



Discussion Guide

Date: 8/2/2026

Sermon Title: Do I have to repent for God to love me?

Scripture: John 3:16-21

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

Gracious and loving God, thank you for loving us long before we ever knew how to love you. Thank you for meeting us with grace instead of condemnation and mercy instead of shame. As we study your Word today, open our hearts to receive your love anew. Help us to recognize the places where we still live in darkness and give us courage to step into the light of Christ. May your Holy Spirit guide our conversation, deepen our faith, and transform our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.

THEME:

Many people have heard the message that God will love them if they repent. The gospel tells a different story. God loves us first. Because God loves us, God invites us into repentance; a turning away from darkness and toward the life, freedom, and hope found in Jesus Christ. Repentance is not about earning God's love. Repentance is our response to God's love. The invitation of John 3 is not one of condemnation but of transformation. Jesus came not to shame the world but to save it.

OPENING QUESTIONS: Choose one of the following questions to start your group or class with.

1. Describe a time when someone showed you kindness before you believed you deserved it. How did that change your relationship with that person?

BACKGROUND:

John 3 records a nighttime conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a respected Pharisee and teacher of Israel. Nicodemus comes under the cover of darkness; not simply because it is nighttime, but because John frequently uses darkness and light as spiritual symbols throughout his Gospel. Nicodemus is curious, sincere, and searching. Jesus does not shame him. Instead, Jesus invites him into a deeper understanding of God's kingdom. John 3:16 is often quoted by itself, but verses 17-21 reveal the larger message. Jesus says: "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17) The emphasis is not judgment. The emphasis is rescue. People remain in darkness not because God refuses to love them, but because they choose not to come into the light where healing and transformation happen.

WORD STUDY OF REPENT:

The New Testament word translated "repent" is the Greek word metanoia. It literally means to change ones mind or heart. It is turning around and going in a new direction. Repentance is much bigger than simply feeling guilty. It is allowing God to redirect the entire course of our lives. John Wesley described repentance as the awakening of God's grace in our lives that leads us to seek Christ more fully. It is not the cause of God's love but a response to the grace already at work within us.

DIGGING IN TOGETHER: Read John 3:16-21 together. Use these questions to study the text.

1. What words or phrases stand out to you? What surprises you?
2. Why do you think verse 17 is often forgotten when people quote John 3:16?
3. How does verse 17 reshape your understanding of God's character?
4. What do you think Jesus means by "light" and "darkness"?
5. How are darkness and light more than simply good versus bad behavior?
6. What keeps people from stepping into God's light?

Reflecting on repentance

7. Have you ever experienced God's love before you were ready to change?
8. How did that experience affect your faith?
9. How is repentance different from guilt? Why do people often confuse the two?
10. How does understanding prevenient grace (God's love for you before you were even aware of it) change the way we think about salvation?
11. If God already loves us, why is repentance still important?
12. What areas of your own life might God be inviting into the light today?
13. How can a church encourage repentance without using shame or fear?

GOING DEEPER INTO SCRIPTURE:

1. Read Luke 15:11-32. Who begins the reconciliation? What does the father's response teach us about God?
2. Read Romans 5:8. What does this verse say about the timing of God's love?
3. Read 1 John 4:19. How does God's love empower our response?
4. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. Where do you see grace before human effort?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Think about an organization or community you have been part of. It could be a workplace, a club, a church. Did their mission statement match the actual culture? What made it feel real or hollow?
2. The sermon points out that the Greek word for "world" in John 3:16 refers specifically to people who are opposed to God. How does that change the way you read or feel that verse?
3. The sermon draws a distinction between believing something with your brain and trusting it with your heart. In your own words, what is the difference? Which one do you find more challenging?



4. Nicodemus was a religious insider who was someone who knew the rules and followed them; yet Jesus told him there was still a moment of decision required. What does that tell us about the limits of religious knowledge or tradition on its own?
5. The sermon says, "The things we do now echo in eternity." What is one area of your daily life at work, at home, or in your neighborhood where that idea feels especially meaningful or convicting?
6. If eternal life begins now rather than only after death, how does that change the way you think about your ordinary Tuesday?

REFLECTIONS:

1. The sermon opens with the question 'Do I have to repent for God to love me?'. How does the answer to this question challenge or confirm what you have always believed about your relationship with God?
2. The Greek word for 'world' in John 3:16 refers to those who are actively opposed to God, yet God loved them first. How does this reframe the way you think about loving people who seem hostile or indifferent to faith?
3. The sermon draws a distinction between a mission statement and a vision statement, between where we are and where we are trying to go. Where do you see the gap between your current spiritual reality and the life God is calling you toward?
4. God is described as never forcing anyone into a relationship with him, always leaving it as a choice. What does it mean to you that the God of the universe chooses not to compel your love but to invite it?
5. The sermon uses the metaphor of buying a ticket to see the full story rather than settling for a preview. What might it look like in your life to move from a surface-level engagement with faith into a fuller, more committed trust in God?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Loving God, thank you for loving us before we ever knew how to love you. Thank you for sending Jesus not to condemn the world but to save it. Help us to live in the light of Christ. Give us the courage to confess what keeps us from you, not because we fear your rejection, but because we trust your love. Continue your transforming work within us through your grace. Make us people who extend mercy before judgment, compassion before criticism, and hope instead of shame. May we remember that repentance is not about earning your love but about living more fully in the love you have already given us. Through Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

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

1. Move from belief to trust. Identify one area of your life where you believe something about God in your head but have not yet fully trusted him with your heart. Bring that area intentionally into prayer this week.
2. Practice eternal-minded living. Choose one relationship like a coworker, a neighbor, or a family member and make a specific, concrete effort to treat that interaction as one that carries eternal weight.
3. Reflect on your own story of grace. Take a few minutes this week to write down a moment when you experienced love or kindness you did not earn. Consider how that might be an reflection of God's prevenient grace in your life.
4. Revisit John 3:16 slowly. Read John 3:16 once each day this week, pausing on a different word or phrase each time. Notice what stands out to you and write it down.