

# “Being Certain You Can Be Certain” // 1 John 5:13–18 // Message #1—Assured: 1 John

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## Small Group Push

Small groups are where the **real action** in the Summit Church is. The Bible teaches that **the majority of work that God does in your life will happen through other members of the body, and our vehicle for that here is a small group. Which means if you're not in some kind of small group, you are not just missing out on some good friendships, you're missing out on a lot of what God wants to do in your life and family. I want to challenge you to start a new chapter in your life; take the first step of getting into one today.**

## Chapel Hill Celebration

Some of you have heard this, but our Chapel Hill campus launch last week was somewhat successful. They packed out 2 services with about 1200 people. PICTURE. That is the **largest campus launch** we've ever had. Tragically, they had to **turn away** a couple hundred people last week, so this week we are launching a **3<sup>rd</sup> service at 5:00pm** on Sunday. So, **Chapel Hill, we love you guys**, and all of our campuses—we had nearly 8000 people on our campuses last weekend: *North Raleigh, Cary, West Club, North Durham, Summit En Espanol and Brier Creek North and South...* I want everyone at all campuses to stand up, because I want us to stand together on something:

## PRAYER: MLK and National Right to Life Sunday

This weekend is significant for our society for two reasons, and I want us to pause and remember both of them:

- The first is MLK day, and we remember the incredible significance of this holiday in moving us forward toward a more just and free society;

- The other is this is National Right to Life Sunday. This weekend marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. Since that day in 1973, more than 50 million innocent children have been killed. Let that sink in. 8 times the Holocaust. **Me and some of our pastors have reflected about** this on my blog, [jdgrear.com](http://jdgrear.com), which I'd encourage you to read. We as a church rarely get caught up in politics, but let I agree with Randy Alcorn, ***“To endorse or even to be neutral about killing innocent children created in God's image is unthinkable.”*** And so I want to, on this day, pray together about both of these things.
- PRAYER

## New Series Introduction

We are starting a new series today through the book of 1 John called *Assured*.

The **book of 1 John is one of my favorites** because it is all about assurance. **John, who was one of the closest disciples** to Jesus, deals with subject a lot: **covering things** like how you can know for sure **you are saved** (at peace with God); how you can know that what you **believe is true**; how you be assured of **God's love and control** in your life, and how to maintain that certainty in the face of **disappointment and opposition**.

I'll be honest: these are things I have struggled with for all of my life. For one, how can you know for sure that you are saved?

- *I've told you before that if there were a Guinness book world record for amount of times someone had prayed the sinner's prayer, I'm pretty sure I would hold it.*
- By the time I graduated high school I'd probably **prayed the sinner's prayer** 5000 times. **Every time** a speaker gave an invitation to be saved, I'd take it. And **then if they'd ask** for a show of hands or come down front or to throw your stick in the fire I'd do it... (I didn't want to invalidate the prayer by failing to confess Jesus before men.)
- Honestly, it got a little embarrassing. I've **walked a lot of aisles** in those days. I've been saved in **youth camps** all over the nation. Once in every **denomination**.

- I got **baptized 4 times**. (that doesn't even include an infant one—that's 4 times after I was grown up). I was a **staple** in my church's baptismal lineup. My church gave me **my own locker** in the baptismal area.
- But I wanted to know! Because that's not the kind of thing you want to be wrong about.

Now, some of you know I have a new book coming out related to this topic: *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You are Saved*.

- And I would never really want to use a sermon series to promote a book I wrote, because, you know, somewhere in the Bible, whenever you self-promote an angel loses his wings and a puppy dies in heaven.
- And I've told you that my wife and I made the decision that all the proceeds of this book go to feed hungry children...
- Seriously—I want you to know all proceeds from books that we sell here at the church—every dime—go back directly to the church. I don't write these books to make money off of you.

But I wrote this book because there are a lot of people like me who want to know that they are saved and can't seem to figure it out!

- **No matter how many times they pray the prayer** they can't find the assurance of salvation. They wonder, *Did I get the prayer right? Was I sorry enough for my sin? Did I repent enough? Did I understand grace enough?*

**On the other hand**, Scripture tells us **there are a lot of people who have prayed a prayer to receive Jesus and consequently think they are going to heaven because of that—who are tragically mistaken.**

- *A 2011 Barna study<sup>1</sup> shows that 50% of Americans say they have prayed some kind of sinner's prayer*, even though half of them have no regular presence in any kind of church or have

lifestyles and worldviews that in no way differ from those outside of the Christian faith

- But when these people hear that you need Jesus to be saved, they think, *"oh... been there, done that... I've prayed the prayer; filled out the card. I'm good. My grandma was there. It was super-meaningful. Her tearstains are still on the page."*

**Matthew 7** talks a lot about a group that say to Jesus on the last day, "Lord, Lord" and whom Jesus turns away with the awful words, *"Depart from me, I never knew you."* Most all of those will have prayed a prayer, and many of them are going to go into eternity confident of a salvation they do not possess.

- And honestly, as your pastor, I wonder if some of you are in that group. He's describing church people, like us.
- I don't want to scare anybody, but there are several things in that passage that people often use to assure themselves of their salvation that are not at all legitimate:
  - **A prayer they prayed.**
  - **Religious and ministry activity:** these people in Matthew 7 were very active in their churches: went on mission trips, knew verses, volunteered. They were even active in their church's prayer ministry, helping to throw out demons in Jesus' name.
  - People sometimes use the fact that they are **moral**, or the fact that they **feel guilty** about their sin. These people in Matthew 7 were **moral people** who I'm sure felt guilty about their sin.
    - Lots of people who aren't Christians feel guilty about sin—that's one of the primary things the whole industry of psychology is built upon—dealing with guilt.
    - Judas felt so guilty he went out and hung himself.
    - Feeling bad about your sin doesn't prove you are saved.

And so I wrote the book to help people identify the marks of someone who is truly saved. I want to **comfort those who are**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/514-barna-study-of-religious-change-since-1991-shows-significant-changes-by-faith-group>

**unnecessarily troubled and trouble those who are unjustifiably comforted.**

The **gist of the book** is this: You're not saved because you pray some magical prayer. God saves us when we repent and believe the gospel.

You **can express repentance** and faith in a prayer, but it is not the prayer itself that saves, it is repentance and belief behind that prayer that lays hold of salvation. And **it is possible to repent and believe without praying** the prayer; and it's also possible to pray the prayer without repenting and believing.

So I **encourage you** in this book to understand true repentance and belief, and "**stop asking Jesus into your heart**" and start resting in the promises of the gospel.

- BTW, I had a good time trying to explain the title to one to my 9-year-old daughter. She asked me what the title of my new book was and I told her, and she said, "Dad, why would you ever want to tell somebody to do that?" So I explained... and she said, "That doesn't sound like a very long book... How long is it?" About 120 pages. "*Oh, Dad, that's too long. You could say that in about 10 pages.*"

I'm not going to preach through my book, but I am going to preach through 1 John because the whole point of it is how you gain **assurance that you know God**; that **he's real**; how to **know that he loves you**; and **that you are walking** with him.

### 1 John 5:13–18 (Title)

We're going to start with the last chapter (**1 John 5:13–18**) where John summarizes the whole book, and look at 2 things:

- **First, Does God really want us to know for sure that we are saved?** (Some would say 'no'—at least, God doesn't want us to know where we stand with him because that's a way of keeping us in line.

- Like **dangling a carrot** in front of us. You better act right or you won't get heaven and you'll go to hell forever!
- Or, if you guarantee someone they **can't be fired**, they might get lazy in their job—I'll call in sick again today—what can they do? Who cares about these TPS reports? I'm not too worried about it.)
- People think that if someone had the assurance of salvation they'd get lazy. **So, does God even want us to know?**

### • **Second, How can we know?**

#### 1. Does God even want us to know for sure we are saved?

**Verse:** [13] *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*

Yes. 2 reasons: **1. He loves us**, and when you love someone, you want them to know that you love them. **2. The only way we'll ever** develop real love for him is when we are sure that he loves us. **Real love only grows in the** soil of security. When you make someone behave by threatening them you might coerce their behavior but you'll never captivate their heart.

In John's other book, the Gospel of John, John recounts a couple of analogies Jesus shared with his disciples about how he felt about them before he left them on earth that **communicated assurance** to them in the tenderest of terms.<sup>2</sup>

#### (A. We are his beloved children (John 14:18))

The **FIRST** one, in **John 14:18**, was that of a loving father. Jesus said, "*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*"

- A **good father** does want his kids wondering whether or not he loves them or he is committed to them.

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<sup>2</sup> Assurance seems to have been a big deal to John because it is a theme in all of his writings.

- **When I go away** on a trip, I don't say to my kids, "Daddy will be back soon... or maybe he won't. Maybe I'm not really your daddy at all. Maybe my real family lives somewhere else. You'll just have to wait and see if I come back. I might return from this trip with a gift for you, or I might not return at all. Sit around and think about that while I'm gone, and let that compel you to become better children."
- **That would not produce love** and loyalty in my children. It might produce a little **fear-based obedience**, but it's only a matter of time until **fear-based obedience** turns into **father-loathing rebellion**.
- If I don't want my own children feeling like orphans, would God, who is the best father, want his kids fearing that they might be orphans?

### **(B. We are his betrothed bride (John 14:1-3))**

In that **same conversation** Jesus compared his disciples to a **betrothed bride**. Just like a man assures his fiancée that he loves her and is coming back for her, Jesus told his disciples they could be sure he was coming back for them. He said, "**If I go and prepare a place for you, (be sure) I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.**" **(John 14:1-3)**

- When my wife and I got engaged, she was a student at the University of Virginia and I was in a seminary here in North Carolina. The **hardest thing for us** to do was to say goodbye each weekend and return to our prospective homes to endure another week of classes, apart. The last thing I would have wanted was for her to wonder if I really loved her. **If she doubted that, she might be open to the advances of other suitors**. So throughout our engagement **I assured her repeatedly** not only that **I loved her**, but also that **nothing was going to stop me** from marrying her. And I gave her a **big fat diamond** to wear on her finger to prove it. She and I both knew that if I didn't come back for her, she was keeping that ring.
- **You see, that assurance not only gave her peace, it gave her strength**. She was not interested in the attention of other guys because she knew she had the awesome-sauce in me.

**Here's a gospel secret:** assurance in the gospel has a greater power to produce virtue and love in our hearts than the threats of the law could ever do. The threats of the law can **coerce behavior** but it cannot **captivate the heart** and affections.

- The established church of Martin Luther's day believed that people would only obey when they were threatened with harsh consequences for rebellion.
  - Martin Luther decried this as the "**damnable doctrine of doubt**."<sup>3</sup> He said, **yes, being afraid of judgment** will indeed produce a surface-level adherence, he said, but underneath that thin veneer of obedience will rush a river of fear, pride, and self-interest. The only way to develop real love for God is to have fear removed.
- **Love for God grows only in the soil of security**.
  - **John says it this way** in 1 John: "**We love him** (why? Because we are commanded to? Threatened with hell if we don't?) **because he first loved us.**" **(1 John 4:19)**. Assurance of the love of God for us is what produces love for God *in us*.
  - There's a great example of this in one of the most popular movies out right now, **Les Mis... HOW MANY?** (Valjean experiences this incredible act of grace as a priest, instead of giving him justice, extends mercy to

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, LW 26. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1963. "I am saying this in order to refute the **dangerous doctrine** (*perniciosa doctrina*, or "**damnable doctrine**") of the *sophists and the monks*, who taught and believed that no one can know for a certainty whether he is in a state of grace, even if he does good works according to his ability and lives a blameless life... *This wicked idea, on which the entire kingdom of the pope rests, is one that you young people should flee and regard with horror as a dangerous plague.*" (LW 26:377. Emphasis added.) Also, "*Let us thank God, therefore, that we have been delivered from this monster of uncertainty* (*hoc monstro incertitudinis*) and that now we can believe for a certainty that the Holy Spirit is crying and issuing that sigh too deep for words in our hearts. And this is our foundation: The Gospel commands us to look, not at our own good deeds or perfections but at God Himself as He promises, and at Christ Himself, the Mediator. By contrast the pope commands us to look, not at God as He promises, not at Christ our High Priest, but at our own works and merits. From the latter course, doubt and despair necessarily follow; but from the former, certainty and the joy of the Spirit." (LW 26:386-387. Emphasis added.)

him and keeps him from a life of hard labor in prison. After successfully resisting the threats of his captors for over 20 years, who had tried to break him and conform him to certain behaviors, now finds himself shattered before the simple act of grace by this priest).

- Hugo says, “... *Valjean dimly felt that this priest's pardon was the hardest assault of all, the most formidable attack he had ever sustained... that... a gigantic and decisive struggle had begun in his heart between his own wrongs and the goodness of this man.*”<sup>4</sup>
- If you are having trouble walking with God—**anger, a habit you can't break...** What you need is not more condemnation; you need to know the sweet assurance of his love.
- **Example in Scripture I often go to...** JOHN 8.
- **God's acceptance is the power that liberates us from sin, not the reward for having liberated ourselves.**
- Everything we do spiritually grows out of that. You'll never go anywhere spiritually until **you are assured that he is yours** and you are his.

So, yes, God wants you to know...

## 2. How can we know that we are saved?

John identifies 2 major things in these verses, both of which I'll just introduce to you today and flesh out more later:

*[13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*

### A. You have placed your hopes for heaven entirely on Jesus (vs. 13)

- When John says, “You believe in the name...” “*Believe in the name*” means that you rest in the account of.

- Think about it like this: If you were invited by a **really rich person** to stay in a really nice hotel that you could never afford on your own, all-expenses paid, when you checked in, you'd say, “I'm under the name of so-and-so.” Which means, “Don't charge this room to my credit card. I'm under this rich person's name!”
- When you believe in the name of the Son of God, you are resting in his actions to save you.
- You **don't attempt to earn heaven** by drawing upon your moral bank account; you go under his name, withdrawing on his righteous account in your place.
- **The gospel, by its very nature, produces assurance.** Because you are not depending on how well or how much you've done to earn your way to heaven, you are resting on his finished work.
  - You see, if I say to you, “Are you a Christian?” and you say, “Well, I'm trying. I'm doing my best.” That shows me you don't get it. **You still think there is a level that you need to perform at to qualify for the title. There is nothing left that needs to be done. Jesus has finished the work of your salvation. You accept that and rest in it.**
- OT gives a picture of this: **Leviticus 1:4:** hand on head of lamb.
  - **To be converted is to place your hand on his head, and that produces assurance, because your salvation is as sure as his finished work and faithfulness.**

*Is your hand resting on Jesus as the payment for your sin?*

- **By the way, it doesn't matter** what you said when you placed your hand there. It just matters that you placed your hand there.
  - The analogy I've used before it is that of a **chair**.
  - You can **only be in 1 of 2 positions** toward the chair: standing in the strength of your legs, or seated in rest on the chair.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, Volume 1, Book 2, Chapter 13, "Petit Gervais"

- In the same way, you can only be in 1 of 2 positions as it relates to Christ. Standing in your own authority, or seated in submission. Standing in the your own hopes of righteousness, or seated in the righteousness of Christ.
- **What if I told the chair how much I trusted it, but never sat down?**
- **How do you know you made the decision to trust Christ?**
  - **Well, HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU MADE THE DECISION to sit down?** All of you made one coming in? Because you remember making it? Do you remember thinking consciously—this chair looks sturdy; these legs like they are made from a poly-carbonite blend, sure to hold me up; *I believe it will hold me up and I choose to sit down!* Anybody do that? Of course not.
    - It was likely a subconscious decision. How do you know? What's the proof? That you are sitting there now!
    - **How are you supposed to know that you made the decision to trust in Christ? Because you are seated in him now.**
  - **If you are seated in him right now, then if never before you are saved.**
    - But I don't remember the prayer. Who cares?
    - Maybe you do remember the prayer, but you are no longer seated. Who cares what you prayed?
  - **The point is not the prayer you prayed; the point is the posture you're in.**
  - **Assurance of salvation comes not by remembering a prayer you prayed in the past, but by the posture you are in in the present.**
  - A lot of Christians get caught up looking for assurance to a prayer they prayed 2 years, 5 years or 30 years ago.
  - **Don't look analyze a past prayer; consider your present posture.**

*So, one way John tells you that you can no for sure is you have leaned all your hopes for heaven on Jesus' gracious work in your place. A **second** way John gives you to know:*

*[18] We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.*

### **(B. You have a new nature (vv. 16–18))**

- If you've been born of God you've been given a **new nature. With new desires.** *So you don't keep on sinning because you have new desires.*
  - Here's kind of an earthy way to think about it (**Vomit**).
  - **God doesn't change us by standing in front of sin and beating us if we touch it.** He changes us by giving us a new heart. We are born again, born from above. And when that happens, you don't love unfaithfulness and dishonesty and self-glorification and hatefulness like you used to. These things start to make you sick, not because God threatens you but because they are simply disgusting to you.
- **And when you do start to go back toward it, WHICH WE ALL DOD, he protects you; he renews you.** There is a **play on words:** *"If you've been born of God" then "the One who was born of God (that is, Jesus) protects you."*<sup>5</sup>
  - All of us backslide, but the sign of someone who is saved is that they always come back.
  - For years I've used the **parable of the seeds** to teach this.
  - One of the signs that your salvation is genuine is that you never permanently fall away from it. God brings you back. Over and over.

<sup>5</sup> The Greek here is vague, and the ESV translators preserve that by just using the pronouns. There really isn't another option for who this is referring to, though, other than (1) Jesus. It can't mean that (2) the believer protects himself, because then there would be a reflexive pronoun. And it's extremely unlikely that (3) John is referring to a fellow believer (as in vv. 16–17). Almost all interpreters opt for (1), very few for (2), and none at all for (3).

- “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a (what, church?) *liar*.” (1 John 2:4)
  - If you say you know God and practice sin; and I don’t mean struggle with sin, because we all do that, but engage in sin willfully and defiantly, you are a LIAR.
  - If you fill up your weekend up with the things that put Jesus on the cross, then walking in here, checking in with God, and singing a few God songs does not deceive God into thinking that your heart belongs to him.
  - **The simple fact is that you can’t love God and love the things that grieve him.** You can’t love God and be **neutral toward** the things that he hates. You can’t have a mouth that sings praise to Jesus with a life that openly crucifies him.
  - **What did you do with your friends last night? Do those things show you love God?** What are your your conversations like? What’s hidden in the closet of your life? What are you staring at on the internet or filling your mind with? Do those things show you love God?

BTW, this explains what he means in the previous 2 verses, that sometimes confuse people ([16] *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. [17] All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.*)

- There are two kinds of sins. Every one of us stumbles into sin. And we need to pray, when we see others committing sin, that God will bring them back to their senses. That God will restore them to life.
- There is another kind of sin—or should we say a sinful resolve—that represents a hardness of heart so severe that the person never comes back from it.
- They die. **And that either means one of two things:** the believer physically dies; or that this person’s sin shows that they were never saved.

- You say, “**How do I know if I’ve committed that sin?**” As long as you are alive, there is a chance to repent. If it hasn’t led to death, you can still repent.
- You say, “**Well, maybe I’ve sinned so much that I’ve hardened your heart.**” As long as you want to repent, you always can.
- **Also, I would caution you, if you see a believer die prematurely,** it’s not wise to speculate whether there was a sin they were committing that God killed them for.

*We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning...* New nature. And God keeps bringing you back.

- I love how the book of Proverbs says it (24:16), “***The righteous man falls seven times, and rises again.***”<sup>6</sup> If you are watching a man walk through the mall and he falls, you snigger and point it out to your friends. If he does it twice and looks like he is about to do it again, you get out your phone, film it, and send it to your friends who aren’t there. If he does it a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> time, you post it on YouTube and it goes viral. If he falls a seventh time, you conclude there is something wrong with him and feel bad for posting it on YouTube. Righteous people fall so much that it sometimes seems they can barely walk! But each time they get back up looking at Jesus.
- **Your salvation is not demonstrated by never falling, but by what you do when you fall.**
- **Conversion is not sinless perfection, but it is a new direction.**

And if you go right on sinning without being brought to your knees, then you have **serious reason to doubt** whether God is really in you!

- In college, one of my **best friends** lived in a house off campus. Now, college guys, in general, are not usually what you would

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<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 24:16

call “clean,” but this guy took domestic filth to a whole new level. He and his roommates rarely did their dishes. And by “rarely” I mean “never.” Plates covered with decaying food and radioactive biotic sample piled up in the sink. Each morning my best friend left his old cereal bowl, filled with milk, on the breakfast table where it curdled and mildewed. And don’t get me started on their bathroom... Put it this way, if we had still been living in Old Testament days, going into their bathrooms would have defiled you and your offspring for 4 generations. Furthermore, they had a cat that, for whatever reason, did not get the “litter box” concept. When you walked into their house, you were greeted by a concoction of odors that eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man.

**Twice a semester**, my best friend’s mother came to visit. She would usually arrive on a Friday, and her first order of business was to cleanse the house, which usually involved a blowtorch and napalm. For the first few days after she had visited, the house smelled like lemons and Ajax. **Had I walked into their house one Sunday** and been greeted by usual cocktail of foul fragrances, and then been told by my friend that his mother had come earlier that week, I would have said, *“You’re lying. Had your mother been here, this place would smell different.”*

- John says: If you say that you have been born again, that Jesus is in you, but you continue to sin, you are a liar!

## Invitation

Do you have that kind of certainty? God wants you to have it, and the gospel can give it to you. Receive it today.