



**Series: Stand Alone**

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**Text:** 1 John 1:1-10

**Title: Disciple or Deceived? How to Know for Sure You're Saved**

Open to 1 John 1... My name is Curtis... **Spence...**

<sup>1</sup>That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup>the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— <sup>3</sup>that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we

say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

## INTRODUCTION

Unless you're Canadian, you probably don't recognize the name **Charles Templeton**. As a young boy, faith was not a part of his life until **one day, when he was 19**, he overheard his **mom talking about God** and the **happiness her newfound faith had brought her**. Templeton began to **take mental inventory of his life** and, in his words, **"Suddenly [my life] seemed empty and wasted."**

He goes to his room, kneels beside his bed and is overcome with **"a sense of enormous guilt."** Listen to what he said next: **"It may have been minutes later, or much longer, there was no**





sense of time, but I found myself... at the center of a **vast emptiness**. . . .In a moment, **a weight began to lift**, . . . **An ineffable warmth** began to [pass through my entire body]. It seemed that **a light had turned on** in my chest and **its refining fire had cleansed me. . .**”

Talk about an **intense experience**, right? This experience led him into the ministry where he **began putting together traveling revivals** where he **preached the gospel to tens of thousands of ppl**.

- Along the way he convinced another guy to join him...a guy who became one of his best friends and also had a knack for preaching...perhaps you've heard of him: **Billy Graham**.

The crazy part is that in the 40's and 50's Templeton was generally acknowledged to be *the* most **gifted** and **anointed** young evangelist, surpassing even Billy Graham in **fame** and **popularity**.

*So why have you never heard of him?* Well, sadly, later in his life he **renounced his faith** and became an **ardent atheist** due to the belief that **the Bible was “out-dated.”**

- From **disciple** → **doubter** → **deserter** of the faith.

I tell you this because I can't help but wonder **how many people in the Bible belt—here at Mercy Church and at TSC—are on a similar path as Templeton**.

- Every time I hear his story I have to literally hold back tears cuz it brings to mind ppl I know who are headed down a similar path: ppl who are **deceived into believing they're a follower**, but their **entire faith is based** on a **one-time spiritual experience** rather than the **finished work of Jesus Christ**.
  - Did you notice the way Templeton described his **so-called conversion?**: **“A weight lifted. Indescribable warmth. A fire that cleansed.”** What's missing from his 'conversion experience'?? **Jesus. Repentance. Faith. Belief.**

## CONTEXT

Our text today in 1 John **deals with an issue that's as prevalent today as it was in Templeton and Graham's day**—it's the issue that deals with **spiritual assurance and identity**. Questions like:

- *What does a real Christian look like?*
- *How can you tell a true Christian from someone who just professes to be one but actually isn't?*
- *How do you know you're truly saved?...**Can** you ever truly know if you're saved?*



The book of 1 John presents us with two categories of people: **Disciples** and those who are **deceived**. And these groups look eerily similar:

- Both groups **understand the gospel**.
- Both groups **believe they are saved**.
- Both groups **say (and believe) they have fellowship with God**.
- Both groups even **sin**.
- Neither group is **“faking it.”**

*So how can we tell whether we're a **disciple or deceived**?* Let's look at it...go back to v1...

## WALKTHROUGH

<sup>1</sup>That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup>the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—<sup>3</sup>that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you...

John says, “Before I tell you what I’m about to tell you I need to tell you that this whole thing ain’t made up! It’s not from

**human invention or ingenuity**. It’s based on a **real person, who really existed, who really walked the earth, who really taught and preached specific commands, and who really died on a very real cross**. So when you hear this gospel from me, you’re hearing it from a man who **knew, saw, heard, and touched** Jesus...and the words we teach and preach ourselves are *from God* and we’re passing them along to you.”

Look at v4: <sup>4</sup>And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. That could read “that your joy may be full.”

- If you have kids you know this to be true: the **things kids remember vs what they don’t** is insane. Like they **can’t remember to get their socks and shoes on** even though I’ve asked them 4x in the last 5 minutes...but darn it if they don’t remember stuff like: **“Oh, I don’t like grilled cheese because you always burn it.”** You know how many times that took for them to remember? ONE TIME.
- We do something called **Cereal Saturday** . . . One time I told my kids Frosted Flakes were my favorite. Now they all offer me their FF every Saturday. . . They argue over who gives me the most.
  - They’re so eager and anxious to give me some of their cereal because **they know how good it is and they want my joy to be complete!**



That's what's happening here: John is telling them about **the gift of Jesus Christ** as found in the gospel, and he's offering it to them so their **joy may be full**. John personally knows the **joy, pleasure, and life** that comes from a relationship with Jesus and he wants everyone to experience that same thing.

- Jesus says the same thing in **John 15:11** when he says, **"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."** . . . *I'm not telling you these things so you can be burdened with a longer religious to-do list or to feel more guilty about how you fall short. I'm telling you all of this so you can have a joy that only God can give and that the world can never take away!*

**But this joy only comes to true disciples of Jesus**...so what 1 John does from here is put before us some **litmus tests for our salvation**. First John is gonna be very clear that **there's no gray area or in between when it comes to following Jesus**—either we are **walking in the light (disciple)** or **walking in the darkness (deceived)**.

Look at v5: John says, **This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.**

What light is in the **natural world** (illuminating darkness and revealing what is there), **God is to the spiritual world.**

For God to be light means he's the source of all **truth** in the world—he's **life** and **purity** and **beauty** and **goodness**. **"God is light"** means **God is always the goodest of good**; he's always radiating goodness—like the sun radiating heat and light—**goodness** and **perfection** it's part of his **nature**.

This also means God can't do anything that's **not good**. He can't act in a way that's **unholy** or **unrighteous** or **evil**.

- That's why the Psalmist declared: **"I have no good apart from you"**
- God is always good, **because God is like the sun.**
  - **The sun is always shining.** You can hide yourself from the sun or you can get far away from the sun, but the sun is always the same, and any time you're in the presence of the sun, it's only warmth and light that radiate off of it.
  - That's what God is like. God does good all the time because he is good all the time. Bad cannot come from God because God is infinite goodness.



- **God is not like a shadow** whose goodness lengthens or shortens depending on what time of day it is. God is not **moody** or **capricious**--you know, sometimes you look at him and he's **leading you with tender love**, but then other times he's **irritated with you** so he's going to **mess with you** a little bit or **ignore you** or **lead you toward destruction**.
- **No, God has one thing in his heart:** constant, unfailing, forever goodness.
  - He's not like the **spouse** who left you.
  - He's not like the **father** who abandoned you.
  - He's not like the **friend** who betrayed you.
  - He'll never be unfaithful to you —he *can't*—he can only and always act according to light, because he IS light.

And that's good news, church! . . . But there's also **bad news** tucked away in this too: see, the bad news is that *because* God is **perfect and holy**, he cannot dwell with anything (or anyone!) that is **dark or unholy** because his **light**—his **perfection**—will consume it. The slightest hint of imperfection and God's perfection will eviscerate it, because in him there is

no darkness at all. It'd be like trying to hold a tissue next to the sun.

And here's the harsh reality: **there's darkness in every one of us—the Bible calls it sin**—and without God's intervention, we're the tissue, he's the sun.

*Ayyy, come on, man. Really? That's a pretty heavy accusation. I'm not making it; the Bible is.* And here's the reality check some of you need to hear...

#### Reality Check:

**You are deceived if you claim to know God relationally while sinning habitually (vv6, 8, 10).**

Look at v6, 6If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

I don't know if y'all have heard, but your pastor discovered golf during his sabbatical. Once a man hits a certain age he must choose his destiny: golf, smoking meats, lawn care.

- What if Pastor Spence told you he loved golf but then you asked "What kind of clubs do you have?" I don't have clubs.



- “Where do you like to play?” I don’t play.
- “Oh, you said you loved golf...you must mean you just love to watch it...?” No, I never watch it.
- “So you just like wearing the clothes and driving the cart and being outside?” Nah, I hate all that.

At some point you’d conclude: *Hey bro, I know you say you love golf...but I don’t think you’re a golfer at all. In fact, you say you have fellowship with golf but you’re lying and not a participant in golf at all. The evidence is clear.*

- Listen, it’s the same with Jesus: Just because you’re a **professor of faith** doesn’t mean you’re a **possessor of faith**.

To ‘walk in darkness’ means to live and act in a way that’s not in step with Jesus and his teachings. You can’t call yourself a Christian if you don’t **align your life** with the Scriptures that explain what a Christian is in the first place.

This is foundational: For a true follower of Jesus, the **foundation of your life** must be the Word of God. In fact, **the way you show you have submitted your life to the God of the Word is by how much of your life is submitted to the Word of God.**

- You cannot say you love Jesus if you **regularly participate** in the very things that put him on the cross.
- In church terms it means **Jesus can’t be your Savior if he’s not also your Lord**. You can’t **give him your eternity** (“all your days”) w/o always **submitting to him each and every day**.
- There’s a **lifestyle** that goes along with **Lordship**...and he’s the one who gets to determine that lifestyle, not us.
- If Jesus isn’t **Lord of all** in your life, then he’s **not Lord at all** in your life.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the **Bible belt**. **I’m from North Georgia; now here we are in NC. I’d consider both of these the Bible belt**. In the Bible belt it’s perfectly normal for someone to be a regular **participant in sinful things** that the Bible calls wrong, while **claiming the name of Jesus every Sunday morning**. One pastor put it this way:

- Bible belt Christianity has just enough Jesus to make me feel **acceptable**, but not enough to make me **uncomfortable**.
- Bible belt Christianity is like **auditing a class** in college, where you’re saying, “Give me the information without the responsibilities”



- In Bible belt Christianity you know **who Jesus is**...know **why he came**...know that **he'll return one day**...know **you need forgiveness of sin**. You **know** the right things. You know a lot **about** the Savior; but you don't **personally know** the Savior!
  - **This was me before Christ! I was deceived**. My own story is proof that **profession does not always equal possession**.
- This should be a reality check for those of you who have **prayed the "sinner's prayer"** but have had **no accompanying life change**. Salvation isn't just information we learn, it's a relationship with a Savior we love.

This sobering reality hits us in **Luke 6:46** when Jesus says, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" or again in **Matt. 7:21-23**, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

- How heartbreaking is this? "MANY will say to me..." Not a **few**; MANY. Not **every once in a while** someone

who says they're a Christian actually isn't; MANY will say to him, "*Wait, I prayed the prayer and said you're my Savior...*" and he's gonna say, "*I never knew you. You didn't submit to me as Lord.*"

- Listen: If you are regularly walking in darkness while claiming to know Jesus you are **deceiving yourself** about where you stand (no matter how badly we want it to be true) and what you're going to hear that day is, "***Away from me; I never knew you.***"

The Bible is more interested in **how you walk** than it is your **verbal profession** or **one-time experience**. **You cannot walk in darkness while claiming fellowship with God. Bible belt faith is not saving faith.**

Friends, don't be deceived. Nor should you downplay or diminish your sin...look at verses 8 and 10: **<sup>8</sup>If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . .<sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.**

See we tend to **downplay** or **rationalize** our sin by **comparing it to others**. So we think, "*The empirical evidence for knowing I'm not a bad person is because I know I'm better than \_\_\_\_\_.*"



- *Sure, I **gossip** a bit, but I don't talk about people as much as she does...*
- *Sure, I **lash out in anger** at my kids, but I'm still a way better dad than he is...*
- *Sure, I'm sleeping with my **girlfriend**, but only with her and we're really committed to one another.*
  - *Come on, none of these things are bad enough you could label me as someone who **walks in darkness**.*

I want to say this as lovingly as I can: **Excusing or rationalizing your sin won't save you from your sin.**

- If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourself.
- If you rationalize your sin and try to call it something else—**mistake, misstep, bad habit, vice**—v10 says that is tantamount to calling God a liar, because *he says it's sin* and sin is what separates you from fellowship with the Father.

According to the Bible, **there's no such thing as a follower of Jesus who follows their own ways.** Friend, you **cannot bend Scripture to fit your lifestyle**; if you're truly walking with Jesus then you'll **bend your lifestyle to fit Scripture.**

**Scholar D.A. Carson** says that whenever a “Christian” challenges the authority of the Bible the first thing he wants to ask them is, **“Who are you sleeping with?”** *What are you participating in that you don't wanna give up for the sake of Jesus because, if you're honest, you just like that thing more than you love Jesus.*

Now, does that mean the only way you can know you're saved is if you **do everything right**? John Wesley said his approach to preaching was to **overwhelm you with law** and **rescue you with grace.** **I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed right now.** John senses that, which is why he rescues us with grace. He doesn't want us to think he's saying perfection is the test of authentic faith...look at v7...

**7But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.**

**Confidence Check:**

**You are a disciple if you walk in the light (vv7, 9)**

“Walk” is a NT way of saying “your Christian life.” It's the kind of **life you live**...it's seeing things the way God sees them and





sharing his values. You **love** what he loves; **hate** what he hates.

- You've bought the **clubs**. You're taking the golf **lessons**. You're working on your **slice**. You're continually growing in your **love and maturity** of the game.

When God invites us to walk in the light, he doesn't mean, "Become more and more perfect by doing **fewer bad things and more good things**. Just chart that progress, you'll know you're good."

He DOES mean that we will willingly put ourselves in the light of God, allowing him to search our hearts every day, that the light of God will keep shining the path in front of us...and even when we do sin and stray from that path, the light of God alerts us to that, **corrects** us, **convicts** us, and **draws** us back.

In other words, those who walk in the light are, ironically, **those who are most aware of where the darkness is at work within them**.

- If the Spirit regularly convicts you of your sin and you're regularly having to confess things and ask for prayer and accountability, to that I'd say PRAISE GOD. Because it means the Spirit of God is living and working inside of you!

*"But, Pastor, you said God's light means he's perfect. If we're to 'walk in the light, as he's in the light'...doesn't that mean I need to be perfect in order to be in fellowship with God?"*

Great question, I'm glad you asked.

- Think about it like this: Ever been **snow skiing**? Think back to your first time...only goal is to **not break anything and not die**. Skiing down, looking like a **baby giraffe**.
  - When you're learning to ski you're **not looking for perfection, you're just focused on the progress**.
- When you think about walking in the light as God is in the light, **don't think perfection, think progress**.
  - Sure, you might still struggle with **lust**...but praise God you don't find yourself in front of a computer screen late at night anymore, but rather on your knees in prayer asking God to satisfy you instead.
  - Sure, you might still struggle with **anger**...but praise God you're able to recognize when it's rising up and you've learned to text a friend asking for prayer instead of lashing out at the next person who does something you don't like.



- Have you arrived? No. But is there progress in holiness and awareness and confession? Is there growth? If so, praise God!

See, following Jesus doesn't mean we never sin...it just means that **when we do sin, we'll confess it**. That's what's so beautiful about this verse—look at it again...**But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.**

Don't miss this: The blood of Jesus "cleanses," not "shall cleanse." **We are cleansed NOW**. The moment a sinner trusts in Jesus he is fully forgiven. And it's written in **present tense**, meaning this is continual: You were cleansed **yesterday**, you're cleansed **today**, and you'll be cleansed **tomorrow**.

This is incredible: the Greek word for 'cleansing' here is *katharizō*. What does that sound like? It's where we get the word "cathartic" from. I love the **dictionary definition of cathartic**: *providing psychological relief through the open expression of strong emotions*.

- You wanna know why I'm so passionate about the gospel...why I have such **strong emotions** about it? Because I know I've been cleansed!
- You wanna know why it's near impossible to worship standing next to my wife w/o seeing tears stream down her face?...why she has such **strong emotions** about it? Cuz she knows she's been cleansed!
- Let me ask you: When was the last time the gospel **brought you to tears**? When was the last time you **wept out of gratitude** for what God has done for you? When was the last time you were **grieved to the point of tears** because of your sin?...but then **shed tears because of Jesus' shed blood** on your behalf?!

And the good news just keeps on getting gooder: **the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from ALL sin**...not *some* sin, but from ALL sin.

- *But what about that thing I was doing last night? The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.*
- *What about that thing I did 20 years ago that I've never told anyone about? The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.*
- *But me and my boyfriend have already fallen into sin so many times; how could God forgive us? The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.*



- What about that thing that's caused me guilt and shame and regret? [The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.](#)
  - When Satan wants to come to you and **unroll the scroll containing all of your sins**, you say, "That's all of it, huh? Great. You forgot one thing though—all those sins are true, but you forgot one thing: [The blood of Jesus cleanses me from all sin!](#)"
  - That may be **my record**, but I'm redeemed because of **Jesus' righteousness!**
  - I know I'm a **sinner**, but he's an incredible **Savior!**

I don't know what God might be revealing to you this morning, but what I do know is that **the blood of Christ will cover it if you will confess it.**

- When you lay your sin at the feet of Jesus, he takes it *all*. And what you're left with isn't **condemnation** but **comfort**; not **guilt** but **grace**.
- I don't know if you've ever experienced something like this, for me it makes me **think back to 2005: Getting jumped at a concert...Mom, "Are you okay?!"**

- The entire situation was my **fault**, my **stupidity**, my **sin**...but instead of **condemnation**, I was met with **comfort from my mom who loves me unconditionally!**

Friend, I don't know what **sin** or **weight** you've walked in here today with, again, I'm not here to judge you one bit...what I hope you hear from me is that God stands ready to meet you and he does so not with **condemnation** but with **comfort**.

For some of you, I know **the darkness in your life seems so dark and you're scared to bring it into the light**...Gosh, some of us have such a twisted view of God as Father cuz what you expect to hear from God if you do is a word of **judgment**...a word of **disappointment**. You expect to hear God meet you at the door with his **arms crossed**, a **disappointed look** on his face, and the words you expect to hear are, *"I told you so. I told you don't do that. I told you that would end poorly. I told you that wouldn't satisfy. Don't say I didn't warn you. Tell me, how'd that work out for you?"*

- But with God there's no semblance of, *"I told you so."* Because of Jesus, there's only **comfort, rest, peace, joy, satisfaction**...even when it's your own fault.
- Because **God knows that guilt and shame and condemnation**—while they can produce behavioral



change in someone—will never produce true heart change.

- **Romans 2:4**, is it God's CONDEMNATION/JUDGMENT/DISAPPOINTMENT that leads you to repentance?
  - **NO**, it's God's KINDNESS that leads us to repentance! It's his goodness, faithfulness, love.

It's his GRACE that breaks our bondage to sin. Over and over again we **rebel**. Over and over again we **mess up**. Over and over again we make **mistake after mistake after mistake**, yet...

- Over and over God **takes us back**.
- Over and over God **forgives our sin**.
- Over and over we will wake up morning after morning to find **God's mercies are new every day**.

How can you know his **mercies are for you**? How can you know for sure you're **cleansed**? Because you've confessed. Look at v9: 9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- "Confess" is a great word. It means "to speak the same." So basically confession is **to say about sin the same thing God says about it**. You say, "Yup. You're

*right, God. That's not good...I agree with you. And I'm asking for your forgiveness and help moving forward."*

- That's it: **Confess** to Jesus. **Believe** upon Jesus. Because, when you do, he **forgives** and he **cleanses** you from ALL sin...there's nothing else for you to do to be saved than just **come** to Jesus.
- There's no **prayer** you need to pray, no **hail Mary's** you need to perform, no **penance** you need to participate in...the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross for you, covers and cleanses all sin! All you have to do is receive his pardon offered to you on the cross.
- Hear me clearly: **God has never rejected a sinner that has sought salvation by Jesus!**

## CONCLUSION

What do you do with all of this? Three very quick things:

### 1. Diagnose your life

Be honest with yourself and ask others to speak into your life.

Here's some diagnostic questions:

- Do you desire the things of God?
- Is your life governed by the Word of God?
- Do you pursue holiness in your life?



- Do you grieve over your sin?
- Is your life lived for your pleasure or God's?

It's true you need to make a **one time decision to follow Jesus**. But it's also true that *if that decision is genuine* then it's gonna lead to a **day-by-day decision to continue following Jesus**.

## 2. Confess your sin

Confession involves

1. **Admitting** your sin
2. **Turning** from your sin

The basis of our fellowship with God is **not our sinlessness**, but **his forgiveness**. So when we confess our sins it's an opportunity to come back to God and experience his **love** and **grace** and **generosity** all over again.

## 3. Walk toward the light

It's the **choices we make** that move us into darkness or into **light**. Walking toward the light means you're regularly engaged in:

- **Ongoing confession**
- **Prayer**
- **Reading and memorizing your Bible**, diagnosing where your life doesn't look like that in Scripture.
- **Walking with community**
- Most importantly: **REST IN JESUS**

Diagnose your life → Confess your sin → Walk toward the light

- **Take one step of faith, then take another, then another.** If you draw near to God, he'll draw near to you.

In his early 80's **Charles Templeton** agreed to an interview with Lee Stroble. Stroble, of course, was the famous Christian author of the book, *A Case for Faith*. Throughout the interview Templeton was clear about his **disapproval and disbelief in the Bible and abandonment of Christianity**. But then Strobel asked him about the **person of Jesus**...here's what Templeton said:

“[Jesus] was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings. . . [Jesus] is the most important thing in my life. I know it may



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sound strange, but I have to say...I adore him!  
Everything good I know, everything decent I know,  
everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. There  
have been many other wonderful people, but Jesus is  
Jesus. . . . He is the most important human being who  
has ever existed.”

Strobel said Templeton’s **voice began to crack** and he heard words he never expected to hear as Templeton said through choked up tears: “I miss him!”

With that **tears flooded his eyes**, [as he buried his face in his hands and sobbed uncontrollably.] Templeton fought to compose himself...sighed deeply and wiped away a tear. Finally, quietly but adamantly, he insisted: “Enough [talk] of that.”<sup>1</sup>

A few short years later Templeton died never **truly experiencing** the **forgiveness** and **lovingkindness** of God.

What about you? Is Jesus your Lord and Savior? Don’t miss him. Don’t wait any longer...

PRAY

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<sup>1</sup>[Charles Templeton: Missing Jesus](#)