

For God So Loved

January 8, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

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

Session Outline

1. For God So Loved (John 3:16)
2. Because of Who He Is (Ephesians 2:1-10)
3. Nothing Can Separate (Romans 8:35-39)

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.



Leader Guide

For God So Loved

Introduction

Open class today by sharing about one of your experiences of praying for a lost friend and how you saw God work.

This month we are studying "What is the Gospel?" and will be focusing on praying for 1 friend or relative that has not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Take time each week to give your Group time to share their Gospel Conversation experience or for whom they are praying. End class time with silent prayer for their one.

- ❓ Name at least one person who does not know Christ that you want to pray for this month

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.

But God

Over against the human rejection of God, Paul painted a picture of the new life manifested in God's gracious acceptance of sinners because of Christ. The strong contrast points to God's answer to people's dreadful situation. Rich in mercy: "Mercy" is God's compassion for the helpless that relieves their situation. While grace involves God giving believers what they do not deserve, mercy means that God does not give what is deserved.



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: Who in your life needs to hear this?

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

Prayer of Response

Thank God for His great love for you. Pray for your lost friend by name.

Additional Resources

- *God is the Gospel* by John Piper
- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter and John Wredberg
- *Be Alive* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

DxD This Week

Call to Action

You are loved. You don't have to do anything—just sit there and know you are loved. Now, what will you do in response to so great a love?

For Next Week

Session Title

- 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

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 3:16

3:16–18 God, out of love, gave his one and only Son (cp. 1:14, 18), so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. John’s favorite designation for Jesus is the Son sent by the Father (3:34–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1), imagery taken from the Jewish concept of the shaliach (messenger), according to which the sent one is like the sender himself and faithfully pursues the sender’s interests (13:16, 20). Jesus is that “sent one” par excellence (9:7), and he in turn sends his disciples. Being sent implies that the commission, charge, and message are issued by the sender rather than originating with the ones sent. The messengers’ role is to fulfill their commission according to their sender’s will.¹

Ephesians 2:1-10

In 2:1–10 Paul discussed how sinful people who deserve nothing but God’s wrath can be redeemed by His grace. Paul described the human condition in 2:1–3. He explained how people were “dead in transgressions and sins,” cut off from the life of God and controlled by their own selfish desires. Beyond this they were ensnared by the power of Satan. As a result men and women apart from Christ are without life, without freedom, and without hope. By His grace He has granted new life to believers. The basis for the new life is God’s great love and mercy. Believers have been united with Christ in His resurrected life. Formerly people apart from Christ were dead, enslaved, and objects of wrath. In Christ believers are now alive, enthroned, and objects of grace. God’s purpose for believers is spelled out in 2:7–10. He has restored us, “expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” The memorable words in verses 8–9 express a central idea in Paul’s theology. He declared that the nature of God is to give freely because of His own love. God does not deal with people on the level of human achievement but on the level of their deepest needs. He provides salvation as His gift to men and women. He then creates a disposition of faith within them so that they may receive His gracious gift. Salvation is completely God’s achievement, a pure gift of God. Salvation is His workmanship. We are saved to live a totally different life “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”²

Romans 8:35-39

Paul’s conclusion to the first half of Romans emphasized the majesty and glory of God and pointed to the certainty of God’s redemptive plan. All that happens to them rests in the sovereign hand of God, who in all things “works for the good of those who love him.” Believers gain assurance knowing that God is for them (8:31). In all the testings and sufferings that confront believers, they can be confident that they are more than conquerors through Christ who loved them. Believers can expect difficulties in this age; yet they can be certain that nothing will be able to separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.”³

References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
2. David Dockery, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).
3. *Ibid.*

Author Bio

John Piper (God is the Gospel)

John Piper is founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is the author of more than 50 books, and more than 30 years of his preaching and teaching is available free of charge at desiringGod.org.

Matt Carter (Exalting Jesus in John)

Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, which has grown from a core team of 15 to over 8,000 attending each Sunday since he planted it in 2002. Matt has co-authored multiple books including a commentary on the Gospel of John in The Christ Centered Exposition Commentary series. Matt also co-authored a novel of historical fiction, *Steal Away Home* which tells the real life story of famed pastor Charles Spurgeon's unlikely friendship with former slave-turned-missionary, Thomas Johnson. Matt holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a Doctorate in Expository Preaching from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife Jennifer have been married for over 20 years, and they have three children, John Daniel, Annie, and Samuel.

John Wredberg (Exalting Jesus in John)

Josh Wredberg has served on the pastoral staff of churches in Michigan, Illinois, and North Carolina, and as teaching pastor at Redeemer Community Church in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. He is a graduate of Maranatha Baptist University and Shepherds Theological Seminary. Josh has also earned a doctorate in preaching from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Cari, have three boys, Jack, Max, and Caed.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Alive)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

David Dockery (Holman Concise Bible Commentary)

David S. Dockery is president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. He is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including *Renewing Minds*, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, and the *Holman Bible Handbook*. Dockery serves on several education and ministry boards and is a consulting editor for *Christianity Today* magazine.