

Session 1

FOR GOD SO LOVED

John 3:1-16; Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 8:35-39

Memory Verse

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

– JOHN 3:16, CSB



For God So Loved

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The love of God is powerful and overwhelming. He loved us while we were still separated from Him by our sin, and He promises nothing will come between Him and those who place their faith in Jesus.

Our lives are full of love. We love our families. We love our pets. We love chocolate. We love our vehicles. Although we may use the same word love to describe our feelings about different people or things, there is a difference in the way we love.

Think about the way you love a family member as compared to the way you love chips and salsa, or any type of food. It is vastly different and yet the same word is used in various ways that imply differing levels of emotions and attachment. You are likely willing to suffer or do without for a beloved family member, yet the same is not true for many things you'd say you love.

 Name at least three people or things that you love.

 How would you describe the difference in the way that you use the word love for various things or people?

Session Summary

God's great love for us is the motivation behind His sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. It is important for us to understand that His love is not predicated at all by our actions. In our performance driven world, it's freeing to realize nothing we do can make Him love us less or more.

It is also empowering to recognize that nothing and no one can separate us from the love God has for us. He is God and His love is the self-sacrificing kind that looks to give itself away on our behalf. In response to God's love, believers should strive to live in a way that reflects Christ to the lost world around us.

1. For God So Loved (John 3:16)

One of the most well-known verses in all of Scripture starts with a statement about God's love. This verse might even be referred to as the gospel in a nutshell because it clearly explains the love of God for His people. Today, we are focusing on the beginning of this verse—the fact that it all starts with God and His great love for us. The gospel does not hinge on our behavior or who we are; it is based on God and who He is.

The Greek word translated “loved” in this verse is agape. Agape is one of the various words used in Scripture that can be translated into the word love. This version of love has a powerful meaning. It is not the one you would use when talking about your favorite food. Agape implies taking pleasure in, prizing above all other things, being unwilling to abandon or do without, regarding the welfare of, and longing for the object of one's love. There is so much more to this simple word than the way we use it today.¹



What does it mean to you that God loves you in this way?



Which aspect of agape love speaks to you the most? Why?

Jesus spoke the words of John 3:16 in a conversation with a man named Nicodemus (see John 3:1-15). Jesus was explaining what must happen for a person to be saved. Nicodemus was a Jew who was wrestling with what he had been taught and what Jesus was now teaching. It was startling for Jews to hear that God loved the world and not just the Jews. Jesus plainly stated that God loved the world—all people everywhere—and not just those of Jewish descent.

This concept was countercultural for Jews like Nicodemus, and it is a strong reminder for us. It is easy to fall into a trap of thinking God's love is for people who look, act, and talk like we do. The reality is that God loves the world, which means all nations and all people. We need to be aware that God loves even the difficult people we meet. That can and should change the way we treat others.

 **How does the reminder that God loves the whole world resonate with you today?**

God loves the world even though it was and is not now in the form He created it to be. The perfect creation of Genesis was changed forever when sin entered the world, and it looks nothing like it did when God spoke it into creation. The good news is that, because of Jesus, God loves us in our imperfect, sinful state. He loves us without our doing anything to earn that love. We do not have to be perfect to be loved—He loves us just as we are because of Christ.

 **Application: What needs to change as you're reminded that God loves you just as you are?**

2. Because of Who He Is (Ephesians 2:1-10)

This passage of Scripture gives us more insight into the love of God for the world Jesus spoke of in John 3:16. Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus, reminding them to never forget where they came from and that God's love for them was not dependent on their ability to fix themselves. Rather, God loved them while they were dead in their trespasses. In this, he painted a picture of what their lives looked like before they accepted Jesus.

For those in Christ, it is powerful to remember where you came from. He wanted them to recognize that Christ made them alive, and they no longer need to follow the path of the world. Paul specified that we have all lived the way of the world by giving in to our fleshly desires, and without Christ the flesh will dominate and drive our choices. It is only when we choose to follow Jesus that we will receive the power to resist the pull of the world and the enemy and live alive in every way. The contrast between being dead in our sin and alive in Christ is an incredible analogy of the gospel at work in us.

? What value is there in remembering where you came from before you accepted Jesus?

After reminding believers of the state they were in before Jesus, Paul wrote the now famous words, “But God.” This phrase is a turning point in the passage, as it begins the explanation of why and how God reconciles us to Himself. It is not about; it’s all about God. God’s rich mercy and great love for us are why He seeks to reconcile mankind to Himself. He extends His mercy and love to us even while we are still sinners. It is not that we are lovable and perfect but that we are loved by God even though we do nothing to deserve it. This concept is difficult to understand because we live in a performance-driven society and sometimes forget the truth that God’s love and mercy are because of who He is, not who we are. We must receive it even as we realize how unworthy we are.

? Where do you struggle to receive the love and mercy of God?

Once you’ve recognized you’re spiritually dead, you can better appreciate how it feels to be alive in Jesus. God offers His mercy, love, and the grace that saves us. Paul wanted people to be clear that salvation is only possible through the grace of God. Paul described the things that happen to us when we accept Jesus and used the phrase “immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us” (v. 7). The grace of God is beyond measure.

Paul wanted to help his readers grasp the concept of God's grace, so he described grace as a gift. Think about that. God offers us the gift of salvation through grace. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. God freely offers it, and all we do is receive it. God gives us the gift of salvation to save us from the punishment we deserve and to transform our lives for His glory. Paul said we are His workmanship created to do good things. Some translations use the phrase "work of art" or "masterpiece," all of which point to us being made new and given a purpose. We don't do works to be saved; we do works that honor God once we are saved. We are transformed by the grace and mercy of God, which leads to good works that display His love to the world.

 **Application: What is God calling you to do in response to the gift of grace you've been given?**

3. Nothing Can Separate (Romans 8:35-39)

In our quest to better understand God's love, we look to another letter Paul wrote to the Romans. He stressed that nothing can separate believers from the love of God. In a world where things were often taken away, Paul reassured believers that they could fully embrace God's love without worry that it would leave.

Think about how you might hesitate to take a gift that seems this wonderful if you thought it might be taken away. No one wants to put hope in something wonderful only to lose it and do without it. God's love is not contingent on anything in the world and is not vulnerable. Once you receive the gift of grace and salvation, you can rest assured that it is yours forever. This can be a tough concept to grasp, yet it is foundational to the faith.

 **Why is it important to be assured that once you receive salvation through Christ it can never be taken away?**

Persecution was a common issue in Paul's day. God's people have and will always face difficulties of various kinds. It is empowering to know and stand firm on the truth that nothing we ever do or that is done to us can separate us from God's love. This means you can be secure in your faith—no matter what happens, you can trust and believe God is with you and for you. Whether you face attacks in a physical form or a spiritual form, you can be confident that you are held by God and live in the freedom that comes with that. No one will live a perfect life without sin, but when you do miss the mark and fall short, you can repent and turn back to God without having to start over in your faith journey.

 **How have you been strengthened in the face of difficulties because of your confidence in Jesus?**

Paul went on to write that we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. Think about what that means. A conqueror is one who wins. How is it possible to be more than a conqueror? Consider watching your favorite ball team play a game. You can't be certain they will win until the last second is off the clock. Games are often decided in the last play. It is fun to be a conqueror but being more than a conqueror is about having victory in the middle of the battle. For Christians, victory is certain because you are on the winning team with Jesus.

Paul spoke strongly about the love of God because it is foundational to the life of a believer. To live the lives we are called to live, we must be certain about God's love. If we want to make a difference and help bring the lost world to salvation in Christ, we need to understand that "God so loved the world." His love is powerful, and it is for everyone. Our job is to receive that love, be changed by it, and live in the victory that comes with being "more than conquerors" (v. 37).

 **Application: In what situation do you need to remember that you are more than a conqueror through Jesus?**

Conclusion

Because sin entered the world and each one of us is born with a sin nature, we needed to be reconciled to our holy God. His work of reconciliation is summarized in John 3:16. The first phrase of this powerful verse is all about the love of God. That is foundational to believers, and we need to understand what it means that God loves us even though we are unlovable. In a world that recognizes and celebrates all a person's accomplishments and work, it is countercultural to be offered something as awesome as the love of God without regard to our own work. The great news is that we can't do anything to make God loves us any more or any less. He loves us because He is God. It is about Him, not us.

Not only is God's love unconditional, but it is also permanent. Nothing can separate us from that love. Our world is full of people who promise to love one another, and yet when something difficult comes along, that love is shoved aside and forgotten. That is not what happens with the Lord. His love is a gift that can never be taken from us. This gives us confidence to live in His love and know we are more than conquerors regardless of what hardships or persecutions come our way.

 How have you misunderstood God's love for you?

 How will today's lesson help you live as more than a conqueror?

 How does God want to use you to bring others to knowledge of the free gift of salvation? How will you respond?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

He Gave His Only Son

Main Passages

- John 1:1-5; 3:16; 1 Peter 1:13-22

Session Outline

1. The Father's Gift (John 1:1-5; 3:16)
2. Our Response (1 Peter 1:13-16)
3. The Call to Love (1 Peter 1:17-22)

Memorize

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

- John 3:16, CSB