



Discussion Guide

Date: 10/4/2026

Sermon Title: What does God do with darkness?

Scripture: John 1:1-5

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

God of Light, you were there in the beginning, speaking creation into being. You brought light into darkness, life out of emptiness, and hope where there seemed to be none. We come to you today carrying our own darkness and aware of the darkness around us. Open our eyes to see where your light is already shining. Remind us that Christ is our life and our light. Through your grace, fill us again with hope, love, courage, and compassion. Show us where you are inviting us to poke holes in the darkness; not by force, fear, or judgment, but through love, healing, hope, mercy, and truth. Amen.

OPENING

Darkness is a reality we all recognize. There is the darkness of grief, loneliness, fear, injustice, addiction, poverty, violence, division, and hopelessness. Sometimes darkness is something that is happening around us and other times within us. The question is not whether darkness exists. The question is: What does God do with darkness?

John gives us a powerful answer. God does not abandon the world to darkness. God enters it. John begins his Gospel by taking us all the way back to creation: "In the beginning." Before there was anything we could see or understand, there was God and the Word was with God and was God. Through the Word, all things came into being. In Christ is life, and that life is light.

And then comes the declaration that becomes the foundation for our conversation: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it." — John 1:5, NRSV Notice what John does not say. He does not say that darkness eventually creates light. He does not say we have to defeat the darkness ourselves. He says the light shines. The darkness cannot overcome it. And throughout John's Gospel, we discover that this Light is Jesus. So today we are asking: What does God do with darkness?

OPENING QUESTION:

1. Think of a time you were hiking, traveling, or simply outside and stopped to take in a beautiful view. What did that moment feel like? Did any deeper questions or thoughts come to you in that stillness?

BACKGROUND OF OUR TEXT:

John does not begin his Gospel with Jesus' birth. Matthew begins with a genealogy. Luke begins with stories surrounding Jesus' birth. Mark begins with John the Baptist. John begins before creation. "In the beginning..."

That wording intentionally echoes Genesis 1:1. John wants us to hear the creation story in the background as we read his Gospel. Genesis begins with darkness and chaos, and God speaks creation into being. John begins with the Word, identifies the Word with Christ, and tells us that all things came into being through him.

The connection is significant because Genesis is when God brings light into darkness. John shares that Christ is the Light who shines in the darkness. Scholars commonly recognize the opening of John's Gospel as a theological prologue that introduces themes developed throughout the Gospel. Its opening language deliberately connects Jesus with creation and identifies him as the source of life and light.

The Greek word John uses for “Word” is Logos. John is not simply talking about a spoken sentence or an abstract idea. The Word is personal, divine, and active in creation, and John will soon make the astonishing claim that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). The God who creates light does not remain distant from the darkness. God comes into it.

READ JOHN 1:1-5 THEN DISCUSS THE TEXT TOGETHER:

Use these questions to unpack the scripture together.

1. Why do you think John chose to begin his Gospel with “In the beginning”?
2. What does John 1:1–2 tell us about who Jesus is? How does this change the way you understand Jesus if you think of him not merely as a teacher, but as the eternal Word of God?
3. What difference does it make that the God we encounter in Jesus is the God who was present before our darkness ever existed?
4. Where in your life do you need to remember that God was already present before your current circumstances began?
5. What does it mean to you in John 1:3 that says all things came into being through Christ? How might this affect the way we see people who are different from us? How does this shape the way we think about our community?

The United Methodist tradition understands Christian witness as both word and deed: sharing the good news of Christ in ways that communicate it as good news. UMC discipleship resources describe evangelism as the responsibility of all Christians, not simply something delegated to pastors or evangelism committees.

6. When you hear the word evangelism, what emotions or assumptions come to mind? What would it look like for evangelism to feel less like “selling Christianity” and more like offering good news?
7. What are some ways the church can accidentally make the gospel feel like another burden for people to carry? What would it look like for us to offer healing, hope, belonging, grace, and new life?

John 1:5 says, “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” This may be the most important statement in the passage. The light shines is a present tense verb. The light keeps shining. John doesn't promise that darkness won't exist. He promises that darkness will not have the final word. The darkness does not have to disappear before the light can appear.

8. What kinds of “darkness” do you see around you right now?
9. Which forms of darkness are easiest for you to notice? Which are easiest to overlook?
10. What is one small act that could allow God's light to enter one of those places?
11. Why do we sometimes believe that our small actions don't matter?

12. What is the difference between trying to eliminate all darkness and simply letting the light shine?
13. Where might God be asking you to poke a hole in the darkness this week?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Allison uses the image of stopping on a hike to take in a panoramic vista as a metaphor for how the Gospel of John opens -- what practices in your own life help you pause and see the bigger picture of what God is doing rather than just watching your next step?
2. The sermon draws a deliberate connection between the opening words of Genesis and the opening of John's Gospel, suggesting that the creative Word of God and Jesus are one and the same. How does understanding Jesus as the Logos, the force that brings order out of chaos, change the way you think about who he is and what he does in your life?
3. John 12:35 describes walking in darkness as not knowing where you are going -- can you identify a season in your own life when you felt that kind of spiritual or personal darkness, and what, if anything, brought light to your path during that time?
4. Pastor Allison contrasts the image of God as a distant lighthouse on a cliff with the image of God as a friend standing beside you holding a flashlight. Which of these images resonates more with how you tend to think of God, and what might it mean to embrace both at the same time?
5. The sermon challenges the common feeling that our personal concerns are too small or insignificant for God's attention. What beliefs or experiences have shaped your sense of whether God is truly present and interested in the details of your individual life?
6. World Communion Sunday celebrates the reality that Christians across the globe share the same table of God's grace. How does participating in a practice that is simultaneously universal and deeply personal shape your understanding of what it means to belong to the body of Christ?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God of all people and every nation, thank you for the Light that shines in the darkness and cannot be overcome. Thank you for Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made, in whom we find life, and through whom we discover hope. As we have received your grace, send us now to share your grace. Send us from this gathering with open hearts, open hands, and open eyes. Help us notice the places where the darkness seems strongest. And then give us courage to poke a hole in it. Let your light shine through us. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Set aside 10 to 15 minutes this week to step away from your to-do list and sit quietly with God. Ask one of the deeper questions that tends to surface when you slow down. Write down what comes up.
2. If you are in a season of spiritual darkness or uncertainty, write it down honestly. Then bring it to God in prayer, trusting that the same God who spoke light into the darkness of creation is present with you now.
3. Our church maintains a prayer list, commit to praying over it this week; name by name. Let it be a reminder that no concern is too small for the God who meets individuals at wells, at weddings, and in the middle of the night.

4. We are called to reflect the light of Christ to others. Who are you reflecting God's love to? How or what can you specifically do, say or not do or say this week to someone to reflect God to them?