself said, **“I did not come to condemn. I came to seek and to save the lost.”** It's always been a love story of what God is willing to do to make it possible for us to enter into a relationship with Him. When we come into the Light, and the Light exposes our rats, rather than scurrying back into the darkness, we recognize this is what the whole story has been about...that through His death on the cross, His blood cleanses me from all unrighteousness, so that I stand right before a holy God now and forever. This is the fulfillment of the love story that God has been writing from the beginning. That's what John is saying. Verse 6:

...the one who says he abides in Him (who dances with Him) ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Now John is talking literally “for himself”. He told us in verse one, “What I'm telling you is, *‘I walked with Jesus; I talked with Jesus; I heard Jesus; I touched Jesus.’*” He's understanding literally how Jesus walked, and His disciples learned to walk like Him.

One of the things that I think is so stunning when you read the Gospels, is to realize that those sinners: the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners, the misfits and losers, did not flee away from Jesus when He came to town. It was just the opposite of that. They flocked to Jesus. They couldn't get enough of Him. The self-righteous religious Pharisees had big problems with Jesus, but the sinners and misfits and losers flocked to the Light because, for the first time in their lives, they believed there was hope, that somehow they could stand right before a holy God, not on the basis of a bunch of religious stuff, but on the basis of what Jesus promised to do for them: to offer forgiveness and cleansing as a gift of His grace. And they could not get enough of Him.

The reality is we were made for relationship with God. It's what our souls long for, and we're going to struggle until we experience that relationship. But if you're going to dance with God, you have to dance in the Light. There is no other option. But when you come into the Light, the Light exposes our rats, and that's the moment of truth. Are we going to slink back into the darkness and pretend we have no rats? Or are we going to recognize that God exposes our sin because our sin blocks us from the intimacy we want to experience with Him? Therefore we agree with Him. We confess that sin, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness, so that we might enter into a more deeply intimate relationship with Him.

So rather than closing my message this morning with a prayer, I'm just going to give you a minute to process what we've talked about this morning. So, I'm going to invite the worship team to go ahead and come up on stage, and here's what I invite you to think about. You were made for relationship with God. God is so committed to this love story, He gave up His own Son to pay the debt to make it possible. If we're willing to come into the Light, to see our sin, (We're all sinners.) recognize it, agree, confess it, and cry out for the Savior to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, we remove the roadblock so that we might enter into the relationship our soul longs for.

So just to help you as you process this, we're going to set the stage, just as I described it at the beginning of this message. So, we're going to darken the auditorium. We're going to create a light. If you're going to dance with Jesus, you have to come into the Light, but the Light exposes your rats. So, what are you going to do with that?

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Discussion Questions *(with your group)*

- 1) **How is sin viewed in our culture? What specific examples can you give to explain that viewpoint?**

- 2) In verses 7 and 9, John gives two behaviors that mark a faithful person – walking in the light and confession. **What role does spiritual community play in those actions?**

How comfortable are you in letting the light shine into the dark places in your life?

Have you ever experienced confession in an authentic spiritual community? Share if you are willing.

What would it take for your Life Group to become that kind of community?

- 3) According to the text this week, the issue is not so much whether or not we sin, but rather how we respond when the light exposes our sin. **What are two responses and what are the outcomes for each choice?**

Think about your life this past month. **How might you be dancing in the dark these days? What dark environments grab your attention and cause you to linger?**

- 4) Pastor Bryan reminded us that God’s purpose for exposing our sin flows from his *love* for us. **Why do you suppose we more often perceive God to be condemning and judgmental rather than loving in those moments?**

How can your Life Group help you see God’s love rather than condemnation when you struggle with sin?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so that we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit— we invite you to strengthen your souls with exercises that challenge and stretch you in new ways. Choose one and commit to repeating it until you gain strength in that area.

- 1) **Scripture Reading: to listen and soak in the Word as an experience of the words washing over you.** Read or listen to the entire letter of 1 John at least twice/week. As you take it in, resist the impulse to study and parse the details. The point is not to gain “head knowledge” but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.
- 2) **Memorization: to internalize God’s Word.** A key passage for this series is **1 John 4:7-14**. Commit to memorize it yourself and encourage others in your group to do it with you.
- 3) **Walk & Pray: to actively engage with the scripture passage.** Write out the passage of the sermon each week on a note card and take it with you on a daily walk.
- 4) **Journal Reflection: to practice remembering what God has done.** Make time in your schedule to put down in writing the feelings and thoughts that are stirring as you interact with the Word of God.
- 5) **Self-control Exercise: to help you come to stillness from a busy or hurried pace of life.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Sit upright but comfortably in a chair with your palms open and upward on your lap. Focus on a word or short phrase about the character of God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When your thoughts wander to the things on your to-do list or other people’s needs, redirect them back to the character of God. When the 10 minutes is up, close in a short prayer of gratitude.

Prayer

Praying together in a group is different than praying alone with God. It's a conversation that can help you grow closer to each other as you are in God's presence. One way to pray follows this often-used pattern in scripture – acknowledge who God is, recognize the need we have for Him, and ask to partner with Him on behalf of others. When possible, use the passage of scripture from this week's sermon as your starting point, then form a prayer that follows this pattern:

God, our Father, this week we learned that you are _____ and _____ .

As I looked into your Word, I understood how I need you to _____. Help me to be faithful to _____ in the week ahead.

Other people are on my heart, and I trust that you have put them there for a reason. I ask for your will to be accomplished in their life as they _____. Help me to know how to respond well to the needs of _____, even as my first step is in praying for them right now.

Each group engages in prayer differently. Some groups go around and allow anyone to pray that desires to do so. Other groups have several people pray or maybe 1 person closes the group in prayer. Still other groups split into smaller groups of 2-3 people and those people pray for each other. How you choose to engage in prayer is dependent on your group and your choice to ENGAGE! **We learn to pray by praying and by listening and praying with others!**